

A MITZVA DILEMMA FOR THE SHABBOS TABLE



THE BUMBLER BONFIRE

By Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

This week's Torah portion opens with the prohibition to light a fire on Shabbos. This leads us to the following true story.

Aaron belonged to a shul that was auctioning off the rights to light the Lag B'Omer bonfire. There was a significant bidding war, and Aron won the right to light the bonfire after bidding more than a thousand shekels. He made his pledge in honor of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai whose yearzeit is on Lag B'Omer. He paid the money, and the proceeds went to support the shul.

The whole community gathered outside the shul for the bonfire. The bonfire pyre was huge. Aaron was given a torch to light the bonfire by the gabbai who organized the event. Everyone watched as the fire took hold. Suddenly, the tip of the pyre fell down. It went right underneath a nearby car. Apparently, the pyre was set up near an area designated for public



THE MOON HAS NO HABIT

People often dedicate their lives to a noble cause, a cause which truly elevates them to higher spiritual levels. They take on responsibilities to further this cause and it generates genuine growth. Nevertheless, in spite of all that positive energy and in spite of the worthiness of the cause there is always the danger that after some time, the endeavor loses its spirit and those who are involved become less driven. The original dedication somehow seems to lose its power. Even if the endeavor continues it will not be with the same enthusiasm that was there at the beginning.

Why does this happen?

Man is a creature of habit. Whatever we do will eventually become habitual. There is an advantage in creating certain habits. Very often certain beneficial exercises that are difficult to do become easier once they form into a habit. Nevertheless, when undertaking endeavors whose success requires enthusiasm then habit forming activities are not desired. Habit can destroy the passion that initiated the undertaking.

This week we read the extra Parsha of Parshas Hachodesh in which HaShem instructs Moshe to establish the calendar based on the lunar cycle. This mitzvah carries the distinction of being the very first mitzvah that the Jewish nation received from their Founder. Being the first mitzvah implies that this mitzvah is seminal for all the mitzvos that follow. How is that true?

Reviewing some of the basic principles of this mitzvah will reveal an illumi-

parking. The car caught fire and almost exploded. The fire department came and put out the fire, but the car was totaled. Everyone was very shocked by the incident, and it definitely put a huge damper on the celebration.

Aaron was understandably upset. He turned to the gabbai, who was in charge of the bonfire, "Look what you did! You set up the bonfire right near where cars are parked. You are liable for the damage. Not only are you liable for the damage, but I want my pledge back. I bid so much money for the honor of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai on Lag B'Omer. But that was not an honor; it was a disgrace."

However, the gabbai argued that he was not responsible. He just arranged the bonfire, Aaron was the one who lit the fire, and he should have looked around before he used the torch. Not only was he liable, but he had to keep his pledge.

This two-part question was brought to Rav Zilberstein.

What do you think?

Is Aaron liable for the damaged car? On the one hand, he lit the pyre, but on the other hand, the gabbai set it up.

Also, was Aaron allowed to get his bid money back? He pledged money in order to have a meaningful celebration in honor of Lag B'Omer and Rav Shimon, but it turned out to be a disaster, and this was not what he intended when he made the pledge.

See Upiryo Matok Shemos 262



nating insight on how to overcome the forces of habit from destroying impassioned endeavors.

We know that Chazal had the secrets of the astronomical calculations relevant to the lunar and solar cycles. This is evident from the thousand year calendar that Hillel Hakatan generated which still today remains totally accurate.

Why then does the Torah require the Jewish court to pronounce the New Moon through a judicial process? Take for example when the court and all the people observe the new Moon. Imagine there are only a few minutes left to the day before the judges can make the necessary proclamation. The rule is that since there will not be time for witnesses to testify before the judges, the new month will have to be delayed to the following day.

If we know with certainty that the new Moon appeared,

what is the point of the testimony? Rav Hirsch explains that HaShem empowered His people with the ability to renew and rejuvenate themselves. The moon and its relationship to the sun is to be for us a sign, an inspiration for us to renew our relationship with HaShem. Every month the Jewish people through their court must observe how the moon is able to regain her reflective ability from the sun. This, in turn, will inspire us to do the same.

Every Jewish parent raising their children in the ways of Torah, teaches them to recite brachos and to say the Shema, to wear tzitzis and go to shul and so on. A thorough proper upbringing will create within the child a natural proclivity to observe the mitzvos he was trained to do. However, because we are creatures of habit, that child's mitzvos will become habitual and will be missing the most critical component of all mitzvos; the passion and enthusiasm to fulfill the Will of HaShem.

Perhaps the reason why this mitzvah is the first mitzvah is because it preserves the passion and enthusiasm which every Jew must have.

Have a wonderful Shabbos.

Paysach Diskind



SHABBOS: CELEBRATING HASHEM'S CREATION

THE LAMPREYS

While researching the candidates for the chilazon, I came across some other fascinating and unusual underwater creatures. Please meet the fascinating Lampreys. (pronounced lamp preeze)

The Lampreys, sometimes also called the vampire fish, is a jawless fish with a toothed, funnel-like sucking mouth. Their mouths are usually as wide as or even wider than their heads. There is no jaw, and the mouth has a round, sucker-like appearance. Consecutive circular rows of sharp teeth are found within. They are often confused with eels but aren't related to them at all. The parasitic carnivorous lampreys are the most well-known species of lampreys and feed by boring into the flesh of other fish to suck their blood. They have scaleless, elongated bodies and can range from half a foot long to more than three feet long. One female sea lamprey can produce 100,000 eggs. About 10% survive, producing 10,000 new sea lampreys.

