

## A MITZVA DILEMMA FOR THE SHABBOS TABLE



## THE TORAH IN THE KOVNO GHETTO

By Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

During the Holocaust, Jews demonstrated their incredible mesiras nefesh and devotion, to Hashem, and to the observance of Torah and halacha.

One small example of this can be found in the shailos, questions that Jews in the Kovno ghetto during the holocaust, asked Rav Ephraim Oshry. Rather than do what was most expedient under their horrific conditions, they wanted to do what was most proper according to the Torah.

Here is one such fascinating question.

The Jews in the ghetto had a Sefer Torah that they secretly used but sadly, it



## THE COST OF THE BRIDAL GOWN

In this week's Parsha the Torah teaches us the concept of tzaraas which is discoloration of the skin, of the walls of the house and on the clothing. When this discoloration occurs on the person, house or clothing it renders the person, house or clothing tamei, spiritually impure, and the laws of tuma apply to it. Our Sages teach us that tzaraas is not a natural phenomenon, rather a supernatural phenomenon which is sent from HaShem as an indication to the recipient that he should correct his behavior. The Talmud teaches for which sins tzaraas occurs so that the afflicted person will understand the message he is being sent.

In explaining the details of tzaraas, the Sforno tells us that this affliction of tzaraas was an expression of HaShem's kindness in His interest to help us perfect ourselves. With this insight he explains that the laws of tzaraas do not apply to non-Jews since they do not have that special relationship with HaShem. He goes one step further to explain that tzaraas occurs only for the people who are most worthy of HaShem's special hashgacha. He writes that the majority of the Jewish people are not on a level of purity that should warrant this degree of hashgacha and therefore it was not a common occurrence.

What follows from this insight is that the more pure a Jew is, the more attention HaShem pays to his behavior. This tzaddik will get more messages from HaShem to perfect himself than the mediocre Jew. As with tzaraas these messages are not comfortable. The effectiveness of the messages are specifically the discomfort or even pain that they inflict. It is this pain that gets the attention of the one who receives it.

Behold! The better a person is the more they will suffer! It somehow seems counterintuitive.

became pasul. The Jews in the ghetto did not have the required supplies to fix it and make it kosher.

One day a Jew in the ghetto made an incredible discovery. He found a Sefer Torah that was sadly discarded in mud. The Sefer Torah was covered in slime and filth. After he cleaned up the Torah and brought it to a more respectable state he noticed that the mud caused the parchment to transfer the words from one side to the back of the parchment opposite it. A kosher Torah cannot have words written on the back. And then the Jew noticed that Hashem's name had transferred to the back of the parchment numerous times.

Was he allowed to erase Hashem's names in order to fix the Torah?

Erasing Hashem's name is a Torah prohibition. Reading from the Torah is just a rabbinical mitzvah. Was he allowed to erase Hashem's name in order to fulfill a Rabbinical prohibition?

Is it perhaps better to use a pasul (not kosher) Torah in order not to erase Hashem's name?

This was the question this holy Jew asked Rav Oshry during the Holocaust.

What do you think?



Consider the bride whose wedding is two weeks away. In her wardrobe together with her regular dresses is her pure white bridal gown. She notices that there is a very small dark dot on the sleeve. You can well imagine that this dot will get special attention until it is removed. Right next to the gown is her colorful weekday dress which also has a dot on the sleeve. Actually, the dot on the dress is somewhat larger than the one on the bridal gown. Chances are that she will forget about the second dress and may never come back to clean it. Why? For one, it is not so noticeable and also it is of much less significance.

HaShem wants only good for His creatures. This goodness is achieved by reaching higher levels of existence. The more a person resembles HaShem the higher that level will be. For the tzadik who has achieved such a high level, even a small fleck on his personality lowers his level and diminishes the goodness he will receive. HaShem, in His mercy, treats him to an alert by which that fleck is cleared. For the regular folk, however, or as the Sforno

writes, for the majority of the Jewish people, they do not deserve that alert.

I was once asked if the Jewish people are the 'chosen people' why does HaShem afflict them more than the other nations? The fellow asking me says, were we chosen for punishment?

The Sforno's insight offers the answer. We were chosen to be HaShem's bridal gown while the others may just be the weekday dress.

When considering the Holocaust, the sheer evil defies the imagination and one cannot fathom the intensity of the Divine fury that was unleashed. All that notwithstanding we must consider the Jewish world 75 years before the Holocaust and the Jewish world 75 years after the Holocaust. We will discover how that five year period of darkness changed the landscape of our nation and revived the spirit of our people.

Have a very wonderful Shabbos.

**Paysach Diskind**



PICTURED: SALT MINES

## SHABBOS: CELEBRATING HASHEM'S CREATION

### SALT

Today, let's explore some of the fascinating properties and wonders of salt. We know that historically salt was extremely valuable.

Salt was so valuable in ancient Rome that legend has it that soldiers were sometimes paid with salt. In fact, the word "salary" comes from the Latin word *sal*, for salt. When a soldier was doing a lousy job, his paycheck might be cut, which is how we got the expression "not worth his salt."

