

## A MITZVA DILEMMA FOR THE SHABBOS TABLE



### THE GHETTO ROOMMATES

By Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

This week's Torah portion describes the tribe of Dan as "the Gatherer of all the Camps". Our Sages teach us that Dan would travel behind the rest of the camp to return any objects that were lost by along the way. This is a reference to the mitzva of Hashavas Aveida, the mitzvah to return another's lost objects.

This brings us to the following dilemma that was asked to Rav Ephraim Oshry during the Holocaust.

Two Jewish families shared a cramped apartment in the Warsaw Ghetto. One day, one of the families was rounded up and all were executed. The family that perished left many of their valuables in the room.



### THE MESSY LAB

In this week's Parsha, B'haloscha, there are two verses that are cordoned off from the rest of the Parsha with a unique character resembling a parenthesis. The Talmud teaches us that these two verses form a book unto itself, thereby creating an additional two Books. The original Book of Bamidbar remains one Book concluding at the parenthesis. Then there is the two-verse Book and the balance of the Book constitutes a third Book.

This miniature Book reads as follows. "*When the Aron (the Holy Ark which contained the Two Tablets) traveled from the encampment, Moshe would say 'Arise HaShem and let your adversaries disperse and your enemies should flee from before You'. And when the Aron settled he said 'Rest, HaShem, to Your place among the myriad thousands of your people'.*"

Moshe is teaching us the purpose of the Aron's traveling was to disperse the adversaries and to chase away the enemies. And the purpose of the Aron's resting was to be among the Jewish people. What is the function of this two verse Book, and why was it placed here?

In the verses immediately preceding the parenthesis the Torah tells us with what type of attitude we left Mount Sinai after encamping there for close to a year learning HaShem's Torah. We left in the same manner that a child leaves school at the end of the day. Even though the conduct of leaving in such a manner is only an issue of a bad attitude, nevertheless, it was an indication of how we accepted the Torah. Our acceptance of the Torah was analogous to a child's acceptance of the lessons he learnt at school. It is in this context the Torah creates the two verse Book.

Our Sages teach that these two verses contain the entire destiny and purpose of our people. The Aron is the container in which the Torah given to us by HaKadosh baruch Hu rests. For the entire duration of our 40 year trek through the desert we took our cue from the Aron. When the Aron would travel we would travel when it rested we encamped. We, the people of His Torah, follow the lead of that Torah. This two-verse Book

The surviving family had the following moral dilemma. The husband said to his wife, "Food is very scarce. Perhaps we would be able to sell some of the valuables that were left over in order to obtain a little more food. The owners of the possessions are no longer living. The valuables seem to be ownerless.

But the wife responded, "But perhaps there are some unknown relatives living somewhere in the world who were entitled to these possessions. Would it be theft from those people if we used or sold the possessions? Can one argue that the unnamed inheritors relinquished their claims because it was impossible to access the ghetto?

The husband answered, "There were no claims to these items, so I think they are ownerless, and we can keep it. Additionally, even if there were inheritors, maybe they would relinquish their claim because the ghetto is inaccessible to them."

The wife finally replied, I still think it might be stealing from the inheritors if we use the valuables.

Rather than take the valuables as one would expect, they brought this question to Rav Oshry to hear what the Torah would answer in such a case.

How would you decide this question?

*See Shailos V'Teshuvos Mimamakim Part 3, Chapter 4*



teaches us that we have two responsibilities. We a responsibility that expresses itself as a traveling Aron. As a people without a home and always wandering through the desert of nations. And then we have a second responsibility that expresses itself as the Aron that has reached its destination. As a people who were designed to be the carriers of HaShem's Presence in the world, we must rest in our place and elevate the world to Godliness.

What is the practical application of this idea

Let us use the following illustration. The scientist goes to his laboratory but there is a pile of trash blocking the entrance. So he spends his time dispersing the trash to get into his lab. However, once he gets in he sees that it is filled with smoke. He can barely find the light switch. After turning on the light he realizes how it is even more difficult to see, as the smoke diffuses the light. He then turns on the fan to pull out the smoke. Finally he gets to his microscope and his specimens and settles down for a day of discovery.

While this is only an analogy it illustrates the two modes by which HaKadosh baruch Hu interacts with His world. There is the mode in

which His Presence dispels the darkness and the antagonism to acceptance of His sovereignty. That mode is not the mission of His Presence in this world. It is the prerequisite needed to allow His Presence to reach it's Resting Place where it can then elevate this world and bring it to its spiritual heights that are otherwise unattainable.

After encamping at the base of Mount Sinai for close to a year studying HaShem's Torah we were ready to enter the Land which HaKadosh baruch Hu promised to our fathers. It was the Land in which HaKadosh baruch Hu would rest His Presence. However, when we left that encampment we left like children who run from school at the end of the day.

It was evident that the goal of elevating the world to Godliness was not yet at hand. The world still needed clarity to appreciate what it stood to gain from HaShem's resting His Presence among us. It was for this purpose that the Torah inserts the two-verse Book to indicate that we now have these two responsibilities. We are not yet ready to begin the elevation, we must still disperse the trash and chase away the smoke.

While this applies to the destiny and history of the our people it also applies to every person's personal life. We all have areas in our life that are cluttered with distractions and we all have areas in our life where we can find the place to bring HaKadosh baruch Hu to rest and thereby elevate ourselves.

Have a wonderful Shabbos.

**Paysach Diskind**



## SHABBOS: CELEBRATING HASHEM'S CREATION

Plants pour out seeds. A single plant of red clover only a few inches tall turns out 500 copies of itself. The weedy crabgrass makes 90,000 seeds on each plant. Pigweed produces a million seeds per plant.

