

A MITZVA DILEMMA FOR THE SHABBOS TABLE



THE EMBOSSING JOB

By Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

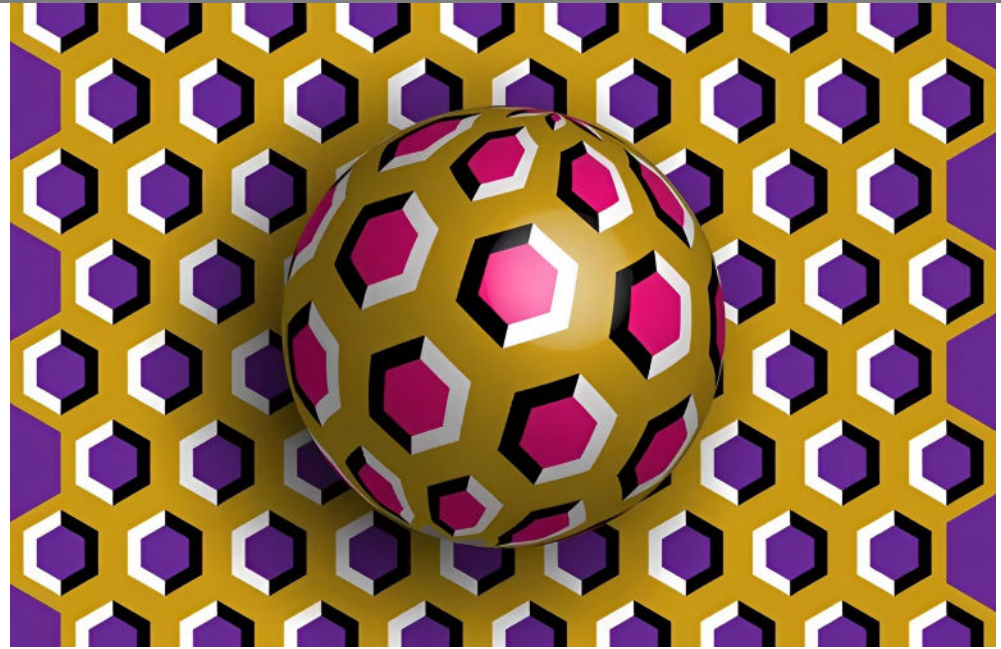
This week's Parsha talks about Yaakov's wedding with Leah and Rachel. This leads us to the following true story.

Shneur was engaged to be married, and the wedding was planned for two months ahead. Shneur's kallah's (fiance) name was Henny. In preparation for the wedding, Shneur bought 300 beautifully designed benchers to be given out at the wedding. They weren't typical benchers; they were designed beautifully, and really stood out. Shneur and his kallah were looking forward to giving them out.

Shneur brought the 300 benchers to a professional who could emboss the chassan and kallah's names into the benchers, he wasn't simply going to use gold foil for the names, it was going to be embossed and pressed into the cover of the benchers and it would look beautiful.

Shneur gave the embosser, named Ariel, the words to emboss on the covers and Ariel told Shneur that they would be ready in a week.

A week later, Shneur came to pick up the benchers. The embossed design looked really stunning. But then Shneur noticed a glaring error that made his stomach drop. Instead of his Kallah's name written as חנייה instead it was written as סנייה. It was written as Sonya rather than Henya, (the full version of the shortened Henny).



MOVING STONES

Our Parsha opens with Yaakov Avinu on his way to Uncle Lavan to find a wife. He lies down on what is today the Temple Mount and surrounds himself with a set of 12 stones. Chazal teach us that the stones began to quarrel. Each one claiming that Yaakov should rest his head on it. They quarreled until they united into a single stone. They lost their respective distinctness and blended into one single stone.

How do stones, which are the lowest level of creation and lack any intelligence, argue. The Maharal explains that their quarreling was not a function of intelligence, rather it was an existential struggle between the stones. Every creature does what it needs to do for its existence. This is the way creatures are programmed. Within the parameters of nature, animals act instinctively to protect themselves. In a similar fashion, when nature is suspended and the spiritual sphere is active, creatures will continue to do what they need to do to exist within the parameters of the spiritual realm.

