Obedience to Authority



**#1**

**TODAY’S LEARNING MATERIAL**

**Torah Bereshis**

**2:15 - 17**

*Now the Lord G-d took the man, and He placed him in the Garden of Eden to work it and to guard it.*

*And the Lord G-d commanded man, saying, “Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat.*

*But of the Tree of Knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat of it, for on the day that you eat thereof, you shall surely die.”*

**3:6 - 11**

*And the woman saw that the tree was good for food and that it was a delight to the eyes, and the tree was desirable to make one wise; so she took of its fruit, and she ate, and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate.*

*And their eyes were opened, and they knew they were naked and they sewed fig leaves...*

*They heard the sound of G-d manifesting itself in the garden toward evening; and the man and his wife hid from G-d among the trees of the garden.*

*G-d called out to the man and said to him, “Where are you?”*

*He said, “I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I am naked, so I hid.”*

*And He said, Who told you that you are naked? Have you eaten of the tree from which I commanded you not to eat?”*

**#2**

**Talmud Sotah 49b**

*In the times of the approach of the Messiah, chutzpah (shameless audacity, brazenness) will increase … young people will shame old men, and old men will stand up before youngsters, a son will degrade his father, and a daughter will rebel against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law ... the face of the generation will be like the face of a dog … a son will not be ashamed before his father ...On whom can we rely? On our Father in Heaven.*

**Questions:**

* **Do you sometimes find it difficult to respect those who have a measure of authority over you (parent, older sibling, boss, professor etc.)?**

**We hear or come across commands, instructions, directions, and orders every day.**

* **What is it that makes us obey them?**
* **What is it that makes us disobey them?**

**#3**

**Question: Is it better to help others because you want to help or because it is a Mitzvah from the Torah?**

**Talmud Kedushin 31a**

*Rav Yosef said, I have learned in the name of Rav Chaninah that the reward for the performance of a Mitzvah by one who is commanded to do so is greater than the reward for a Mitzvah done by one who is not commanded to do so. Therefore, if someone can disprove the statement of Rav Yehudah that “a blind man is exempt from doing Mitzvos,” I will make a party in celebration!*

**Question: What is the reason for there being greater merit in doing that which is commanded than for doing that which is not commanded?**

**#4**

**Talmud Sanhedrin 21b**

*Rabbi Yitzchak also said: Why were the reasons of [some] Biblical laws not revealed? — Because in two verses reasons were revealed, and they caused the greatest in the world [King Solomon] to stumble. Thus it is written: “He shall not multiply wives to himself” (Torah Devarim 17:17), whereon Solomon said, ‘I will multiply wives yet not let my heart be perverted.’ Yet we read, “When Solomon was old, his wives turned away his heart” (I Kings 11:4).*

*Again it is written: “He shall not multiply to himself horses” (Devarim 17:16); concerning which Solomon said, ‘I will multiply them, but will not cause [Israel] to return [to Egypt].’ Yet we read: “And a chariot came up and went out of Egypt for six [hundred shekels of silver]” (I Kings 10:29).*

**Question: How do you know when to fully trust authority?**

**G. M. Gilbert, *The Psychology of Dictatorship* (Ronald Press Co., 1950), 255;**

**www.facinghistory.org**

Another defendant, Rudolf Höss, the commandant at Auschwitz, used the same defense. He explained:

“Don’t you see, we SS men were not supposed to think about these things; it never even occurred to us ... We were all so trained to obey orders without even thinking that the thought of disobeying an order would simply never have occurred to anybody, and somebody else would have done just as well if I hadn’t ... I really never gave much thought to whether it was wrong. It just seemed a necessity.”

**The Milgram Experiment, https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Milgram\_experiment**

*The Milgram experiment* on obedience to authority figures was a series of social psychologyexperiments conducted by Yale University psychologist Stanley Milgram. They measured the willingness of study participants, men from a diverse range of occupations with varying levels of education, to obey an authority figure who instructed them to perform acts conflicting with their personal conscience. Participants were led to believe that they were assisting an unrelated experiment, in which they had to administer electric shocks to a "learner." These fake electric shocks gradually increased to levels that would have been fatal had they been real.

The experiment found, unexpectedly, that a very high proportion of men would fully obey the instructions, albeit reluctantly.

**Questions:**

* **At what point does respect for authority stop and you have to make your own decisions?**
* **Why would so many people listen to a higher authority when they are told to do something, even if they feel it is wrong?**
* **Does the explanation, "I was following orders" exonerate Nazis and participants in the Milgram experiment?**
* **If not, this suggests that we *should* question authority. How then can governments and other authoritative bodies operate, if the subjects are not expected to listen unequivocally?**

**#5**

**Mishnah Pirkei Avos 3:2**

*Pray for the welfare of the government, because if people did not fear it, a person would swallow his fellow alive.*

**Tiferes Yisrael**

*This mishnah is the source for the custom of offering a prayer on behalf of the government during the Shabbos morning services.*

**Questions:**

* **Does this mishnah refer to a good government or to any government?**
* **What’s better - no government, or a bad, corrupt government?**
* **Is there an advantage to defer to authority figures even if you know that they are wrong?**
* **What would happen if there were no authority?**

**#6**

**Question: What is one idea that we discussed today that you felt connected to and can implement in your life?**