



PhiloTorah D'var Torah

Dr. Seuss in the Sedra



The above picture, the one from the top page of this week's PhiloTorah, comes from Dr. Seuss's first book, *And to Think that I Saw it on Mulberry Street* (1937).

I remember reading the book to my daughters way back when, and staring at the page with this picture and thinking that there was something not kosher about it.

I realized that it was the fact that an elephant and two giraffes were harnessed together, and tasked with pulling a bandwagon and a house-on-wheels of a kindly old man who would be able to listen to the band's music from beginning to end.

The picture immediately brought to mind the prohibition from Parshat Ki Teitzei of plowing with an ox and a donkey together.

The first question is, does the mitzva apply to pulling a bandwagon with an elephant and giraffes? Or not. Maybe it's only ox-donkey-plowing.

The answer is, definitely yes! It is forbidden to harness an elephant with giraffes in order to pull a bandwagon.

But it does not go without saying, because there are mitzvot in the Torah that are very specific and not to be generalized.

The firstborn (if male) of a donkey (ATON in Hebrew; Jenny, in English) must be redeemed before its owner may derive any benefit from it. PIDYON PETTER CHAMOR. Horse, too? No. Dog? No. Cat? No. No. No. Just a donkey.

Better example. Take a look at the two p'sukim (D'varim 22:10 & 11), each of which is a prohibition (LO TAASEI), that share the same 2-pasuk parsha:

You shall not plow with an ox and a donkey together. You shall not wear a mixture of wool and linen together.

The first pasuk is the one we are focusing on: Do not plow with an ox and a donkey together. The second pasuk says Do not wear SHAATNEZ, wool and linen together.

These two p'sukim are remarkably similar in structure. LO LO (Do not), verb - TACHAROSH (plow), TILBASH (wear), something and something - ox and donkey, wool and linen, YACHDAV YACHDAV, together.

As similar as they are, look at how very different they are. SHAATNEZ -

you cannot wear garments of wool and linen. How about wool and cotton? No problem. How about cashmere and linen? No problem. How about making a tapestry from wool and linen woven together? No problem. You can even make a Parochet from wool and linen for the Aron Kodesh in shul. SHAATNEZ is only wearing only wool and only linen together. There has not been any Rabbinic extension of the definition of SHAATNEZ. No CHUMRA to add any other fiber to this prohibition.

Yet, we already said above, that the prohibition of LO TACHAROSH applies to an elephant and giraffes pulling a bandwagon. Plowing, in this pasuk and for this mitzva, represents any function; plowing is just a common example. Ox and donkey are only a common example, but the prohibition applies to any two non-compatible animals.

How do we know all this? That wool is wool but an ox can be a giraffe? That a donkey is only a donkey in one place but can be an elephant in another place?

The answer is simple.

TORAH SHE-B'AL PEH, the Oral Torah. The Oral Law is an inseparable part of TORAH. It is joined at the hip (as the expression goes) and then some. Torah She-b'al Peh says in what context a BEN is a son, a male

child, and in what context BEN means a child, offspring, male or female.

It teaches us when YOM means daytime and when it refers to a whole 24-hour time period.

Are we sure about that? That's another Definitely Yes! It is one of the foundation stones of Torah Judaism. It can be summed up as EMUNAT CHACHAMIM. MOSHE KIBEIL TORAH MISINAI... (the first of the two p'rakim of Avot for this Shabbat) - Moshe received ALL OF TORAH at Sinai and it is passed down from generation to generation.

Back to the Dr. Seuss page. Okay, using an elephant and giraffes to pull a bandwagon is forbidden.

But is that Torah Law, or rabbinic legislation that is inspired by Torah law? More difficult question. Maybe.

The answer is that it is part and parcel of the same Torah command of LO TACHAROSH. Not one bit less than plowing with an ox and a donkey.

Says who? TOSHBA (as Torah she-b'al Peh is affectionately referred to).

Many peoples of the world - including some Jews, are convinced that the Bible is the Word of God - referring to the Written Torah. It is only part of the Word of God. That's how He wanted it. And that is a fundamental of our YAHADUT. **PTDT**