

## A MITZVA DILEMMA FOR THE SHABBOS TABLE



### THE KALLAH CHAIR

By Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

This week's Parsha, Mishpatim, talks about the laws of damages. This leads us to the following story.

The wedding of Eli and Zehava started as planned, and the chuppah was beautiful. After the chuppah, Eli and Zehava were musically escorted to the yichud room by a joyous and raucous group of Eli's friends. They entered the room, and the door was closed behind them. Two witnesses, the eidi yichud, stood by the door to make sure that the chasan and kallah were alone.

When the new couple came into the room, they saw a small table filled with a plate of fruit for both of them to enjoy. Before they both sat down, Zehava excused herself for a moment to use the attached washroom. While Zehava was out, Eli looked around the room. In the corner of the room, there was a huge white, wicker chair adorned with flowers that looked like it was a chair used by a kallah during the Badeken. Eli was exhausted from fasting all day and from being on his feet, and the huge white chair looked inviting. Eli went to the far side of the room where the big chair was kept and plopped himself into



### EVERY JEW, A JUDGE

One of the ways to learn about the nature of a people is to study their laws. In the ancient world there was no law regarding the murder of infants. In fact, it was common practice especially if the baby was female. In modern day there are places where murder is permitted before birth. Without much research one can already understand something about the people who legislated these laws. The same is true in every field of law, whether it is business and finance or civil law and zoning law. Within every field of endeavor the laws of a people tell who the people are, what their expectations are and what their values are.

The beauty of our Parsha is that we get a glimpse of the greatness of the Torah, her expectations of us and what our aspirations are to be.

One such example can be found in the laws regarding commerce in which we are prohibited from charging a customer more than the market value. The Torah expresses this mitzvah specifically in terms of the ger, the stranger who is new to Judaism. He is the most vulnerable member of the society and we might feel justified to treat him less than we would treat our Jewish brother and sister. Nevertheless, the Torah is teaching us the injustice of this behavior. By extension, we are instructed from this 'business law' how we need to act in our interpersonal relations with our fellow Jew. This mitzvah includes hurting the feelings of another person, not only their pocketbook. Justice between man and his neighbor goes far beyond finances; it goes to the heart of all relations. The culture defined by Torah is that justice and kindness are not separate concepts, they are both integral parts of the Jewish psyche.

Another example is the mitzvah that is directed to the courts and specifically their judges. The Torah instructs "You shall not accept a false report." This prohibits a

the chair. It was very comfortable. Eli closed his eyes for a moment to appreciate the respite. After a few moments, Zehava came back. Eli quickly got up to sit at the table with her. Zehava let out a sharp "Oh my!".

"What's wrong," Eli asked. Zehava said, "Look at your jacket and the back of your pants." Eli looked down and saw that his new wedding suit was covered in wet paint.

It turned out that a wedding planner named Chavie, who worked with the wedding hall, was preparing the Kallahs' chair for a wedding in the near future. For some reason, the painted chair was placed in the yichud room.

Thankfully Eli's family was able to quickly find him a replacement suit, and the wedding continued to go as planned without any further hiccups.

After the wedding, Eli reached out to Chavie, the owner of the big white chair, and told her the story. "My brand new wedding suit got permanently ruined, and I'm wondering if you would be able to pay for a replacement", Eli politely asked.

But Chavie didn't see it that way. "I empathize with you, but I don't think I have to pay for your suit. The chair was clearly a chair to be used for the Kallah. What were you doing sitting in a Kallah's chair? Also, it was set to the side. Why didn't you sit at the table with the normal chairs?", Chavie said. .

But Eli replied, "What right do you have to leave a chair with wet paint in a yichud room? It should be put somewhere where no one would sit on it. In addition, there wasn't even a 'caution, wet paint' sign on it. I think you are responsible for these damages".

Both amicably agreed to bring this question to a Rav. What do you think?

Does Chavie have to pay for the damaged suit because she should not have left a wet, freshly painted chair in the yichud room?

Or is Chavie exempt because Eli should not have sat in the kallah's chair, and he should have realized that it was placed on the side?