One orchid was estimated to grow 3,770,000 seeds on a single plant. Orchids grow high up in jungle trees, and their seed must find a limb which is wet and the bark slightly decayed. So millions of seeds, as fine as the finest powder float off into the air.

Dandelion seeds come equipped with parachutes. Maple seeds have wings and flutter off like butterflies. Some water plants produce seeds with air-filled floats. When released, they just sail away, as the wind blows them along.

Other plants have pods that snap open and shoot their seeds out as from guns. Witch hazel pods gradually press tighter and tighter against their slippery seeds, until out they pop and travel some distance before landing. As the squirting cucumber grows, its pod thickens inwardly. The fluid center comes under ever-increased pressure till--bang! and the pressure becomes so great that the seeds shoot out like a cork from a bottle.

A small number of dry bean seeds, accidentally left under a concrete sidewalk, will, when they get wet, swell with such power that they will break the concrete.

Some desert seeds just lie on the ground and refuse to sprout--till a desert rain of a half inch or more occurs. Only a heavy rain will provide them with enough moisture to go through their brief cycle of life. Then they go to work fast!

Scientists tried to figure out a problem here: Why is it that these seeds will not sprout if they are only wet from below? Why must they also be soaked from above! The reason is this: The desert soil has too many salts in it--salts that will prevent the seeds from sprouting. So a rain is needed to wash down the salts so that the seeds can sprout and grow.

The knobcone pine has fire insurance. Unlike most pine trees, which open their cones and let the seeds slide out when ripe, the knobcone holds its ripe seeds sealed inside the cone. This cone is almost as hard as rock and will remain on the tree for as long as 50 years. These cones hug the trunk of the tree and are eventually swallowed by bark growing around them. Inside those cones, however, the seeds are still alive. Even

## AMAZING SEEDS

if the tree dies, the waiting seeds continue to be alive. Still more time passes, and then a forest fire occurs.

Since only a fire can release those seeds, they now spring into action! As the fire passes over the tree, the cones explode like popcorn. This explosion flings seeds everywhere, and they take root in the ashes after they have been cooled and wet by rain. In this way, these young trees grow and protect the forest floor from erosion. Later, other trees reforest the area along with them.

Some seeds are inside fruit, and when eaten the seeds reach the ground and sprout. Acorns are carried off by squirrels who know enough to bury them, and then forget where many of them are so they can sprout.

The burdock seed has big hooks that hitchhike on passing animals and people. Seeds of burr, marigold, tick-trefoil, or Spanish needles, travel in the same way.

Other seeds rely not on hooks but sticky surfaces. Still others are coated with oil, so ants carry them off to their underground homes where some of them will sprout.

Then there are the seeds which are part of such contraptions as slingshots, catapults, spring mechanisms, exploding parts, and cannons.

What about the overcoat seed on the wild oat? It has an overcoat called an *awn* which looks like a partly-bent leg of a grasshopper. *On warm, dry days, the leg suddenly straightens with such force that the seed is lifted over rough ground and partially burrows itself into the ground.*

One of the very smallest of the seeds, eventually grows into the biggest living thing on earth (and probably the heaviest too). The giant sequoia of the Sierra Nevada range grows over 300 feet [91 m] high, with a diameter which may be 36 feet [11 m]. One tree may contain enough wood to build 50 six-room houses. The bark is two feet [61 cm] thick, and its roots cover 3 or 4 acres [1.2-1.6 ha]. Yet its seeds are little more than a pinhead surrounded by tiny wings.

The most powerful things can come in such fragile packages.

## RETURNING A NEEDLE AND MATCHES

One time Rav Yaakov Yisrael Kanievsky, known as the Steipler Gaon, asked a batim-macher (someone who makes tefillin) if he could come to his home and repair the stitching on his tefillin. The Steipler stood over the craftsman's shoulder and supervised every detail of the delicate work. At one point, in the midst of intense concentration, a needle happened to fall on the floor. The Steipler was upset to see anything lost, and he immediately got down on his hands and knees to look for it. The two of them looked everywhere; but the needle seemed to have slipped into one of the cracks on the floor, and it was nowhere to be found. The young man, perhaps not so patiently, explained that the needle cost next to nothing and it certainly wasn't worth the time and effort to look further. This didn't satisfy the Steipler, however. "This needle belongs to your father in Jerusalem. We're talking here about the mitzvah of returning a lost object - A mitzvah! The Steipler tried again to sweep the floor with his hand in search of the missing needle, but with no success. Finally, they took another one to replace it and continued with the work. After the young man finished his work, he left and started on his way home. Before he had gone very far, he heard the Steipler calling after him. He barely had time to turn around when he saw the tzaddik hurrying to catch up to him, breathing very heavily. With a look of joy on his face, he announced, "I found the needle, Baruch Hashem! We're able to perform the mitzvah of returning a lost object." He was nearly overwhelmed by the excitement of doing a mitzvah for its own sake.

Once when The Steipler was in the middle of learning with someone, he suddenly stopped and took a box of matches from his desk drawer. There were only a few matches left in it. "I'll tell you a story about these matches. Once, about ten years ago, you were learning with me here and you left these matches on the table. At the time, I wrote your name on the box and put it away to return to you at some future time. Somehow I forgot about the matchbox entirely until I came across it recently. Now, finally, I'm remembering to give it back to you." To most people it would seem like a trivial thing, giving back a box with three matches in it. But to a tzaddik it was a source of untold joy to perform a mitzvah whose value in the world-to-come was infinitely greater than the three matches involved. From The Steipler, By Rabbi Moshe Sofer, Published by CIS page 154



### ACHIM IN A NUTSHEL

*Ashreinu, Umah Tov Chelkeinu, Umah Naim Goraleinu*

*We are so fortunate, our portion is so good, and our fate is so pleasant!*

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