

KOSHER GELT

by Rabbi Daniel Travis

Yaakov remained alone, and a stranger [appeared and] wrestled with him until daybreak. (Bereshith 32:25)

What was Yaakov doing all alone at night? He had gone back to retrieve some small earthenware flasks that had been left behind when he was moving his family.¹ Yaakov was preparing for his confrontation with Esav, and one would think that he had more important things to concern himself with than such insignificant items. Our Sages learn from this incident that the possessions of the righteous are as precious to them as are their very lives, for they are always careful to ensure that every cent they earn comes their way honestly. Thus they carefully guard even items of little value.²

Since it is difficult to adhere to all of the laws pertaining to money, most people are more careful about the laws of kosher food than those of honesty. This was not always the case. The halachah of waiting between meat and milk is first mentioned regarding Shmuel, one of the greatest Sages of the Gemara. When questioned about this behavior, he replied that he was not as righteous as his father had been, for his father waited a full twenty-four hours between eating meat and milk. The same Gemara relates that Shmuel used to make an accounting of his financial affairs every day, in order to make sure that he did not owe any money, and had not received any money that was not rightfully his. Once again Shmuel said that he was not at the level of his father who had made such an accounting twice each day.³

Although we may not be capable of such meticulousness, we must realize that it reflects great piety. We can learn an important lesson from Shmuel and his father: the Torah not only demands that we observe the laws of kashruth and that we sanctify all our physical indulgences, it also insists that we sanctify all aspects of our relationships with others. We must apply all the tenets of justice and righteousness with painstaking care when we deal with others, avoiding even the slightest trace of dishonesty, both in business and in our personal lives. In the course of any business transaction it is very easy to err with small sums of money, so one who wants to avoid dishonest money must constantly be wary. Rav Yosef Breuer zt"l stressed that just as food should be Glatt Kosher, our financial dealings should be Glatt Yosher (uncompromisingly straight).⁴

The shochet (ritual slaughterer) of the city of Salant once approached Rav Yisrael Salanter for advice; he was contemplating leaving his profession to become a shopkeeper. When Rav Yisrael asked him what had prompted this idea, he replied that he was afraid of the great responsibility he bore for slaughtering the meat properly. Rav Yisrael was shocked at his response, and told him that

if that was his concern, he definitely should not open a shop. A shochet only has to worry about the transgressing the laws of kosher meat, while a storekeeper must concern himself with the countless possible transgressions that involve other's money.⁵

1. *Chulin* 91a.
 2. Maharsha *ibid*.
 3. *Ibid*. 105a.
 4. *A Time to Build*, p. 48.
 5. *Hizaharu BeMamon Chaverechem*, p. 241.
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