



A MITZVA DILEMMA FOR THE SHABBOS TABLE



RATS IN THE JUNIPER

By Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

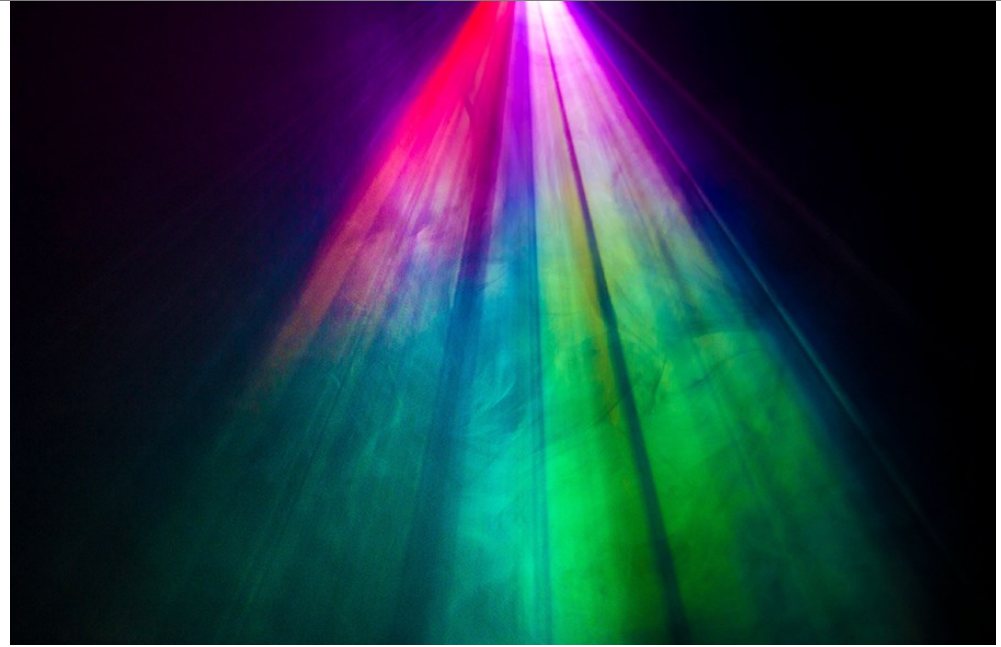
This week's Parsha, Emor, talks about how the Omer has to be the first offering brought before we can eat from the new crop.

This leads us to an interesting question that relates to gardens and plants.

Shira and her family bought a new home in Baltimore. It was a nice home on the corner of a block. One of the most appealing parts of their new house was the fact that it had a large back yard surrounded with bushes. Shira and her family slowly settled into their new home.

A few days later a man knocked at the door.

"Hi there, my name is Yisrael and I live two doors down. Welcome to the neighborhood. I'd like you to know that you have juniper bushes in your yard. It is a well known fact among gardeners and exterminators that Juniper bushes attract rats. These plants make wonderful homes for them. You see, rats seek out areas where they feel protected from



IN A LEAGUE OF ITS OWN

Just as every limb of one's body has its unique role and does its unique job, so it is with the mitzvos of the Torah. Every mitzvah has its unique role and unique accomplishment. However, there is a very critical detail that must be included in the mitzvah for it to play its role and accomplish its job; it must be done with the intent of fulfilling the mitzvah. If, for example, a person ate matzo on the first night of Pesach with no intent of fulfilling the mitzvah, he must eat another matzo with the proper intent. The mitzvah was not carried out. This is true with all the mitzvos of the Torah. There is, however, one exception. The mitzvah of kiddush HaShem which is in this week's Parsha, is fulfilled even without intent. The reason for this anomaly is because this mitzvah is expressed in the passive tone. The Torah does not state "You shall sanctify Me" rather "My Name shall be sanctified ..." Therefore as long as the sanctification of HaShem's Name occurs the mitzvah was done.

This is best illustrated by the Talmud which states that the descendants of Haman studied Torah in Bnei Braq. The question is asked how could such an evil person merit such a great reward? Reb Yaakov Kamenetsky zt'l answered based on another statement of the Talmud that the threat of Haman against our people accomplished more than 48 prophets. These prophets were unable to inspire their people to return to HaShem the way Haman's threat accomplished. Ironically, in spite of Haman's intent to destroy the nation of HaShem he actually achieved the greatest kiddush HaShem. Since the mitzvah of Kiddush HaShem does not require any intent Haman achieved this great mitzvah and was therefore worthy of having descendants who studied Torah!