Of the three fathers, Yaakov is the chosen one. The reason for this is because he brings all three together. Avraham corresponds to the right side and Yitzchok to the left. Yaakov is the center which joins the two sides together. In a similar parallel Yaakov corresponds to the third strand which together with the two earlier strands create a single powerful rope which will not easily break. Yaakov had the power of unifying,

The Maharal goes on to explain that Yaakov's unifying power goes beyond being the third one. Yaakov was Kodesh, he was detached from the material world and was attached to HaShem. Being attached to HaShem dictates that everything associated with him had to lose its distinction and blend into one. Perhaps we can

Shneur understood that his kallah would not accept the bencher being given out at the wedding that way.

Shneur pointed out the error to Ariel. "Look, I think you accidentally wrote Sonya instead of Henya." Ariel looked closely and then blanched. "I'm so sorry for the error. I am happy to redo the embossing for free," Ariel said apologetically.

But Shneur wasn't satisfied with that. He said: "My friend, these benchers were expensive, not only are they ruined and I can't give them out at the wedding and I can't return them, but these 300 benchers cost me close to 1000 dollars. I think you should pay me 1000 dollars to pay for the damage caused by your error, and after you buy new benchers I'd like you to emboss them again."

Ariel felt bad about what happened but he didn't want to spend so much money on damages. Just then he noticed the writing on the inside cover of the bencher.

Ariel turned to Shneur. "Tell me, what nusach (version of the siddur text) do you and your kallah daven? Shneur seemed annoyed by the apparent non-sequitur. "I daven nusach Ashkenaz, but what relevance does that have to this discussion?", Shneur said.

Ariel replied, "It's very relevant. You see on the inside of these benchers it says נוסח עדות המזרח .This is the nusach for Sephardic Jews. This is a Sephardic bencher and you would not have given it out anyway, and you would not have been able to return it even if I did the embossing just perfectly. Even if I didn't make a mistake, you would not have been able to use these benchers., Therefore I don't think I need to pay you for the damage.

Shneur realized that Ariel had a point but he said, "but still, you damaged the benchers by adding the wrong words, until you added the wrong words, I would have been able to return them. Ariel replied, "I don't agree. Even if I would have listened to you exactly and written the words correctly you would have ruined benchers. I therefore caused no damage."

They agreed to bring this question to a Rav.

What do you think? Did Ariel the embosser have to pay Shneur for embossing the wrong words? Or does he not have to pay, because even if the words were correct, Shneur would not have been able to use them or give them out at the wedding? What do you think?

See Upiryo Matok, Bereishis Page 471



understand it as follows.

We know that HaShem created the world ex-nihilo, from nothing. Absolutely nothing; no space and no time. So from what did He create it? What is the base material of the world if there was nothing? Can we really contemplate that this world is based on nothing? The answer is that there was HaShem and His Will. The world was built from the Will of HaShem.

Chazal teach that HaShem is absolutely ONE, there are no components. A human being, by contrast, is a composite of many factors. Within a person there is a part of him that wants to be busy and another part of him that wants to sleep. HaShem, on the other hand, is only ONE - there are no parts. Therefore, His Will is singular. The Will of HaShem that created all of creation is only ONE. This means that although there are a multitude of creatures in this world and each one is different from the next, nevertheless, they are all based on the singular Will of HaShem.