See Upiryo Matok, Shemos Page 251



“Imagine in the morning what the day will bring if we would only get the blessings we thanked HaShem for yesterday!”



judge who is about to judge a civil case between two parties. He may not listen to one litigant if the other litigant is not present. Human nature is such that we usually accept more readily the first version of a story as the default. If the judge will hear the story from one litigant without the presence of the other, he will tend to give more credibility to that side. In order to protect the integrity of the judgment both litigants must be present before the case can begin. This law also prohibits the judge from accepting any information that is not relevant to the case at hand. Only relevant information may be entered into the courtroom; nothing else.

Our Sages explain that by extension this applies to every Jew; man woman and child. No Jew may accept a report about another person that will change their opinion about that person, unless the information is relevant. This is one of the sources for the prohibition of loshon hara. We have no right to see another Jew in a negative light unless we ourselves witnessed otherwise. And then, we may not share that with anybody else, unless it is

relevant.

One might ask how our Sages extend the prohibition directed to a judge to every Jew? Are we a nation of judges? Is every 12 year old girl and 13 year boy a judge?

In the mind of every person there is a courtroom in which he judges the events he sees. This judgment is invariably a judgment on the person or people involved in the event that occurred. He may decide that the subject is right or wrong, did he act inappropriately or did he act appropriately, is he normal or is he not normal, is he a New Yorker or is he an out of townner and so on. When the Torah instructs every judge to be fair and to accept only relevant information, every Jew is being addressed.

It is no wonder why in the middle of our Parsha the Torah makes the statement "Men of a holy calling you should be to Me." The expectation that the Torah has for us and the aspirations to which we must aspire are to be a people with a holy calling for HaShem.

Have a very wonderful Shabbos.

**Paysach Diskind**



## SHABBOS: CELEBRATING HASHEM'S CREATION

### THE AXOLOTL

This picture above can't be a real creature, right? It must be an AI-generated image or a Disney-like fantasy creature, right? Believe it or not, this is an actual photograph. It is a type of salamander called an Axolotl. It is pronounced Axe -soh -lah - till. Please join us once again in our exploration of Hashem's strange, unusual, and wondrous creatures.

Axolotls are native to Mexico and can be found in the lakes of Xochimilco near Mexico City. It is commonly called the Mexican Walking Fish but it isn't actually a fish – it's an amphibian. The word Axolotl comes from the Ancient Aztecs who revered them and translates to mean 'water dog.' They used to be a staple in the Aztec diet. Axolotls are the only species of salamander that can live their entire life in water. Their eyes are lidless, and They grow to be about 6 inches to 18 inches in length.

Axolotls come in all sorts of colors! The patterns and pigments vary, but most often, you will see pink, brown, or black with specks of olive or gold. But something even more incredible is that they can adjust their color to camouflage themselves with their surroundings.

You may notice the large feathery appendages that come out of their heads. What is that? Are they dreadlocks? Those are the external gills that the Axolotls use to breathe underwater. It's fascinating that Axolotls have three ways to breathe. They have their gills. Also, in cases of water with low oxygen levels, they can breathe through their skin. Finally, they also have fully functional lungs. They will often rise to the surface for a gulp of air.

Sometimes, when eating, their mouths remain open for a few seconds after swallowing, which can make them look like they're smiling. Certain Axolotls have slightly turned-up mouths that also give the impression that they're smiling all the time.

Axolotls are small in size and have baby faces, but that doesn't mean they are pushovers. In their natural habitat, the Axolotl is a top predator that feeds on other creatures like small fishes, worms, and insects. They eat in an interesting way. They only have barely visible vestigial teeth. Therefore the primary method of feeding is by suction. Axolotls locate food by smell and will "snap" at any potential meal, sucking the food into their stomachs with vacuum force.

There is a fascinating story behind why they only have vestigial teeth. The reason is that Axolotls are the only species of amphibian that can remain in their larval form for their entire life. Axolotls reach adulthood without undergoing metamorphosis. Instead of dropping their gills, growing teeth, and taking to the land, adult Axolotls remain aquatic and gilled. When most amphibians are young, they live in water, and use gills that can breathe in the wa-

ter. When they become adults, they go through a process called metamorphosis, in which they lose their gills and start living on land. However, the Axolotl is unusual in that it lacks a thyroid-stimulating hormone, which is needed for the Axolotl to go through metamorphosis. Therefore, it keeps its gills and lives in water all its life. This also means that their teeth never develop and that they must rely on a suction method to consume food. So they keep their feathery external gills and remain aquatic. The term for reaching maturity without undergoing metamorphosis is Neoteny.

