

A MITZVA DILEMMA FOR THE SHABBOS TABLE



THE FIRE

By Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

This coming week we will be starting the Yom Tov of Chanukah.

Eli was on a business trip and staying at the home of his old friend Tzvi. It was the fifth night of Chanukah. Tzvi prepared to light with his family. Eli gave Tzvi a quarter and said, "as the halacha requires (Orach Chaim 677), here is my payment to be a partner with you in the mitzvah of lighting the menorah. Because I am your guest, I will be a shutaf with you in the mitzvah.

Then Tzvi and his family lit the menorah and Eli watched.

The family turned away and left the menorah to continue burning. Sadly one of the menorahs tipped and a fire spread



ASTRONOMICAL PROPORTIONS

This week's Parsha Vayeshev begins the drama of Yosef and the brothers that will continue through the next several Parshios. The drama is extreme and there is cause for great concern that the reader will project his own set of life experiences on the players of this drama. For example, when reading that the brothers were jealous when Yaakov gave Yosef the special jacket we tend to project our own sense of petty jealousy. We extend that sense of jealousy to the point that they actually wanted to kill Yosef.

Naturally, we know that such petty jealousy cannot be ascribed to the fathers of our people. It is untenable to contemplate that the foundation of our people rests on such petty folks. Many of us are familiar with the notion that our early ancestors were people of gigantic stature. There are many areas of greatness; intelligence, righteousness, closeness to HaShem, thoughtfulness and consideration of others and perhaps many more attributes that qualify the greatness of a person. When we say that the Chofetz Chaim was great, the implication is that he was great in all these qualities. When we recognize that he was extremely great we use our frame of reference and multiply his greatness many times over till we have an image of extreme greatness.

We tend to use ourselves as a starting point to begin multiplying greatness, so that the Chofetz Chaim was a thousand times bigger than me. To me that sounds like a great deal of his greatness. However, I most recently discovered a different frame of reference to use by which I can have a more accurate picture of the greatness of our Sages.

Please consider the following scale. Place two dots next to each other less than half a centimeter apart and one dot represents the Earth and the other represents the Sun.

across the carpet. The fire spread to the bushes outside, and soon enough much of the block was in danger of burning.

Thankfully the fire department arrived and no one was hurt. But the fire caused a tremendous amount of damage to Tzvi's home, as well as a few homes on the block.

After the dust settled, Eli reached out to Tzvi. "I need to know how much damage was caused by the menorah".

"What do you care", Tzvi replied, "it wasn't your fault".

"It wasn't my fault, but I was a shutaf with you. Therefore I have to pay for half of the damage that was caused."

But Tzvi said, "Nah, you were only a shutaf for the mitzvah, you weren't a shutaf to be obligated in paying for the damage".

This question was sent to Rav Zilberstein.

If Eli was a shutaf with Tzvi for lighting the menorah, is he liable for half of the damage? On one hand he was a partner. But on the other hand, he never intended to be a partner to pay for damages. He only wanted to do the mitzvah. He never took it upon himself to be liable for damages.

What do you think?

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Using this scale we would have to travel over a mile before we would arrive at the closest star to the Sun if drawn to scale. In our galaxy, the Milky Way, there are about well over 100 billion stars making the overall size of the Milky Way quite significant, 100,000 light years across. Astronomers have estimated over 100 billion galaxies in the universe and the space between each galaxy is about one million light years. In short, using the two dots to create the scale of the map of the universe, the entire earth would not provide sufficient space to draw that map.

In light of this overwhelming proportion I realize how small minded I become when I multiply myself by large numbers. It is with this scale of multiplication that we must enlarge the greatness of the early Achronim and from them to the Rishonim and from them to Anshei Knesses HaGedola until we reach the Shevatim themselves. By the time we have arrived at the Shevatim we will realize how the drama played out in our Parshios has a different meaning than any mortal being can imagine. We are fortunate to have the Rishonim explain to us how to understand

the emotions and actions of the players and we must tie our understanding to their explanations.

