

A MITZVA DILEMMA FOR THE SHABBOS TABLE



PRIORITIES

By Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

In this week's Torah portion, the Torah tells us how Yosef distributed life saving food to the people of Egypt and the neighboring lands.

This week, life saving vaccines to stop the spread of the Coronavirus are becoming available. They will be distributed in Eretz Yisroel starting December 20.

In the US, the CDC guidelines established the priority for issuing vaccines as follows. Frontline health care workers will get the first available doses. Next will be people who are in long term health facilities who are very vulnerable to the virus such as elderly people in nursing homes. After that, the vaccines will be available to the general public. Other states have more detailed policies.

What is the Torah perspective on these priorities? According to the Torah, in general, priority should be given to those who are most needy. So in states where there is a limited number of vaccines who should get priority?

For example, Maryland will only have 155,000



UNDERSTANDING YOUR BALANCE SHEET

This week's Parsha, Mikeitz, begins with the Torah informing us that Yosef's freedom from prison was delayed two years. Our Sages explain that this was the consequence of Yosef's lack of bitachon (trust) in HaShem. In last week's Parsha, after Yosef deciphered the butler's dream he asked the butler to please remember him to Pharaoh and to get him out of prison. This slight reliance on the butler's assistance demonstrated an ever so slight shortcoming in Yosef's bitachon. He should have said nothing to the butler and allow HaShem to bring about his freedom with no assistance at all.

The commentaries point out that for an ordinary person it would have been perfectly justified to make this request from the butler, after all, we must do our part in bringing about the anticipated freedom. Nevertheless, for Yosef, whose level of bitachon was so great, this was an inappropriate request. Behold! The amount of hishtadlus (effort) that one is required to do depends on one's level of bitachon. We must always place our complete trust in HaShem, no matter what our need is. However, In addition to our trust we must do our part and expend some effort to make sure HaShem "has the opportunity" to make it happen. This effort is called hishtadlus. The reason for this is because we cannot expect HaShem to do a miracle for us. We have to expend some effort to cover up HaShem's intervention. For example, we know that every year on Rosh Hashana HaShem establishes how much money we will earn. There is nothing that we can do to make more money than that amount. At the same time, we must work to earn that money. If we stay home and expect HaShem to send the funds to us, it won't happen.

vaccines available this week, with a total population of 6 million people. This means that approximately one in 50 will be able to get it. It will be many months before it will be available to everyone.

Front line care workers are of course saving lives and they are essential to keep the healthcare system running. But they may not be as vulnerable to death as elderly people. Perhaps it should be given to the elderly first because they are more vulnerable to die. Do we focus on who is most likely to die or do we focus on who can bring the greatest amount of benefit to others?

Taking this to the next level, once the vaccine is available to the general public how should we prioritize distributing it in prison? In Massachusetts they plan to give it to prisoners first because people in prison can be more vulnerable to getting COVID because it is a closed, confined area with limited movement and limited freedom. Do we say that they should get priority before the general public, or do we say that perhaps they forfeited that priority because of their crimes?

Next, how about leaders? In many cases, government leaders such as mayors, congressmen, senators, and presidents will be getting first priority. Should they have priority because they are needed to give leadership? Or should all vulnerable people be given before leaders get it? How about Police officers and emergency responders? Should they take priority over the general population? Over the prison population? Over the elderly population?

In Montana they are giving teachers priority to the vaccine in order to keep the schools open.

Uber has been lobbying that its drivers should take priority within the general population as their drivers keep society functioning.

What is the Torah's perspective on these questions? How should they prioritize this in Eretz Yisroel?

What do you think?

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*Happiness
is not by chance
but
by choice*”



The lesson our Sages taught from Yosef is that the amount of hishtadlus necessary is relative to our bitachon. The question is if there is some equation to calculate how much hishtadlus one must expend? Is there a test by which we could establish our level of bitachon to use as an indicator for how much hishtadlus we need to exert?

Consider the following scenario. Dovid, the owner of a retail shop, hears a wonderfully inspiring lecture on bitachon and how one should cut down the time they dedicate to work and spend more time studying Torah. He makes a quick calculation which indicates that HaShem has decided that he should earn \$100k annually as this is how much he has been earning for the past several years. Dovid decides to cut the hours his shop will be open from ten hours a day to six hours a day. After all, it is still possible to earn \$100k if HaShem wants him

to, within those six hours just as well as within ten hours. This way he will have an additional four hours to dedicate to his Torah study.

At the end of that year he earned only \$60k. He could have one of two reactions. He could be terribly upset as he looks back thinking that if at ten hours daily he earned \$100k and at six hours a day he earned \$60k, evidently he should have worked more hours a day. Alternatively, he may be very pleased that he cut back on his time. After all, it was evident that HaShem wanted him to earn only \$60k this year. What a waste of time it would have been to work four extra hours a day! Rabbi Tatz suggests that this is the question one must ask themselves to test their level of bitachon and their level of hishtadlus.

