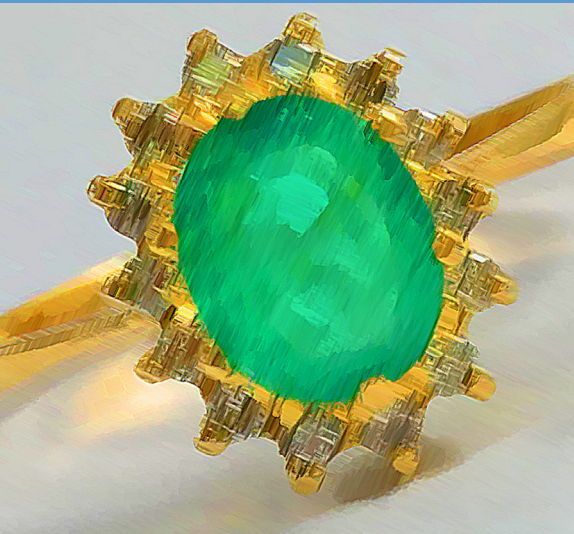


A MITZVA DILEMMA FOR THE SHABBOS TABLE



“A PRECIOUS GEM IN THE GRAVE”

By Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

In this week's Torah portion we find that Yaakov asked to be buried in Eretz Yisrael, the land of Israel.

There is a mitzva to bury a dead body, and not cremate or desecrate it in any way. This is one way we demonstrate respect for the deceased.

This brings us to the following true story that was asked to Rabbi Efraim Oshry in the Kovno Ghetto, during the Holocaust.

In the Kovno Ghetto, food was scarce and tightly rationed. One individual named Chaim wanted to find a way to buy some additional food for his hungry family. There was no way he was able to leave the ghetto. He had a friend named Meir who was a forced laborer who left the ghetto every day with a team of fellow ghetto inmates to build a factory for the Germans. Chaim had a very expensive gem that he thought he might be able to sell to be able to buy some extra food. He asked Meir if he would be willing to try to sell the gem when he left the ghetto. Understanding the



NOT MOTHER NATURE BUT HER FATHER

In this week's Parsha, Vayechi, we find our father Yaakov on his deathbed surrounded by his 12 sons as he is about to reveal the date when his people will finally achieve their destiny. It was a divine inspiration by which he knew this date. However, before he shared it with them the inspiration stopped and he could not recall the date. Yaakov suspected that perhaps the date alluded him because one or some of his children were not steadfast in their commitment to HaShem thereby causing the divine connection to terminate. Even worse, perhaps that destiny would never be achieved. He therefore asked his 12 sons if there was anyone in the room whose commitment to HaShem was wavering. In response to this question all his children proclaimed, "Hear O Israel (Yaakov's name was also Israel) HaShem is our God, HaShem is One!" Upon hearing these words Yaakov understood that the reason the information alluded him was because HaShem wanted it to remain a mystery.

How do these words satisfy Yaakov's concern? They did not proclaim anything else other than their firm belief in HaShem being the One and only God. Are there not many folks who walk this earth that believe in one God and nevertheless are not committed to Him?

The answer is that Yaakov knew his children well. In his home there was no child who was a kafoy tov, an ingrate. Gratitude was an integral part of the very fabric of Yaakov's home. When his children proclaimed their firm acknowledgement that HaShem was their God and that there was no other being that rules this universe, he knew that their commitment would

risks, Meir agreed to help his friend Chaim. Meir sewed the jewel into the lining of his clothing and left the ghetto with his labor team.

After Meir reached the labor area, he wanted to speak to a non-Jew to offer to sell the jewel. It was strictly forbidden for any non-Jew to speak to a Jew wearing a yellow star. In order to make the exchange, Meir quietly removed his star, and attempted to sell the jewel. Unfortunately, Meir was spotted by a Nazi officer, and recognized as a Jew. The Nazi quickly shot and killed Meir. The Nazis had Meir's body transferred back the ghetto where the Jews performed a funeral and buried Meir with his clothes in the Jewish cemetery.