Of course, we must still learn the lessons that can be gleaned from the drama even though we cannot quite fathom mistakes made by these giants. From Yaakov we learn not to treat one son differently than the rest and from Yosef we learn the gravity of speaking loshon hara and so on.

Only astronomical proportions can be used to begin understanding the greatness of our Avos haKedoshim.

When HaShem promised Avraham that his descendants will be as numerous as the stars that could not refer to the actual number of children because there simply are not that many people in the world. Perhaps He was telling Avraham that his descendants will be measured in astronomical proportions.

Have a wonderful Shabbos and a very happy Chanukah.

Paysach Diskind



SHABBOS: CELEBRATING HASHEM'S CREATION

TZARI, BALSAM

In this week's Parsha, we have the story of how Yosef got sold as a slave to Egypt. The Torah talks about how Yosef's brothers saw a caravan of Arabs traveling to Egypt and sold him to the Arabs. The Arabs were part of a caravan transporting the spices "Tzari" and "Lot". Rashi says that Tzari was the sap of Balsam, which was part of the Ketores. Rashi says further that Lot was the spice known as Aristolochia. Aristolochia is still the proper name for this plant, but it is commonly known as Dutchman's pipe. Rashi quotes our Sages that the Arab caravans would normally transport neft, petroleum. But Hashem arranged that Yosef be transported alongside sweet-smelling spices so that he would not be harmed by the harmful smell of petroleum.

What exactly are Balsam and Dutchman's pipe? Why were Arabs carrying it? Why were they bringing them to Egypt?

We will discuss these interesting plants. This week we will discuss Balsam and in future weeks we will discuss the fascinating Dutchman's pipe.

Balsam is not a plant itself but it is the sap that forms on certain kinds of trees and shrubs. (Hatzari eino elah saraf hanotef meatzei haketaf.) Myrrh and Frankincense, other Ketores ingredients, are also made from sap of trees.

Many say that the balsam of the Torah is "Commiphora gileadensis", the Arabian balsam tree. This plant grows in Arab countries such as Saudi Arabia, Yemen, southern Oman and Sudan. Another common name for the plant is Balm of Gilead. Commiphora gileadensis is instantly recognizable by the pleasant smell given out when a twig is broken or a leaf crushed.

How is the balsam produced? The bark of the balsam tree is cut to cause the sap to flow out. This soon hardens and has a sweet smell that quickly evaporates. The hardened resinous gum can be chewed and is said to taste either like a lemon or like pine resin. It is also burned as incense.

Depending on where Commiphora gileadensis is growing, it can vary in size, ranging from a small-leaved shrub to a large-leaved tree up to 12 feet tall. The flowers are red. The fruits are dull red and marked with four longitudinal white stripes, one-seeded and splitting into 2-4 valves.

The plant was renowned for the expensive perfumes that were pro-

duced from it, as well as for exceptional medicinal properties that were attributed to its sap, wood, bark and seeds.

Balsam was a substance famous as a panacea, a cure-all drug, among physicians in the Middle East and Europe until the Medieval periods. It has long been used as a medicine, with early references to the substance recorded as far back as 1500 BCE. Balsam was the most commonly used medicine by the Egyptians. They esteemed it as a kind of panacea for all diseases, both external and internal, using it to cure wounds, and poisonous snake and scorpion bites. They also used it to protect against the plague and to drive away fevers. Egyptian writers said that balsam fetched as much as its weight in gold. According to modern scientists, cited by WebMD, balsam contains chemicals that kill some types of bacteria.

The use of balsam as both a medicine and perfume is actually reflected in the etymology of the word balsam. Balsam is the origin of the English word "Balm" which means a "fragrant ointment used to heal the skin". Balsam's use as a healing ointment led to the English word Balm.

Balsamic was a term to connote healing. Interestingly, this is the origin of the word balsamic vinegar. Balsamic vinegar does not contain any balsam. Rather it was Italian wine vinegar, called aceto balsamico. Balsamic meant something with healing powers, an elixir. This wine vinegar was recommended in many Italian medical manuals—just like those of their Roman ancestors. Some Italians and Romans would bathe in vinegar daily because of its medicinal value.