May HaShem grant us the clarity to find the right balance and may He grant us the menuchas hanefesh, the serenity, that accompanies those who achieve such bitachon.

Have a very safe and very wonderful Shabbos and an enlightening and joyous Chanukah.

Paysach Diskind



SHABBOS: CELEBRATING HASHEM'S CREATION

POTATOES

Many of us have just spent the past week eating fried potatoes. Here are some fascinating details about this Chanukah staple.

The Inca Indians in Peru were the first to cultivate potatoes as long as 4 thousand years ago. Wild potato species, originating in modern-day Peru, can be found throughout the Americas, from the United States to southern Chile, in all 50 United States and about 125 countries throughout the world. Potatoes still remain an essential crop in Europe, where per capita production is still the highest in the world. The world's largest potato producing country is China.

We often think of the sweet potato as a variation of the white potato. But the truth is they are different families. The sweet potato belongs in the same family as the flower morning glories while the white potato belongs to the same group as tomatoes, tobacco, chile pepper, eggplant and the petunia.

Potatoes are a vegetable, but amazingly they have more vitamin C than an orange, more potassium than a banana and more fiber than an apple. There are around 100 varieties of the edible potato. While potatoes seem very solid, they are in fact 80% water and 20% solids. The largest potato grown was 18 pounds 4 ounces.

Can potatoes be poisonous? All potatoes contain glycoalkaloids, which are poisonous. However, a potato that was stored properly will only contain very small amounts, not enough to harm anyone. The stems and leaves of potatoes have a much higher concentration of glycoalkaloids, making them poisonous. Exposing a potato to light so that it turns green, will make it harmful too. Contrary to popular belief, you can eat a potato that's sprouting as long as it's not wrinkled or shriveled.

We normally think of potatoes only as food, but the truth is that they have many other industrial uses.

Potatoes are used to make vodka. Small, blemished potatoes are used as livestock fodder. Potato starch is used in the food industry as a thickener and binder for soups and sauces, in the textile industry as an adhesive and for the manufacturing of papers and boards.

Companies are exploring the possibilities of using waste potatoes to obtain polylactic acid for use in plastic products; other research projects seek ways to use the starch as a base for biodegradable packaging.

There was a time when potatoes were traded with gold directly. Back in the 1890s, during the Alaskan Klondike gold rush, the potato had very high value due to its essential Vitamin C content.

In 1995, potato plants were taken into space with the space shuttle Columbia. The potato grew in space and was marked the first time any food was ever successfully grown in space. President Thomas Jefferson gets the credit for introducing "french fries" to America when he served them at a White House dinner. He called them "potatoes served in the French manner". I guess it was easier to say French Fries.

In 1974, an Englishman named Eric Jenkins grew 370 pounds of potatoes from one potato plant.

The average American consumes 140 pounds of potatoes per year. That's a lot of french fries, potato chips, latkes and potato kugel!

DA'AS TORAH

An older bachur was once having trouble finding a shidduch. To make matters worse, he had a precondition that the girl he married would have to agree to allow his elderly mother to live with them. His friends told him to drop his demand; it would just make the search harder. He refused to compromise. They advised him to consult da'as Torah, so he went to speak to Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, zt"l.

Rav Shlomo Zalman told him that if it was important to him he could insist on it. It would be a good test of the girl's character, he added. Furthermore, if he'd have to place his mother in a nursing home because of his wife, he'd always resent her for it. After giving the bachur a bracha for success in his search, the bachur left.

A short while later the bachur returned to Rav Shlomo Zalman to inform him that he had found his zivug. "Wonderful!" exclaimed Rav Shlomo Zalman. "Now you must place your mother in a home." "What? Why? My kallah agreed to let her live with us!"

"I know. And you see she has a golden character. If it were up to her, you wouldn't put your mother in a nursing home so you have no reason to resent her.

But there is no way that a newly married couple can have the husband's mother living with them, so I'm telling you, you must put your mother in a home."

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Pictured: Rav Shlomo Zalman in his younger years.



THE ANSWER

Last week's question about calling the ambulance in Shabbos, was brought to Rav Elyashiv, Zt"l. Rav Elyashiv answered that if the wife is sure that it is nothing serious again, because she knows her husband well, then she does not have an obligation to call the ambulance. Similarly if the doctors are certain that he is not in danger, and he is just being overly cautious like before, then they don't have to break Shabbos. However, if the wife or doctors are not sure that it is not a danger, they are obligated to break the Shabbos to check it out.

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