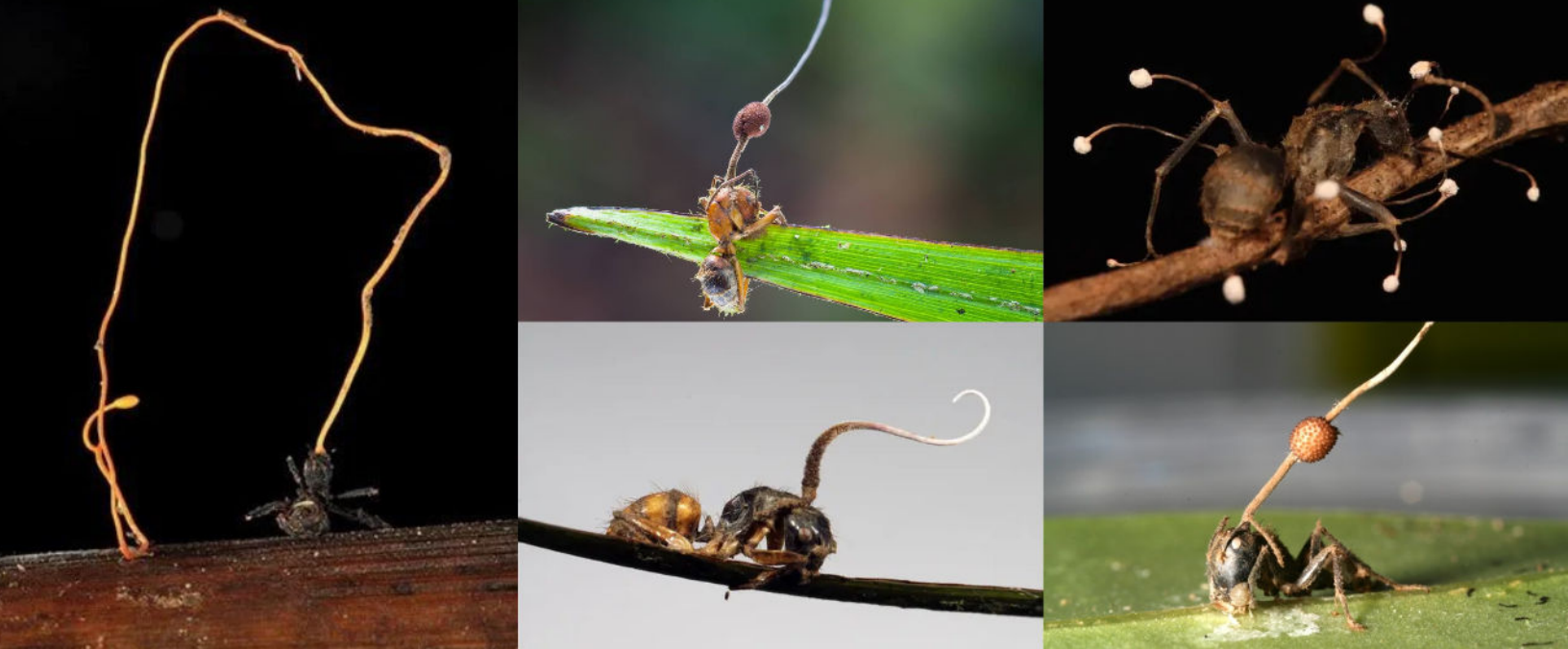
The implication of this notion is that the very existence of everything that has been created is equal for all. We all share the same base - the singular Will of HaShem.

As Yaakov slept on the Temple Mount and had his prophecy, he entered a spiritual state of complete connection to HaShem, the Source of all existence. The 12 stones that surrounded him could no longer exist as distinct and separate stones, each one different than the next. Just as in the natural state each creature acts in self preservation, so too, in this spiritual state, every stone recognized that their existence can only occur if they are united, bound together by their common base - the Will of HaShem.

If Yaakov's experience brought those 12 stones to a state of unity, how much more so can we, the descendants of Yaakov, create a bond of unity - connected by our common base.

Have a wonderful Shabbos.

Paysach Diskind



SHABBOS: CELEBRATING HASHEM'S CREATION

OPHIOCORDYCEPS, THE ZOMBIE-ANT FUNGUS

In last week's Parsha we learned how Esav was an expert hunter. Let's look at some incredible hunters in the natural world.

Zombies are fictional creatures whose minds are taken over and hijacked by a virus. Zombies are not real, right? The truth is that in the insect world, zombies are actually real.

Meet the *Ophiocordyceps unilateralis* (pronounced ofio kordi seps), also known as the Zombie-Ant Fungus.

Ophiocordyceps is a parasitic fungi that hijacks insects and then controls their every move. The *Ophiocordyceps* has just one goal: to reproduce itself and then disperse as wide as possible.

Ophiocordyceps, found in tropical forests, infect a foraging ant through spores that attach to the ant's exoskeleton. Then the *Ophiocordyceps* penetrates the ant's exoskeleton and then slowly takes over the ant's behavior. It breaks through the ant's hard exoskeleton with a combination of mechanical pressure and enzymes.

At first, as the fungus grows inside the ant, there's an incubation period where infected ants appear perfectly normal and go about their business undetected by the rest of the colony.

As the infection advances, the controlled ant is compelled by the *Ophiocordyceps* to leave the ant nest high in a tree, for a more humid climate that's favorable to the *Ophiocordyceps*'s growth. It first affects the ant's behavior through convulsions that make it fall from its high canopy nest onto the forest floor.