What is fascinating is that its body has the capacity to go through metamorphosis if given the necessary hormone, but axolotls do not produce it and must be exposed to it from an external source. If, for example, Axolotls eat other Axolotls and ingest a sufficient amount of iodine, then the Axolotls will undergo an artificially-induced metamorphosis and begin living on land and transforming into bigger terrestrial adults.

There is another feature about Axolotls that is amazing. Axolotls are capable of regenerating lost limbs and organs, including their spinal cord, heart, and even parts of their eyes and brain. They can also readily accept transplants from other individuals, including eyes and parts of the brain—restoring these alien organs to full functionality. If an Axolotl loses a limb, the appendage will grow back at just the right size and orientation. Within weeks, the seam between old and new disappears completely. In some cases, Axolotls have been known to repair a damaged limb, as well as regenerating an additional one, ending up with an extra appendage. In addition to being able to regenerate, these animals display a remarkable resistance to cancer.

The regenerative abilities of Axolotls cells, as well as their natural resistance to cancer, are of significant interest to researchers hoping to find a way to copy this ability for humans and extend our lifespans. Scientists are trying to sequence its genome to identify the genes that cause regeneration and cancer resistance. But what is fascinating is that this creature has an unusually long genetic code. Its genome is mysteriously ten times the size of a human's, with 32 billion DNA bases. Therefore sequencing the DNA of Axolotls is a challenge for scientists. Scientists have already identified two genes used in regeneration in axolotls.

What is sad is that this creature which has so much potential promise to help people is nearly extinct in the wild. As of 2020, the Axolotl was near extinction due to urbanization in Mexico City and consequent water pollution. It is listed as critically endangered in the wild, with a decreasing population of only between 50 to 1,000 creatures living in the wild.

## "I STAYED MILCHIG TO ENJOY YOUR BLINTZES"

Rav Nosson Tzvi Finkel, Rosh Yeshiva of the Mir Yeshiva, would have to raise millions of dollars for the Yeshiva. The pinnacle of the Mir's fundraising efforts is their yearly dinner in New York. You would imagine that a yeshivah the size of the Mir with so many alumni would host a dinner ten thousand people strong.

But in fact, less than a tenth of that number attended, and each and every one of them had to be reminded, worked on, or coerced to be there.

One time, as the Rosh Yeshiva was about to depart for the Gala dinner, his hostess at the New York home he was staying offered him some blintzes. But Rav Nosson Tzvi was too nervous to partake. And there was good reason to be nervous: the weather was stormy, which could definitely impact disastrously upon attendance, last minute confirmations had not come through, pledges had not been secured in advance and the Rosh Yeshiva had to appeal to some one thousand individuals to assist him in footing the cost of the yeshivah.

However, baruch Hashem, the dinner was a huge success, and later that night, a victory celebration was conducted at his host's home. Some of the yeshivah's closest supporters were there, and they sang the Rosh Yeshiva's favorite song, "Kee Orech Yamim" and danced.

Then it was finally time for some food. It was at this time that Rav Nosson Tzvi informed his hostess that despite the fact that he was at a gourmet dinner in the gala Brooklyn Marriott, with an elaborate smorgasbord and a feast catered by one of New York's premier food furnishers, he had remained milchig so that he could eat her blintzes that she offered him earlier.

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### THE ANSWER

Regarding last week's question about wearing the tefillin, Rav Zilberstein wrote that this case is different than the case of lo'eg la'rosh, of not wearing tzitzis in the cemetery. This is because the father can participate in the mitzva of wearing tefillin by learning Torah about tefillin. For him, learning Torah about tefillin is as if he is wearing the tefillin. Or he can chip in to buy someone tefillin, and that gives him a part of the mitzvah.

This week's TableTalk is dedicated in memory of

Yisrael Dov ben Gershon Halevi z"l

Mashie bas Shmuel z"l

For the shloshim of

Binyomin Riel ben Gershon Yeshaya z"l

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