Why was salt so valuable? This was because it was the primary way to preserve food as well as the main flavor enhancer.

We also know that salt is used to draw blood out of meat, as well as to melt ice.

Why does salt do this? Why does salt enhance flavor, preserve food, extract blood and break ice? Is there a connection between all four of them?

Let's take a deeper look at this. Why is salt a preservative? Salt is effective as a preservative because it reduces the water activity of foods. The water activity of a food is the amount of unbound water available for microbial growth and chemical reactions. So if the salt removes its water activity it removes the matrix available for microbial growth and chemical reactions that cause food to spoil or ferment. The salt also draws out the water from the microbial cells, thereby killing them in a process called osmotic shock. Why does salt decrease water activity? Adding salt to food triggers a process of osmosis, which causes water to flow from an environment with a low salt concentration to one with a higher concentration. We will see that this idea of salt's ability to draw water through osmosis will be reflected in many of its unique powers.

As a brief sidebar, salt's role as preservative is reflected in the Torah. The Torah refers to a *Bris Melech*, a covenant of salt. This refers to a commitment that is preserved for eternity. We know that *korbanos* had salt added to them, and that is why we

dip our challah into salt. Why was salt used for a *korban*? Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch explains that this symbolized that the inspiration of the *korban* should not be fleeting. Rather, the inspiration should stay with us and be preserved forever.

The ability for salt to draw out water through osmosis can also explain why salt draws the blood out of meat. The salt causes the blood inside the meat to flow from an environment with a low salt concentration to one with a higher concentration.

We know that salt is used as a universal flavor improver. At low concentrations it will reduce bitterness, but increase sweet, sour and umami, which is desirable for sweet recipes. But at higher concentrations it suppresses sweetness and enhances umami, which is good for savory things. But why does salt improve flavor? Some scientists explain that it is the same reason that we explained above. It is salt's influence on water activity. The use of salt decreases water activity, which can lead to an effective increase in the concentration of flavors and improve the volatility of flavor components. Higher volatility of flavor components improves the aroma of food and contributes greatly to flavor.

Why does salt melt ice? I would have assumed that it was the same reason as outlined above, that the salt draws out the water in the ice and that water melts the ice. But according to scientists I am not entirely correct. It is a more simple answer. Salt works by lowering the freezing point of water. When salt is sprinkled on ice, it makes a brine with the film of surface water on the ice, which lowers the freezing point. This brine has a lower freezing point than plain water so the brine starts melting the ice beneath it.

Interestingly, the word "salad" also originated from "salt". This is because the wealthy Romans would add salty water to their leafy greens and vegetables. This may be another reason why we dip vegetables into salt water on Pesach when we celebrate our *cheiros* and recline like the wealthy Romans.

## I THINK YOUR BROTHER IS STILL ALIVE AND I CAN TAKE YOU TO HIM RIGHT NOW

Terel Howard was an American Jew. He joined the US army and was stationed in postwar Germany. The Germans didn't know that he was Jewish and Terel would often hear anti-Semitic remarks from the Germans. This made Terel realize that things had not changed for the Jews and he decided to move to Israel. Terel joined a secular kibbutz. At the kibbutz he developed a friendship with David, the carpenter of the kibbutz. David had bulging muscles, but he also had a tattoo on his arm from the holocaust. Terel remembered the number because it was the last four digits of his social security number, 7401.

One day as they were working together Terel gathered the courage to ask David the story of how he got the number. Painfully, David said that he and his family were all lined up and sequentially got a number. Sadly the rest of his family later was killed. Terel never spoke to David about the numbers again.

Later Terel got into a bad accident at the kibbutz and lost his leg. After a while he got a job as a tour guide in Israel, and he was famous as the one legged tour guide.

One day he was asked to pick up a client at the airport and take him to the hotel. The customer had a heavy European accent, wore heavy gold cufflinks, smoked a Cuban cigar, and kept talking about all of his wealth. Terel's discomfort at the ostentation must have become apparent. The man said "I know you don't like me, but I've paid my dues. I deserve to live a comfortable life now". He rolled up his sleeve showing the number 7402.

After seeing the number Terel was in shock. "Did you happen to have a brother named David"? The man said he did but he was killed in the war. Terel said "I think your brother is still alive and I can take you to him right now". Terel drove straight to his old kibbutz. Terel got out of the car and told David the carpenter about his passenger and what he saw. David ran to the car and the two brothers tearfully reunited.

Terel was so inspired by this incident and the hashgacha that he became a baal teshuva. He then founded the Jerusalem Institute for Rehabilitation to provide support for more than 25,000 amputees in Israel.

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### THE ANSWER

Regarding last week's question about the person who died in the remote village, Rav Zilbestein does not come to a firm conclusion. But he writes that it seems that perhaps the family of the deceased would not have the power from court to obligate the businessman to pay.

This week's Table Talk is dedicated as an iluy neshama of our beloved mother, grandmother and great grandmother

**Merle Rosin Toooh**

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