The ant is then compelled to climb up the stem of a plant about 10 inches off the ground, sink its jaws into a leaf vein on the underside side of a plant, and wait for death clamped to the leaf. The *Ophiocordyceps* makes the ant take a "death grip", a bite with abnormal force on the leaf and the ant cannot leave that protected area. A study revealed that there is a synchronization of this manipulated biting behavior with solar noon.

Why does *Ophiocordyceps* make the ant travel to the bottom of a leaf? In addition to being a humid environment, this climate, under the leaf, also helps the *Ophiocordyceps* avoid UV light from the sun and rain, which is harmful to it.

Meanwhile, while the ant is clamped to the leaf, the *Ophiocordyceps* feeds on its victim's innards until it's ready for the final stage. Several days after the ant has died, the fungus sends out spores and a fruit of fungus through the base of the ant's head. Sometimes these fruiting bodies that grow out of the ant's head

are quite long and elaborate. It then turns the ant's shriveled corpse into a launchpad from which it can jettison its spores and infect new ants, and continue the cycle. The entire process leading to mortality takes 4–10 days.

Interestingly, while the infection is 100 percent lethal, the goal isn't to convert all the ants into the walking dead. For ecosystems to stay balanced, *Ophiocordyceps* has to keep host populations in check. Therefore, remarkably, *Ophiocordyceps* makes sure that only a few ants in a colony are infected at any given time.

What is also interesting is that even though *Ophiocordyceps unilateralis* control the ants' behavior, it doesn't invade the brain of the ant. Instead, the fungus casts its mind control through bioactive compounds that interfere with the ant's nervous system and controls its hosts directly at the muscles. The fungus secretes compounds and takes over the central nervous system (CNS), which enables it to manipulate the ant to reach the forest floor and climb up the vegetation.

One related species, *Ophiocordyceps sinensis*, colonizes ghost moth caterpillars and erupts from their head like a unicorn horn. *Ophiocordyceps* in Costa Rica infect bullet ants and then force them to climb to a great spore-sprinkling height before the fungus erupts.

One thing that keeps *Ophiocordyceps* in check, is the fact that it is susceptible to fungal infection itself, and gets killed by other fungi. Some call this the "antizombie-fungus fungus".

Although *Ophiocordyceps* sounds terrifying, scientists think there is potential for it to be used to control or hijack cancer growth, and scientists are exploring whether these can be used as anticancer agents.

You are probably thinking, what would happen if an *Ophiocordyceps* touched a person? Could it burrow into our bodies and take over our minds? No! we don't need to worry about this sort of thing happening to us. *Ophiocordyceps* can't infect humans, as Hashem designed our bodies with extremely powerful defenses against pathogens like *Ophiocordyceps*. Human bodies are much better than insects at attacking fungi. Thank you Hashem for creating such an amazing world and thank you for our amazing immune system!

G-D HAS MUCH MORE RESPECT FOR YOU THAN THAT

Rav Manis Mandel, the principal of Yeshiva of Brooklyn, was a master mechanech inside the classroom as well as outside.

A girl with a disability was transported to school each day via a wheelchair-equipped mini-bus. Each day when she arrived at school, someone from the school had to sign the driver's paper.

One day the non Jewish driver, Anthony, asked Rabbi Mandel to sign. When Rabbi Mandel looked around for something to rest the paper on when he signed, he could not find a solid surface.

Anthony then offered Rabbi Mandel his back to use as a surface to sign. Rabbi Mandel refused. He explained, "Anthony, G-d created you in His image. It would not be honorable to use your back as a support. G-d has much more respect for you than that."

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There were times when Rabbi Mandel had to summon a student to the office to discuss her misconduct. He did not want to send a note to the classroom, calling the girl out because this would cause the girl embarrassment. Instead, he would come to the girl's class, teach an important Chazal or another lesson for a minute or two, and when he left the room, he would conveniently "forget" a folder that he had brought with him. Then the teacher, upon "discovering" the forgotten folder, would choose this girl to bring it to Rabbi Mandel. This would allow the girl to leave in a dignified way.

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THE ANSWER

Regarding last week's question about the giant who rescued the man from the oncoming train, Rav Zilberstein said that we are required to have hakaras hatov to one who saves us, even if they had no intention of saving us. Therefore the man should give him an amount of money that in that particular place is considered to be a reasonable gift for saving one's life, even though the hero did not intend to help the person he rescued.

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