So we learned that the word balsam is the origin of the term for a healing ointment. But where does the word Balsam itself come from? It comes from the Latin word balsamum. But that Latin word comes from the Hebrew word Bosem, which means spice or perfume. This is because the Balsam was used to make perfume. So the Hebrew word Bosem is the root of the words Balm, Balsam, and Balsamic.

Now that it is winter, if you look around you might see forms of Balsam trees. This is because the fragrant Balsam Fir is one of the most commonly used Xmas trees.

It now makes perfect sense why an Arab caravan would be delivering the sweet-smelling Balsam to Egypt. We can now also understand why they would normally be transporting petroleum but Hashem did not want Yosef to be traveling with a harmful substance. He traveled with a sweet-smelling Balm instead.

BUBBY AND ZAIDY SAID I SHOULD BUY WHATEVER WOULD MAKE ME HAPPY

Rabbi Raphael Mendlowitz was shopping for Chanukah presents for his children at a large toy store in Maryland. He noticed a father and daughter also buying toys for Chanukah. They had already filled their cart with some toys, and the young girl was busy looking for a few more. The girl picked up a doll and asked her father, "Does this cost too much?" Her father replied, "No, it's fine, you may have it." The girl put it into their cart and then picked up a second doll. She asked her father if she could buy that doll too. "Sure," said her father, and the girl dropped the doll into their cart.

Rabbi Mendlowitz's attention was quickly drawn to a father and son who were also shopping for Chanukah presents. The young girl with the dolls was also listening to their conversation. They overheard the boy begging his father to buy him a remote-control car. The father told his son it was too expensive, but the boy persisted. "Please Tatty" he pleaded, "this would be the best Chanukah present I ever got! Please buy it for me!" "You know we can't afford it," his father said. "Let's go over to the last aisle and you can pick out some nice stickers." The boy sadly walked away.

The young girl turned to her father and said, "I've decided I don't want the second doll." She put it back on the shelf and walked over to the next aisle, where she picked up the remote-control car that the young boy had been eyeing and put it in her cart. A few minutes later, Rabbi Mendlowitz was waiting in line to pay for his purchases. In front of him were the girl and her father. He watched as the girl handed over the remote control car to the cashier after her father paid for it, whispering something into his ear. The cashier put the car under his counter. Rabbi Mendlowitz paid for his toys and watched as the man and his son, who were standing behind him, prepared to pay for their stickers. Suddenly, the cashier began shouting, "Congratulations! Congratulations! You are our one-thousandth customer this week. You have won a brand-new remote-control car!" He reached under the counter, took out the car, and handed it to the boy. The boy looked startled and then his face broke out in a huge smile. He jumped up and down and shouted, "This is my best Chanukah present ever!."

Rabbi Mendlowitz noticed the girl and her father smiling at each other as they left the store. He was very moved by the beautiful act of kindness that he had just witnessed. Coincidentally, Rabbi Mendlowitz's car was parked right next to the car that belonged to the father and daughter. As he walked to his car, he overheard the father say to her. "That was a very nice thing you just did. You know though that Bubby and Zaidy really sent you money for Chanukah to buy toys for yourself." The young girl turned to her father and answered, "Bubby and Zaidy said I should buy whatever would make me happy and giving the car to that boy made me happy!" What a wonderful lesson we can all learn from this young girl. Sometimes you can enjoy a gift more by giving it away to someone else than by having it yourself.

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THE ANSWER

Regarding the question of paying the canteen tab, Rav Shuchatowitz said that even if the agreed upon money will exceed the actual amount owed there will be no concern of ribis because the increase was based on p'shara, a compromise not due to s'char hamtanans maos, it is not a compensation for extending the duration of the loan.

This week's TableTalk is dedicated as a zechus for a refuah shleima to

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