

## A MITZVA DILEMMA FOR THE SHABBOS TABLE



## TOIVELED

By Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

As we prepare for Pesach, many of us will buy new pots and dishes. We know there is a mitzvah to toivel new vessels in a mikvah to sanctify them before use. This leads us to the following true story:

Chanah was visiting Miami, an area with a significant Jewish population, and went to the store, Burlington. In the clearance section, she found a box filled with pans and metal utensils. She wanted to purchase the box but noticed that the word "toiveled" was written in permanent marker on the box. It seemed that someone had bought the box, toiveled it, and then returned it. Chanah wanted to know



## CLOUDS ARE HIGH BUT MOUNTAINS ARE HIGHER

Pictured: Venezuela's Mount Roraima Rising High Above the Clouds

The Malbim (Tehillim 34:4) notes that while many nations recognize HaShem as the Creator, nevertheless He is 'rum'; He is high up and out of reach of Man. The nations see HaShem as being detached from this world. For this reason they see no purpose in serving Him or obeying Him. He is so high up and removed that His Presence is not felt in this world.

It is only we, His cherished people, who recognize HaShem as 'gadol'. HaShem is big and great. Gadol reflects the absolute Greatness of HaShem and it places Him on Earth. Just as the greatness of the mountains is felt on Earth but reaches up to the heavens, so does 'gadol' reflect HaShem's Greatness as being felt in this world but reaches to the very great heights of the heavens. The picture is similar to the ladder in Yaakov's dream whose feet were grounded on Earth but reached up to the highest heavens. Just as Yishayhu (66:1) describes this image as the Heavens being HaShem's seat and the Earth as His footstool.

We serve HaShem because we recognize HaShem is directly involved in and is concerned with what goes on here on Earth. We recognize that there are no other powers or entities that have any influence on what occurs here on Earth - there is only One Decision Maker.

Can we blame the nations for their limited understanding? A serious consideration of their point of view might be justified. The genius of the creation is

if she could rely on the text that said it was toiveled.

On one hand, why would anyone write "toiveled" if they didn't actually do it? Perhaps she can buy it and not toivel it at all.

But on the other hand, maybe someone toiveled it but didn't do it properly. In that case she should toivel it like any normal purchase.

Another question was, if she would toivel it, should she toivel it with a bracha? Perhaps If she did make a bracha and it had already been toiveled, it would be a wasted bracha.

So, there were three options: to toivel it like a regular vessel, to toivel without a bracha, or to simply rely on the words on the box, and not toivel at all.

What do you think she should do?

This question was asked to Rav Tzvi Berkowitz.



*If you want to fly,  
you have to give up the things  
that weigh you down.*



truly astounding. Nature is so perfect and all the laws of physics and chemistry work with such incredible synchronization. It is impossible to consider the Creator anybody less than HaShem. However, how do we see the Presence of HaShem interacting with this world? If He were involved with running the world would we not expect to see good things happening to good people and bad things to others? Any study of history from the rise and fall of great empires to the rise and fall of the stock market does not indicate any rhyme or reason. The predictability and trustworthiness of nature is certainly not found in the running of the world.

There is however, one resounding proclamation which world history itself proclaims to all who are willing to listen, and that is that HaShem is directly guiding every step of world history and that there is no other guiding

force.

When Paul Johnson, the author of A History of the Jews, began studying history he was fascinated by the unending continuity of our people. "The Jews created a separate and specific identity earlier than almost any other people which still survives. They have maintained it, amid appalling adversities, right up to the present" "No people has ever insisted more firmly than the Jews that history has a purpose and humanity a destiny."

Beginning with HaShem's relationship with our people making us the center of the world's destiny He became 'gadol', HaShem's Presence entered the role of directing history through His people with the objective to bring the world to its destiny. Through us, HaShem's interaction with Man became apparent.

Shabbos HaGadol commemorates the day on which our ancestors performed their first mitzvah of HaShem with each family taking a sheep for their korban Pesach. Perhaps it is called Shabbos HaGadol because beginning this day forward HaShem became Gadol, His intervention in this world became evident.

Have a wonderful Shabbos HaGadol.



## SHABBOS: CELEBRATING HASHEM'S CREATION

### DUGONG

This week, we received a request from a frequent reader to explore some fascinating facts about a beautiful and unusual creature: the dugong.

The dugong is a marine mammal belonging to the same family as manatees. They are one of the four living species of sirenians, the others being manatees, Steller's sea cow, and Rhytina. Surprisingly, the closest land relative to the dugong is the elephant. Dugongs can be found in warm coastal waters of the Indian and western Pacific Oceans, from East Africa to Australia. Australia is home to the largest population. (80,000) Apropos to Pesach, the Red Sea is home to large populations of dugongs, and it was estimated there could be as many as 4,000 dugongs in the Red Sea.

What does "sirenian" mean? According to the Encyclopedia Britannica, the order Sirenia was named after the Sirens of Greek mythology. It is believed that sirenians are the origin of the myth of merfolk or merpeople. For example, on January 9, 1493, explorer Christopher Columbus, sailing near present-day Dominican Republic, reported seeing three "mermaids" but described them as "not half as beautiful as they are normally depicted." Scientists believe that what Columbus actually saw was a sirenian, such as a manatee or dugong. You may wonder how a large gray marine mammal could look like a merperson but dugongs are known to rise from the sea on their tails in a tail stand. This, from a distance, can look very human.