It is noteworthy that this mitzvah requires every Jew to give their life before trans-

predators. Dense plantings, tall weeds, and plants like juniper bushes provide safe harbor to a rat. Ivy and bushes close to the ground and around buildings are particularly attractive. Rats will burrow into any available earthen space within close proximity to food but prefer fresh, fertile soil to make their nests—a garden is prime real estate to them. A rat burrow can be anywhere from one to six feet deep and will have an entrance, an exit, and maybe even an escape hole. A typical burrow will house a family of approximately eight rats. We have been having a rat problem and I'm certain that it is your bushes that are attracting them".

Shira didn't know how to respond. The man sounded knowledgeable, but she had never heard of such a thing, that bushes attract rats. "Ok, I will look into it and get back to you" Shira told Yisrael.

Shira called a landscaper for an estimate, to see how much removing the bushes would cost. She was given a quote of 1000 dollars.

That was a lot of money. Shira wanted to know if she had an obligation to remove the bushes around her new house because a neighbor asked her to.

On one hand she did the research and learned that it was a true concept that certain bushes are homes for rats.

But on the other hand she did not know for sure that it was her bushes that were attracting the rats. Also, even if they were a home for the rats, Shira wasn't causing any damage directly. Shira wondered if she was obligated to pay the \$1000 to remove the bushes in his backyard.

What do you think?



gressing even the slightest infringement of Halacha if we are forced by our enemies to do so as a demonstration of defiance to the Torah. This means if an evil ruler were to force Jewish men to remove their yarmalka's as an act of defiance to the Torah, we would be required to give our life before surrendering to such an act! Outside of the three cardinal sins the rule is that all mitzvos of the Torah move aside in order to save a Jewish life. Evidently, the mitzvah of Kiddush HaShem carries greater import than all the other mitzvos. Why then is this mitzvah given in the passive and not as a direct command?

Our Sages teach us that the reason HaShem gave us so many mitzvos was to create many opportunities to perfect ourselves. Every mitzvah presents an opportunity of growth and perfection of our character and our relationship with HaShem and with others.

The role of our people is to carry the Presence of HaShem in

this world. HaShem, so to speak, has no other mechanism by which to be included in the material world without His people bringing Him in. It is for this reason that HaShem wants us to perfect our character and our relationships. He wants His carriage to be perfect.

Perhaps the mitzvah of Kiddush HaShem is different from all the other mitzvos because Kiddush HaShem is our core mission. The mission of our people is to bring the Presence of HaShem into this world. This is the essence of Kiddush HaShem. This mitzvah is therefore not given to perfect us. It is the mission itself. HaShem is not interested in the act per se, He is interested in the outcome.

Perhaps this is why we are obligated to surrender our life before transgressing even the slightest tradition. While it is true that no mitzvah stands in the way of saving a life, however, if by saving our life we will profane His Name, then we have lost our reason for existence.

Have a very wonderful Shabbos.

Paysach Diskind



SHABBOS: CELEBRATING HASHEM'S CREATION

SUGAR

This week, let's explore another fascinating food that has a huge impact on our behavior; Sugar. When we use the word sugar we normally think of white granulated cane sugar. But the technical truth is that sugar is the generic name for sweet-tasting, soluble carbohydrates. There are several types of sugar.

Sugars are one of the primary sources of energy for our body and the sugar, glucose, is the main way our brain gets energy.

Sugars are found in the tissues of most plants. Honey and fruit are abundant natural sources of unbounded simple sugars. Sucrose is especially concentrated in sugarcane and sugar beet, making them ideal for efficient commercial extraction to make refined sugar. Common examples of sugars are sucrose (table sugar) (glucose + fructose), lactose (glucose + galactose), and maltose (two molecules of glucose).

Lactose is the only sugar that cannot be extracted from plants. It can only be found in milk, including human milk, and in some dairy products. The average American consumes up to 110 pounds of sugar a year!

Historically, honey was more often used for sweetening. One of the earliest historical references to sugarcane is in Chinese manuscripts dating to the 8th century BCE, which state that the use of sugarcane originated in India. Indian sailors, who carried butter and sugar as supplies, introduced knowledge of sugar along the various trade routes they travelled. Traveling Buddhist monks took sugar crystallization methods to China. China established its first sugarcane plantations in the seventh century. In the Indian subcontinent, the Middle East and China, sugar became a staple of cooking and desserts.

