

A MITZVA DILEMMA FOR THE SHABBOS TABLE



THE VALUABLE KVETENTSIA

By Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

This week's Torah portion makes a reference to the prohibition of theft. The Torah says that Moshe led his sheep out to the wilderness. Rashi explains this was done to make sure that the sheep would not eat from other peoples fields.

This leads us to the following interesting story that was related by the Rogatchover Gaon.

For many years under the rule of the Czars, the Russian authorities would draft people into the army. For some period of time they issued "kvetentsias" which could be bought for a price. These kvetentsias were documents which exempted the bearer from the draft. Since it was not limited to a spe-



WOOD OR ELEPHANT?

As we begin the Book of Shemos in which our people are born, I would like to share an insight presented by the Maharal through which we can appreciate who we, as a people, and how we ought to perceive ourselves. The importance of our self perception goes beyond feeling proud of who we are. It impacts how we feel towards our fellow Jew and the responsibility it places on us.

Everything in this world can be defined in two ways; by its chomer or by its tzura. Chomer is the physical material from which it is made. Tzura is the form which it holds. Let us give two illustrations, the first a concrete the second abstract.

For the concrete illustration let us take a block of wood which has no tzura, form. The only way to define it is 'a block of wood'. A sculpture then takes the wood and forms it into a magnificent elephant. When asked to define the same piece of wood the response will be a 'wooden elephant'. Wood is now the adjective and elephant is the noun. Behold! The tzura redefines the object it is no longer defined by its chomer but by its tzura!

For the abstract illustration let us take a spoon that is being used to carry a few grains of salt. The spoon is the chomer and the salt is the purpose of the chomer, hence it is the tzura. Regarding the laws of Shabbos carrying a spoon on Shabbos constitutes a melacha. Carrying a few grains of salt does not constitute a melacha since it is an insignificant amount. If one were to carry our spoon with the few grains of salt on Shabbos it would not constitute a melacha,

cific person there was a market for kvetentsias. Eventually the period of the kvetentsias closed and they were only given out under extremely rare circumstances. Naturally, the value of the kvetentsia skyrocketed.

There was a family with many sons who had a kvetentsia. The father was about to pass away and in his will delineated that the kvetentsia should be used for the youngest son, as the older sons were already too old for military service and would not be drafted. Eventually the father passed away and the son inherited the kvetentsia.

When the youngest son was called to register It turned out that he did not need to use his kvetentsia because he was medically exempt. He decided that he would sell it and keep the money.

When the brothers heard about it they objected. They argued that the only reason why the father left it to him was for him to use it to prevent him from going to the army. If he wasn't going to use it then it should be given to all of them to share equally and they should be able to equally share in the profits of the sale.

This question was brought to the Rogatchover Gaon. What do you think? Can the son sell it and keep all the money, or would the proceeds of the sale go to all of the brothers?



even though the spoon without the salt would be a melacha. The reason for this is that when the spoon is in the service of the salt, it becomes redefined by its purpose, namely the salt. Hence, it is not a melacha.

Whenever the chomer serves its own purpose it is defined by its chomer because there is no tzura. However, when the chomer serves a purpose other than itself it is defined by its tzura. The spoon is therefore no more significant than those few grains of salt which it carries. Behold! Even a spoon which is considered significant in its own right, nevertheless, when it is serving something insignificant it loses its significance.

The prophet Yishayahu tells his people in the name of HaShem "This nation I have formed for Myself (for My purposes) they shall relate My praises."

Every nation in the world from the beginning of history onward served the needs of its people or the needs of its leaders. They served no other purpose. We, on the other hand, have only one purpose, to serve HaShem. While other nations proclaim "G.D bless our country", we proclaim "Jewish People bless G.D" as we recite the Shema twice a day.

Given the Maharal's insight we, who are the carrier of HaShem's Presence in this world, are defined by that significance. There is no wonder why HaShem insists that we honor, that we love and that we care for every other Jew. It is HaShem Himself who we honor, love and care for!

So while the wood becomes an elephant and the spoon becomes a few grains of salt we have become the People of the Torah and the People of her Author.

Have a very safe and very wonderful Shabbos.

Paysach Diskind



SHABBOS: CELEBRATING HASHEM'S CREATION

THE NILE

In this week's Torah reading, parshas Shemos, we begin the long narrative of our ancestors' persecution and slavery at the hands of the Egyptians, ruled over by a new Pharaoh who boldly proclaimed "I do not know Hashem!" The Torah relates our persecution in Egypt that had evolved over a period of 210 years – and how Hashem, in His great kindness, brought us out from that lowly place "with great strength and a mighty hand," miraculously afflicting the Egyptians with the Ten Plagues and splitting the Sea on our journey to freedom.

As a backdrop to this dramatic struggle between a stubborn Pharaoh, the enslaved Jews, and G-d's Providence, there is the land of Egypt and the source of her power and wealth: the Nile River. The Nile figures prominently in the Torah's account of our struggle as slaves in Egypt: • It was into the Nile that Pharaoh ordered the Jewish midwives to cast the Jewish newborns, and it was into the Nile that Yocheved herself cast the basket containing her son Moshe • Later, it was on the banks of the Nile that Basya, Pharaoh's daughter, stretched out her arm and retrieved the baby Moshe • Moshe would confront Pharaoh on the banks of the Nile • And the first 2 plagues – dahm (blood) and tze'fardayah (frogs) – would both originate from the Nile River. So powerful was the Nile River to ancient Egypt, that the Egyptians worshipped it as an idol.