Dugongs can grow up to ten feet long and weigh up to 1,200 pounds. Females tend to be larger than males. But despite their imposing size, Dugongs display playful behavior, like jumping out of the water. They are slow-moving, gentle creatures that are rarely aggressive towards humans. The Dugongs actually appear to always be smiling and have a constant smile on their face. They have a streamlined body and a flattened tail, enabling them to swim gracefully. They are social animals, living in herds and sometimes traveling in groups of up to 200. Dugongs communicate through vocalizations such as whistles, moans, and grunts, and can recognize each other by their unique calls. They have been known to help injured or stranded herd members and form close bonds with their kin, especially mothers and calves. They invest considerable parental care in their young. The young stay with their mothers for 6 to 9 years, which is why mother-calf pairs are often spot-

ted together. Sometimes they even catch a ride on their mother's back.

Their gray-brown, smooth skin is tough and rubbery, with a thick layer of blubber providing insulation and energy storage. This blubber layer can be nearly three inches thick. Dugongs have a large, whale-like tail, used for swimming, steering, and stopping. Their tails distinguish them from manatees, as manatees have paddle-shaped tails, while dugongs have fluked, whale-like tails.

While human gestation lasts nine months, a dugong's gestation period is around 13 months. Dugong calves can swim independently as soon as an hour after birth. They can hold their breath for up to 11 minutes while diving, thanks to their unique ability to store oxygen in their muscles. They can dive up to 130 feet, but typically stay closer to the surface.

Dugongs are unique as the only completely marine mammal with a diet consisting solely of seagrass. They are herbivores, uprooting seagrass with their strong lips. Their large, sensitive lips help grab and pull seagrass from the ocean floor. Dugongs have specialized jaw adaptations for grinding and digesting tough seagrass. As important ecosystem engineers, they help maintain seagrass bed health, which in turn provides habitats for other marine animals such as turtles, fish, and crustaceans. They have a well-developed sense of smell and taste, allowing them to detect seagrass up to 90 meters away. Dugongs can consume up to 80 pounds of seagrass daily. They have special complex digestive systems that efficiently break down and extract nutrients from the sea plants.

In the wild, these creatures have a lifespan of around 70 years. You can estimate a dugong's age by how many rings that they have on their tusks, just like a tree! Dugongs have very few natural predators, but they are sometimes hunted by crocodiles, killer whales, and sharks. They are vulnerable to boat strikes, which can cause serious injury or death. Human activities, such as coastal development, fishing, and pollution, pose the greatest threat to dugong survival. Efforts are underway to conserve and protect dugongs and their habitats, including the establishment of protected areas and the promotion of sustainable fishing practices.

## AWARE OF HIS SURROUNDINGS

Rabbi Moshe Juravel was known throughout the Baltimore community as the one to contact if you need a Megillah reading for one person or for a tzibur. He was committed that no Jew should be left behind. He trained many people to lain and he and his mitzvah men made sure that every person heard the Megillah by night and by day.

Mr. Morris Baronoff had suffered three debilitating strokes from which he became uncommunicative for his five final years of life. Although the doctors encouraged his wife to place him in a nursing home, Mrs. Baronoff refused because she was convinced that her husband was still comprehending his environment.

For five years Mrs. Baronoff asked Rabbi Juravel to blow shofar for him on Rosh Hashanah and read the Megillah for him on Purim and of course he did.

One year when Mrs. Baronoff called before Purim, R' Moshe decided that it would be best if he went himself to lain rather than sending one of his mitzvah men. He knew that Mrs. Baronoff appreciated his personal touch. As R' Moshe walked in that morning with Megillah in hand, he approached Mr. Baronoff who was propped up in bed and in a loud cheerful voice wished him a freilichin Purim. Mr. Baronoff returned his greeting with a blank empty stare. Pretending that he was speaking to someone who was actually aware of what he was saying, R' Moshe continued "I am now going to read the Megillah for you. First I will recite the brachos for the reading."

As he began reading the Megillah R' Moshe thought to himself 'maybe the others were right; Mr. Baronoff does not even realize that I am here reading the Megillah, however he continued reading.

When he reached the first mention of Haman R' Moshe thought he heard a tapping sound. He looked up and saw Mr. Baronoff's right index finger gently tapping on the table in a light rhythmic beat! "No!" thought R' Moshe "Surely this is a coincidence". He continued reading and as he soon reached the next Haman he once again saw Mr. Baronoff tapping his finger. He could not believe his eyes, Mrs. Baronoff was right! He was totally aware of his surroundings.

R' Moshe stopped for a moment and with a tear in his eye went on reading the rest of the Megillah.

Taken from "For Goodness Sake" with permission from Rabbi Boruch Brull



### THE ANSWER

Regarding last week's question about the candy sale, Rav Tzvi Berkowitz answered that since the girl is only 10 years old, her vows are not binding. Therefore, in this case, she can drink the soda.

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