How was sugar introduced to Europe? Would you believe it was from Eretz Yisrael? The Crusaders brought sugar back to Europe after their campaigns in Eretz Yisrael, where they encountered caravans carrying what they called "sweet salt". Then Venice acquired some villages near Tyre Lebanon and set up estates to produce sugar for export to Europe.

In August 1492, Christopher Columbus introduced sugar cane to the New World. The sugar cane cuttings were planted and the first sugar-cane harvest in Hispaniola took place in 1501. By 1540, there were close to 3000 cane-sugar mills in the area of Brazil. It took until 1600 for Brazil to become the main center of sugar production, and it remains the largest exporter even today.

Initially, sugar was so rare and expensive only royalty could afford it—and in very small quantities at that. In the 13th century, for example, British monarch Henry III once tried to order three pounds of sugar, but expressed doubts that so much sugar could even be found in England. However by the 19th century, it became widely available and it became a staple.

Sugarcane plants are 6-20 feet tall with stout, jointed, fibrous stalks that are rich in sucrose. Sugarcanes belong to the grass family, Poaceae, and it is related to maize, wheat and rice.

How is sugar processed from sugarcane? Sugar is made in the leaves of the sugarcane plant through photosynthesis and stored as a sweet juice in sugarcane stalks. The sugarcane is harvested and sent to a factory. At the factory, cane juice is extracted, purified, filtered and crystallized into golden, raw sugar. This raw sugar is then taken to a refinery to be made into the refined sugar we are familiar with. Refined sugar is made from raw sugar that has undergone a refining process to remove the brown molasses. The first stage of refining involves immersing the sugar crystals in a concentrated syrup that softens and removes the sticky brown coating without dissolving them. The crystals are then separated from the liquor. The liquor is spun off in a centrifuge and the white crystals are dried in hot air and ready to be packaged or used. The surplus liquor is made into molasses.

Why is white sugar so addictive? Eating sugar releases opioids and dopamine in our bodies. This is the link between added sugar and addictive behavior. Sugar can be even more addicting than cocaine. Every time we eat sweets, we are reinforcing those neuropathways, causing the brain to become increasingly hardwired to crave sugar, building up a tolerance like any other drug.

Research on rats from Connecticut College has shown that Oreo cookies activate more neurons in the pleasure center of the rats' brains than cocaine does (and just like humans, the rats would eat the filling first).

The brain is dependent on sugar as its main fuel. It cannot be without it. Although the brain needs glucose, too much of this energy source can be a bad thing. Too much sugar can cause obesity and Type 2 diabetes. Type 2 diabetes is a condition in which cells become overwhelmed by insulin and fail to properly respond; they become resistant to insulin.

What is insulin? When we eat sugar, glucose goes into our bloodstream. But glucose can't remain in our blood. Insulin is released from the pancreas and travels through the bloodstream to the body's cells and tells the cell doors to open up to let the glucose in. Once inside, the cells convert glucose into energy to use right then or store it to use later. Insulin takes the sugar in your blood and puts it into your cells where it gets used or stored. But if the body cannot properly produce or react to insulin, then the sugar stays in the blood and over time the excess sugar in the blood can cause damage to the kidneys and eyes.

IT'S NOT THE BIRD'S FAULT

The fifth Gerer Rebbe, the Lev Simcha's sensitivity extended to all of Hashem's creatures.

On one occasion, an unpleasant odor that emanated from the water faucet greeted the Lev Simcha when he returned from a trip. An attendant climbed up on the roof to check the water tank, and discovered that its cover had come off and a dead bird was floating in the water.

The attendant then emptied the tank on the roof, cleaned it, refilled it with fresh water and refilled the cover.

After hearing the attendants report, the Lev Simcha asked him to fill a dish with water, go to the roof, and to set it on the tank.

"The birds should not be deprived of their water," the Lev Simcha said. "They're not at fault.

Please see that the dish remains full until they've found another source of water."

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THE ANSWER

Regarding last week's question about the kidney, Rav Zilberstein writes that it would not be nivul hames for the man to request his kidney back. It would be permitted. It would also not be a problem of chavala to do the surgery to replace it.

This week's TableTalk is sponsored In honor of Paysach Diskind and his team for their hard work sharing Torah with others in such an interesting and engaging way!



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