The Nile River has played a crucial role in the development of Egyptian civilization. Annually, the River overflows its banks and deposits new layers of rich, organic silt onto the surrounding floodplain, making it very fertile. The ancient Egyptians grew and traded huge quantities of wheat, beans, cotton, flax, papyrus and other crops in the Nile River delta. Of course, wheat was a crucial crop in the famine-plagued Middle East. The ability to trade valuable commodities secured Egypt's diplomatic and economic relationships with other countries, and contributed to her national stability. The Nile itself became a critical trade route and played a major role in the Egyptian economy. In fact, the river was crucial in the building of the pyramids, since the blocks of stone used for their construction had to be transported by boat along the Nile!

The name Nile is derived from the Greek Neilos (Latin, Nilus), which many etymologists say originated from the Semitic/Hebrew root

nachal, meaning a valley or a river valley. Egyptians throughout the ages have been altogether dependent on the Nile River for bathing, drinking, recreation, irrigation, trade and transport. The River flows from south to north through eastern Africa and today runs through or along the borders of 10 other African countries. It begins in the rivers that flow into Lake Victoria (located in modern day Uganda, Tanzania, and Kenya) and ends at the Mediterranean Sea – more than 4,100 miles to the north! It is one of the longest rivers in the world; picking up more and more water along its journey, the Nile's average discharge into the Sea is 680,000 gallons per second!

Many animal species rely on the Nile, which flows through and influences a variety of ecosystems along its long course through many lands. The hippopotamus has its home here. There are also soft-shelled turtles, cobras, black mambas, water snakes and three species of monitor lizards – which have been reported to grow as long as 6 feet! Perhaps the river's most famous and feared resident is the Nile Crocodile: *Crocodylus niloticus* inhabit most parts of the river and can reach lengths of 20 feet and weigh over 1500 lbs! They are among the most deadly crocodiles on earth.

The Nile River delta was and is an ideal growing location for growing the papyrus plant. The reeds of the papyrus plant can be used in the production of cloth, boxes, rope, mats and sails. But for the ancient Egyptians and her trading partners, by far the most important use of the papyrus plant was in the making paper. Today, papyrus 'paper' is still used by calligraphers and artisans who may specialize in its use. For nearly 3,000 years, Egypt would remain the preeminent nation in the Mideast, fueled by both water and fertile land it received as gifts from the Nile. Egypt was eventually conquered and eclipsed by other empires; yet despite its decline, it still thrives with help from the Nile. It's now home to nearly 100 million people — 95% of whom live within a few kilometers of the Nile — making it the third most populous country in Africa. Considering the role Egypt has played in the rise of civilization, the Nile has influenced human history in a way few rivers have.

Mah rabu ma'a'se'cha Hashem, kulam b'chachma
a'see'sa!

-Ed. by Avraham Cohen

DO YOU THINK IT HONORS ME WHEN YOU TURN OFF THE MUSIC WHILE SHE IS STILL LISTENING TO IT?!

Last week we learned about the sensitivity of Rav Baruch Ber. Here is another similar story. Rav Shalom Schwadron related the following story: "When I passed through Baltimore I met a man whose name was Koppel. He was elderly and distinguished, over ninety years old, and was one of Rabbeinu's (R' Baruch Ber Leibowitz) disciples who immigrated to America. Although his Yiras Shamayim was unquestionable, and he was careful with all the mitzvos, he dressed like an American, and was clean-shaven as well. As a result, a person who did not know him would have doubts about his level of Yiddishkeit. R' Koppel told me the following story. When Mari V'Rabi was in America, I went to see him at the hotel where he was staying. I entered the room, stood before him and said, "Shalom aleichem." Rabbeinu looked up at me and replied, "Shalom aleichem," but in a barely audible voice. I didn't pay much attention to that but afterwards he began to sigh. Slowly, he emitted one sigh after another, keeping his gaze down all the while. So it continued until I realized that he was harboring grave suspicions about the level of my Yiddishkeit on the basis of my appearance. I drew closer to him, opened my shirt and said, "Let the Rebbe look at my tzitzis, which meets all of the specifications of the halachah! Please, let the Rebbe's mind rest easy, for Baruch HaShem, I faithfully keep Shabbos, daven three times a day, and attend a daily Gemara shiur that goes for a few hours — it's just that my outsides are not like my insides!" Hearing this, Rabbeinu nodded to me and said, "Ah... Azoi... Bist du noch Koppel — Ah! Yes! You are the same Koppel that I knew before!" Immediately he rose to his feet and fell on my neck, showering me with kisses, until he felt sure that he had made me feel better!

Afterwards, of course, I invited my Rebbe to my home, to be my guest. He accepted my invitation and came with me to the house. When we walked in, I saw that my wife was busy with her housework, listening to music as she went about her tasks. I immediately felt that it was not appropriate that such music be in the background, for it was an affront to my Rebbe's honor so I quickly turned it off. Afterwards I invited Rebbe to sit down with me at the table. He did not sit down. Instead, he made a request of me. "Koppel, come out to the porch with me for a minute." We went out, and there he said to me, "Koppel! Where did you learn such a 'Torah' as that, to go turn off the machine without your wife's permission?! That was cruelty! I know that you did it out of concern for my honor, but do you think it honors me when you are cruel to your wife and turn off the music while she is still listening to it?! Therefore, I ask you to please go and ask her forgiveness." Reb Shalom used to conclude this story by saying, "This teaches us that if anyone thinks that jealousy for another person's honor revolves around subjective feelings, he is surely mistaken! There is a precise Shulchan Aruch for everything, telling us how to act and when!"

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THE ANSWER

Last week's question about dividing the yard was brought to Rav Elashiv Zt"l. Rav Elyashiv said that they should divide the yard equally and one family cannot stop the others from building in their portions.

This week's TableTalk is dedicated to memory of the mother of Elana Malachevsky
Nesya bas Shlomo
May this dedication bring an aliya to her neshama
by Boris and Elana Malachevsky

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