Several days later, Chaim, the owner of the jewel realized that his jewel was still sewn in the lining of Meir's clothes, buried in his grave. Chaim really needed that jewel. He had the following moral dilemma.

On one hand, there is a mitzva that normally prohibits opening up a grave several days after a corpse is buried. Part of the reason for this is to show respect to the deceased who would not like his decomposed corpse exposed in public. Normally it would not be permitted to open up a grave even to retrieve money for inheritors.

But on the other hand, in this case, Meir gave up his life for his friend Chaim, by trying to sell his jewel. If we would be able to speak to Meir, he would surely want to return the jewel to Chaim, its rightful owner. Meir surely does not want to permanently hold on to the jewel. Perhaps Meir would be posthumously doing the mitzva of returning a lost object. Is it possible that this prohibition would be waived if we can assume that the deceased would waive this right for respect? Can we assume that Meir would want us to open up the grave in this case? Would the fact that this is a shas had-chak, a case of pressing need, allow leniency in this case?

Chaim asked Rav Oshry whether he should leave the grave closed and not disturb the grave, or if it perhaps might be permitted in this case

What do you think?

See Shailos V'Teshuvos Mimamakim Volume 2 Siman 12

You can email me at rabiweiner@achim.org for the answer, or see the answer posted at achim.org



“A good character is the best tombstone.
Carve your name on hearts,
not only marble.”



remain forever.

When a person is makir tov (grateful) he recognizes that his very first breath upon his birth which must be so carefully orchestrated not to happen a moment too early nor a moment too late was gifted by HaShem; and when he recognizes that all the subsequent breaths until his final one are all gifted by HaShem; and when he recognizes that that the parents he was given who cared for him during those early years of his life when he is so vulnerable were gifted by HaShem; and when he recognizes that the economic system that exists in the world which allowed his parents to do their work and buy the necessities of life to provide for him was gifted by HaShem; and when he recognizes that all parts of his body from his

digestive and cardiovascular systems to his nervous and skeletal systems continue to work ceaselessly is gifted by HaShem, then this person will be totally committed to HaShem and to His Torah.

It is true that there are many folks who draw on all these gifts and know that there is only one God, and nevertheless are not committed to HaShem. This is because they do not possess the quality of gratitude.

It is the members of the Jewish nation who are blessed with the natural quality of recognizing our gifts and willingness to bow before our Benefactor. Our only real challenge is recognizing that it is not Mother Nature who has granted us all these gifts but rather her Father.

Let us continue to discover how much HaShem grants us and feel the deep debt of gratitude we owe Him for it. There is no greater joy than reciprocating the good that one receives. How wonderful it is to be a Jew!

Have a wonderful Shabbos

Paysach Diskind



SHABBOS: CELEBRATING HASHEM'S CREATION

Animals that fly by night and can't rely on vision need an alternative way to navigate safely without relying on their eyes. Bouncing sound waves off nearby objects is a handy way to move around if you have the right equipment. Bats do, and scientists are still uncovering new surprises about the complex, interacting components that must all be in place for this system to work.

Bats rely on complex echolocation to maneuver in the dark.

Two things are needed to see with your ears (a phenomenon more commonly known as echolocation): a sound producer and a sound receiver. Bats use their vocal cords to produce sound waves, controlling the intensity, direction, and frequency. This sound is loud enough to easily bounce off any object, whether moving or stationary, and return to the bat.

The sound receivers, the bat's ears, may be the most interesting parts of the echolocation sys-

BAT SONAR

tem. Bats have complete control over which sounds their ears pick up. Otherwise, their highly sensitive ears would go deaf whenever they made their loud, high-frequency sounds.

