

# The Weekly Daf



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Chullin 54-60

Week of 1-7 Cheshvan 5757 / 14-20 October 1996  
Rav Weinbach's insights, explanations and comments for the 7 pages of Talmud  
studied in the course of the worldwide Daf Yomi cycle

## Accentuating the Positive and Eliminating the Negative

A fowl which has been bitten on the head by a small animal is likely to have its brain punctured and rendered a *treifa*. There are tests which can be made to determine whether this indeed happened. Passing a needle over the skull to see if it will get caught in a hole is a more precise manner of examination than an alternative suggested by one of the sages, but it runs the risk of sometimes creating a hole which did not exist before.

"How long will you destroy the money of Jews?" is the challenge which is hurled at the champion of the needle test.

"How long will you cause Jews to eat *treifa* meat?" is the response of the stringent examiner.

This dialogue echoes the debate (*Chullin* 49b) between the sage Rava and Rabbi Papa concerning the status of an animal whose intestinal puncture had been sealed by forbidden fat. While Rava raises the issue of concern for Jewish money, Rabbi Papa counters with the concern for not violating Torah law against eating *treifa* meat.

In his commentary on the Talmud, Rabbi Zvi Hirsh Chayos points out the difference between the stringent position taken by the aforementioned sages with disregard to "Jewish money" and the attitude we find in *Mesechta Rosh Hashana* and in *Mesechta Yoma* of refraining from the use of gold in adorning the *shofar* used on fast days and the ballot box used in drawing lots for scapegoat on Yom Kippur on the grounds that "the Torah had consideration for Jewish money." In *Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim* 656 the ruling is that while a Jew is obligated to sacrifice all his money in order to avoid transgressing a negative command, he is not obligated to give up more than a fifth of his resources in order to fulfill a positive one. When it comes to the positive performance involved in *shofar* and scapegoat lottery there is a consideration for Jewish money. But when the issue is a possible violation of the Torah ban on eating *treifa* meat the outcry is "How long will you cause Jews to eat *treifa*?"

Chullin 56a

## Experimentation or Inspiration?

Rabbi Shimon ben Chalafta was known as a great experimenter. One of his experiments focused on King Solomon's description (*Mishlei* 6:7) of the ant as an industrious creature preparing its provisions for the winter, despite the fact that it has no ruler to discipline and direct it.

How did Solomon know that the ants have no king? wondered the sage.

The experiment he conducted was based on his knowledge that ants will come out of their hole in large numbers only when there is shade. He therefore spread a garment over an ant hole on a hot summer day. One ant appeared, and Rabbi Shimon marked him for further identification. This ant returned to his hole with a report that there was shade, but when the entire colony came out the sage removed the garment, flooding the area with sunlight. Enraged by what they assumed had been a deliberate deception, the ants pounced upon the suspected liar and killed him.

This is how Solomon knew the ants have no ruler, concluded Rabbi Shimon, for if they had a king they would have brought the offending ant before him for judgment and not exercised mob rule.

Another sage challenged the validity of this experiment. Perhaps the king was with them and gave the execution order? Or perhaps there was a standing order to execute all deceivers? Or maybe the king had died and until a new one was appointed the anarchy of mob rule prevailed?

This challenger concludes that there is no scientific way to establish that ants have no king and Solomon knew this only because of Divine inspiration.

But it is Rabbi Shimon's interest in scientifically demonstrating Solomon's knowledge of ant society which raises a problem. There is a story told (*Bava Basra* 75a) of a student who snickered skeptically when he heard Rabbi Yochanan relate a tradition that in the hereafter the gates of Jerusalem would be formed from massive slabs of rare precious jewels. On a sea journey, this student had a vision of angels sawing away at massive slabs of such jewels, and heard from them that they were preparing the future gates of Jerusalem. When he returned to Rabbi Yochanan and reported his confirmation of what the master had taught, he received a sharp rebuke:

"Worthless one! Had you not seen it for yourself you would have not believed what I taught. You are guilty of disrespect for the Sages!" (The offending student was reduced to a pile of bones!)

Why was this student's skepticism such a serious offense, and Rabbi Shimon's passion for experimentation legitimate?

Rabbi Shimon, explains Tosefos, never doubted the words of Solomon as did the student of Rabbi Yochanan. He merely wished to establish whether his knowledge of ant society was the product of natural human intelligence employing scientific experimentation or the supernatural gift of Divine inspiration. While his own conclusion was that Solomon had made an experiment similar to his own, the challenges presented by the other sage led to an opposing conclusion that it could only have been the result of Divine inspiration.

Chullin 57b

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