Adult lampreys have large eyes, with one very sensitive nostril atop the head. What is very unique about the Lampreys is they have an additional set of eyes, a total of four eyes. They are the only vertebrate to have four eyes. Although lampreys are classified as vertebrates, sea lampreys, like sharks, don't have any bones and are completely cartilaginous. Their smooth skin is typically olive to yellow-brown in color. Sea lampreys are found along the shores of the Atlantic Ocean in Europe and North America. Populations exist in the western Mediterranean Sea and the Black Sea. They are also found in the Great Lakes.

Let's now learn about those scary-looking teeth and why lampreys are called the vampire fish. Sea lampreys are parasites, meaning they can only survive if they have a host to feed from. One sea lamprey can kill up to 40 pounds of fish in its life.

These parasitic fish use their round mouths like suction cups to latch onto their prey. They also use their multiple rows of sharp teeth to anchor themselves on the bodies of the animals they feed on. They attach their mouthparts to the target animal's body, then use three knife-like horny plates on the tip of their tongue to scrape through surface tissues until they reach body fluids. The teeth on their oral disc are primarily used to help the animal attach itself to its prey and not chew or eat. Similar to leeches, lampreys secrete enzymes that prevent the blood of their prey from clotting. This gives them a steady flow of blood. Some species of lampreys not only eat the blood of other animals — but they also eat the flesh. Taking this to another level, there are a few species of lampreys that puncture all the way through into the inside of another animal and eat the animals' internal organs to get food. Lampreys aren't afraid to target fish bigger than them in the ocean. In fact, they've even been known to grab onto specimens as big as sharks and rays. Common targets, however, are thin-skinned fish like salmon, lake trout, lake whitefish, northern pike, walleye, and lake sturgeon. Although attacks on humans do occur, they will generally not attack humans unless starved.

Sea lampreys are strong! They use their mouths to move rocks as big as a softball when building nests for spawning.

All of this sounds fairly scary. But the truth is out of the 38 known species of lamprey, only 18 of them are carnivorous. The other species are vegetarians. The vegetarians attach their suction device to a stone, and its tongue makes contact with the stone to rasp algae from the rock.

Sea lampreys have become a major pest in the North American Great Lakes. They are an invasive species, have no natural enemies in the lakes, and prey on many species of commercial value, such as lake trout. Sea lampreys invaded the Great Lakes in the 1830s. Within a decade, they had gained access to all five Great Lakes, where they quickly set to work preying on the lakes' commercially important fishes, including trout, whitefish, perch, and sturgeon. Within a century, the trout fishery had collapsed, largely due to the lamprey's unchecked proliferation. Before their invasion, upwards of 15 million pounds of lake trout were harvested per year. By the early 1960s, that figure had dropped to just 300,000 pounds per year. Today great efforts are invested in curtailing the lamprey population in the Great Lakes.

Although some lampreys have four eyes, they rely more on their sense of smell to get around. In fact, because of their acute sense of smell, some people call the lampreys a "swimming nose." Their strong sense of smell allows them to detect predators and prey, even at night.

Studies have shown that lampreys are among the most energy-efficient swimmers. Most fish move in the water by using their fins to push their weight in the direction they want to go. Lampreys, however, bend their slender bodies to generate low pressures in the surrounding water. This causes water to rush in and propel their bodies forward, and it essentially means that they pull their weight rather than push it like other fish. Although this method of swimming isn't any faster than how other fishes swim, it is a highly efficient method that saves a lot of energy.

Lampreys are anadromous fish. This means that they spend part of their lives in freshwater and part of their lives in saltwater. During their final metamorphosis from filter-feeders to parasitic lampreys, their kidneys change so they can tolerate salt water, allowing them to enter lakes and oceans where they can seek hosts to feed on.

While they are definitely not kosher, lampreys have long been used as food for humans. They were highly appreciated by the ancient Romans. During the Middle Ages, they were widely eaten by the upper classes throughout Europe. King Henry I of England (11th century) is claimed to have been so fond of lampreys that he often ate them late into life and is said to have died from eating "a surfeit of lampreys." In more recent history, The official pie made for the coronation of the late Queen Elizabeth on March 4, 1953, was a lamprey pie. Thank you, Hashem, for your amazing world!

THINKING OF OTHERS

Rav Shimshon Pincus's yiras Shamayim and yearning to increase k'vod Shamayim in the world extended to all realms of life and to all his fellow Jews. His yiras Shamayim and gemilus chasadim were deeply intertwined, both drawing from a pure heart eager to fulfill the will of Hashem through mitzvos between man and man, as well as mitzvos between man and Hashem.

Rav Pincus would occasionally donate a substantial sum of money to the shul. He would announce that the donation was on behalf of anyone who had pledged a sum of money and forgotten to pay it, and that any surplus should be a zechus for himself and his family.

When celebrating his sons' bar mitzvahs and aufrufs, the Rav would always come prepared with a large stash of candy that he hid under his seat in shul. As soon as the tumult of the candy-throwing had waned, and amidst showers of berachos and mazal tov wishes, Rav Shimshon would make a rapid dash around the shul, fists stuffed with candies as he searched for the sad little faces in the crowd who hadn't managed to catch any sweets. With a smile, he would drop candy into their outstretched hands, turning their tears into smiles.

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THE ANSWER

Regarding last week's question about the elevator, Rav Zilberstein wrote that the one who pushed the button is liable for all of the damage. He should have known that pushing the button may cause the elevator to break.

This week's TableTalk is dedicated to the birth of our youngest grandson, Meir Simcha.
May we merit to see our grandchildren walking in the path of Torah.

By Yosef and Rut Ushakov

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