So when the bat produces sound, either it uses its middle-ear muscles to close its ears or it adjusts them to hear only a certain frequency. As the sound waves bounce back toward the bat, the frequency shifts, due to something called the Doppler Effect. This allows the bat to protect its ears from the loud frequency going out while retaining the ability to hear other frequencies coming in.

BATS HAVE COMPLETE CONTROL OVER WHICH SOUNDS THEIR EARS PICK UP. OTHERWISE, THEIR HIGHLY SENSITIVE EARS WOULD GO DEAF WHENEVER THEY MADE THEIR LOUD, HIGH-FREQUENCY SOUNDS.

THE HOLY PANTS

Mr. Moshe Friedman was born in Poland in 1930, and his family survived the war through a series of miracles that brought them to Siberia. When the war was over, Moshe's father heard that the Nazis ym"sh had made soap out of Jewish bodies, and he decided to return to Poland to buy as many of these bars of soap as he could and give these remains a Jewish burial. Father and son traveled back to their hometown, and spent days combing the streets and offering to purchase the townspeople's Nazi-supplied soap. This part of Moshe Friedman's life story was known to the family; the rest was not — until it became revealed through Harav Ovadia Yosef. Mr. Friedman moved to America, married, and had children. When he was getting on in years, one of his sons— in-law, who is of Syrian descent, offered to accompany him to Eretz Yisrael. Mr. Friedman was delighted to visit the Holy Land, and especially to see gedolei Yisrael and receive their blessings. One of the stops they made was at Harav Ovadia's home. No sooner had Mr. Friedman walked into the study than Harav Ovadia asked, "Why do I detect the scent of Gan Eden on your clothing?" Mr. Friedman did not know what to answer. "What special deed have you done in your life?" Harav Ovadia asked. At first Mr. Friedman would not answer, but when Harav Ovadia kept repeating the question, he said, "Well, I have a several children whom I support so they can devote their lives to studying Torah." "That's not it," Harav Ovadia said. "Others do that as well and their clothing doesn't have the scent of Gan Eden. What else did you do?" Harav Ovadia sensed that Mr. Friedman knew the answer, but wasn't willing to say it in front of others. He sent all the people present out of his room, including Mr. Friedman's son-in-law. The only other person who remained was a young man named David, who acted as an interpreter, translating Mr. Friedman's English and Harav Ovadia's Hebrew. When everyone left, Mr. Friedman told Harav Ovadia a story that had happened on the last day he and his father had attempted to buy and bury human soap in Poland - a tale, he said, he had not shared with anybody. After spending a few weeks in Poland, they had already bought and buried all the soap they could find, and they decided it was time to rejoin their family in Siberia. The day they were planning to leave, however, a non- Jewish man approached the 15-year-old Moshe Friedman and asked, "Are you the one who is buying the human soap?" Moshe confirmed that he was. "I have a full box of such soap, and I'm willing to sell it to you." The man named a price, but Moshe did not have enough money on him, and his father was nowhere sight. "I don't have money here," he said, "but give me the soap, I'll bury it, and I'll bring you money later." "No, I want the money up front," insisted the seller. Moshe thought for a while and then said, "Look, I have this pair of warm, woolen pants, and yours are thin cotton. I'm willing to trade my pants for yours if you'll allow me to buy the soap." The man quickly agreed to the deal; a pair of thick woolen pants were a premium commodity in the harsh European winters. After the two traded pants, Moshe buried the box of soap, and then rejoined his family in Siberia, undoubtedly shivering his way through the winter in those cotton pants. When Harav Ovadia heard this story, he said, "This explains why your clothes have the scent of Gan Eden. The neshamot of all the Jews whose remains you buried were all kedoshim, who died "al Kiddush Hashem" and are therefore in Gan Eden, and these neshamot have been accompanying you throughout your life." (From Rav Ovadia, By Rabbi Yehuda Heimowitz)



Achim in a Nutshell:

"Veyached l'vaveinu l'ahava es Shemecha."

"Please bring our hearts together so that we can love Your Name".

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