



SERMON RESOURCE FOR SHLUCHIM

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Taking On New Resolutions

A PROJECT OF THE SHLUCHIM OFFICE

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 In loving memory of

Emil W. Herman ז"ל ר' מנחם זאב בן פנחס ז"ל
 who loved and supported Torah learning.

Naso

Taking On New Resolutions

Good Shabbos!

How many of you have a Facebook page?

Perhaps I should better ask, “How many of you do not have a Facebook page?”

But whether you have or do not have a Facebook page, one thing is for sure: the co-founder of Facebook, Mark Zuckerberg, is one lucky young man.

Besides being a billionaire who continues to make news from time to time, he’s also a social activist—and his social activism also makes news from time to time.

For example, there was a headline proclaiming that none other than Mark Zuckerberg, who very well may also be the richest and most famous Jew in the world, adopted the concept of “you eat what you kill” as part of his moral code.

Now, a little research will tell you that the “you eat what you kill” concept is all the rage among certain circles of foodies. The idea is that the meat you eat must come from an animal that you personally slaughtered, not some anonymous animal in a slaughterhouse far away from your dining-room table.

Zuckerberg was sold on the concept. He now believes that people who eat meat aren't aware that the meat on their plate was once a living creature that was slaughtered so that they could eat that meat—and that when people are reminded of this fact, they aren't prepared to deal with it and would rather hide from it. And so Mr. Zuckerberg decided that he would only be eating meat that he slaughtered himself—also announcing that he had personally killed several farm animals himself.

Further research will reveal that, according to at least one top restaurant chef who actually serves his patrons meat that he slaughtered himself, the meat is better and tastes better if it's slaughtered immediately before eating, and preferably by hand.

But, of course, as is the case with many "new" and "progressive" ideas, this concept is nothing new to us Jews.

Up to about 50 or 75 years ago—and certainly in pre-War Europe—any Jew who wanted to eat kosher meat or poultry would have to first go to the livestock or poultry market, purchase a live cow, chicken or sheep, take it to the shochet, the kosher butcher, where the animal would be slaughtered specifically for him. He (or, as was often the case, she) would take the freshly-slaughtered animal home for koshering (soaking, salting, draining, cleaning, etc.), so that most Jews would have this "you eat what you kill" experience personally.

Even today, anyone who wants to experience this personally is invited to take part in the Kaporos ritual held before Yom Kippur each year. Immediately after the Kaporos ritual is performed, during which a live chicken is passed over the head three times to symbolically replace the individual and his or her sins, participants stand on line to get their chickens slaughtered by hand right in front of them by a professional shochet. Many people have the custom of donating the chicken to charity—and it's likely that this is a result of the experience of seeing the slaughter yourself.

In Judaism, this idea that one should stand behind one's actions is very accepted.

For example, everyone knows the mitzvah of bris milah, circumcision. A bris must be done by a professional mohel—but to learn to be an expert mohel, one must learn the trade from an experienced professional. Some people argue that a mohel's first circumcision should be on his own son—only after that should he be allowed to touch another Jewish child. Because if you are not ready to circumcise your own son, it's a sign that you're not really ready. After all, is another Jewish child more important than yours?

And we find this in halachah, in Jewish law, when it comes to the laws of Shabbos. As is commonly known, when it comes to a life-and-death matter, it is permitted to violate the Shabbos. Let's say you need to take someone to the hospital—if it's an immediate threat to the person's life, then not only are you allowed to violate the Shabbos, but you must.

Halachah tells us that when you ask the rabbi if you're allowed to violate the Shabbos and the rabbi rules that in your specific situation (whatever it may be), violating Shabbos is justified, then it is forbidden for the rabbi to designate someone else to go violate the Shabbos. Rather, the rabbi himself must be the one who goes and violates the Shabbos—because if he thinks that one must violate the Shabbos, then he must do so exactly as he would have anyone else do it.

The story is told about the Alter Rebbe, Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi (1745-1812), the founder of Chabad Chasidism, that he once stopped praying in the middle of Yom Kippur, took off his tallis and kittel and walked to the edge of town—where he gathered wood to boil water over a fire for a woman alone in a little house who had just had a baby and had no one to help her. When they asked the Alter Rebbe why he did it himself instead of sending someone over, he invoked the same halachah.

The Rebbe explains in a talk that the reason for this law is that if the rabbi sends someone else to do it, then there will be people who will conclude that violating the Shabbos is not as simple and straightforward as it may seem—and they'll bring proof from the fact that the rabbi himself refrained from doing so, which is proof that even though it's technically allowed, it's still not really allowed.

And then, it's likely that the next time that there might be a situation of life and death, those individuals who saw the rabbi refrain last time will hesitate and take their time violating the Shabbos—because, after all, they saw that the rabbi himself was not too happy about doing it. And so, they might end up putting a Jewish life in danger—which is why the halachah states that if the rabbi thinks he needs to violate the Shabbos, he must stand behind his words and do it himself.

And now we come back to the subject at hand: Mark Zuckerberg and his new meat rules.

What's interesting is that someone asked Mr. Zuckerberg why he suddenly took on this new moral code, and he said that he takes on a new goal with each new year. One year, it was to know what it's like to wear a tie every day. Another year it was mastering Chinese (in which he succeeded, at least relatively). And now, he decided to become a "butcher."

But there is a similar concept in the teachings of the Baal Shem Tov, the founder of Chasidic philosophy. The Baal Shem Tov taught that at every Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, a Jew should take on a new mitzvah, or a mitzvah stringency, that he or she never observed until then. And so, there are many Jews who resolve at each Rosh Hashanah to start keeping one new mitzvah that they previously didn't keep.

(I constantly warn people not to take on too many mitzvos—because if they do, there won't be anything left for them to take on the next year...)

Now, we may not be standing before Rosh Hashanah now—but we are still in the vicinity of Shavuos, the holiday marking the giving of the Torah. And so, it may be appropriate to take on a light and easy mitzvah at this time.

And so, I cordially invite you all to: Come to shul every week! And if you're already doing that, invite someone you know or love, or both, to come to shul every week too.

You don't have to learn Chinese, or even Hebrew. You don't have to change your life. You don't even have to slaughter a chicken. All you need to do is show up. And best of all, there's great food after each service. Don't miss it!

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