

A MITZVA DILEMMA FOR THE SHABBOS TABLE



BURNING IPHONES

By Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

This past week, Rav Matisyahu Solomon passed away. Rav Matisyahu was instrumental in bringing awareness to the Jewish community about the potential harm that smartphones can bring to our mental and spiritual health. Interestingly, yesterday, January 6th, the New York Times ran a story by technology reporter Kashmir Hill, who wrote about the harm that smartphones have brought to our mental health and family life, and the benefits of using a basic phone. This leads us to the following true story.

Akiva lived in a small town in Israel. He was successful in reaching out to young Israeli boys from less observant backgrounds and created a vibrant learning group of about 30 students. One year, in the middle of Sukkos on the holiday of Hoshana Rabba, Akiva led a learning program where the boys learned all night. They learned with great alacrity and enthusiasm. At the end of the learning, Akiva spoke to the boys about the importance of Hoshana Rabba and how it is the conclusion of the judgments of Yom Kippur. He spoke about the spiritual benefits that come with not using a smartphone, and using a basic phone instead. He said it would be a tremendous merit if for Hoshana Rabba, every one of them would give up their iPhone and put their iPhones in a box. Akiva's words which emanated from his



PROTECTIVE WALLS

This week was the yartzeit of Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch, one of the towering personalities who helped reorient our people as their protective ghetto walls began crumbling 150 years ago. Although those ghetto walls represent oppression in the eyes of many, nevertheless they actually protected our people in the most profound ways.

With the world's acceptance of the Jew in their midst, assimilation began to erode the masses of our people. One hundred years ago in Europe a family would consider themselves blessed if they were able to eat the food of their children because so many of the young people left the path of Torah.

Rav Hirsch carved a path upon which the loyal Jew can travel even as it takes him through the streets of Paris and Berlin. He provided the fortification needed to withstand the attraction of assimilation.

This notion is alluded to in our Parsha when HaShem tells Pharaoh before the plague of the wild animals; "I will place a פְּדוּת between My people and your people." In defining the word 'pdus' there are two translations. One translation is 'distinction'. HaShem is telling Pharaoh that He will set a distinction between the Jews and the Egyptians. The latter will be subjected to the plague and the former will not. There is, however, another translation, 'a redemption'. HaShem is telling Pharaoh that I will redeem My people from this plague and they will not suffer from the wild animals. When using the translation of 'redemption' the preposition 'between' becomes difficult to understand. Why did the Torah use this word of 'redemption' when there are many other synonyms that would have sufficed?

The Baal Haturim identifies two other verses in Tanach where the word פְּדוּת

heart penetrated his students' hearts, and as he passed around the box, every single student took out their iPhone and put it in the box. Akiva told them that the plan was that the morning after they daven and after they beat their aravos they were going to burn the box with all the iPhones inside of it. It would be an expression of their commitment to living lives of greater holiness.

The next morning, after the prayers, they took the box and saw that there were only two phones in the box. 28 of the phones were missing. They burned the box but with a great feeling of dismay at the missing phones.

A few days later, what happened became clear. One of the boys in the group, named Yoni, decided that the whole purpose of this group was just to give up their phones. If they were planning to burn them, what did they care if the phones were burned or gotten rid of some other way? He took most of the phones and went to a nearby phone dealership, and sold them for \$100 apiece. So, for the 28 phones, he was able to make \$2,800. He figured, why do they have to burn them? They could burn two of them, what do they need to burn all of them for?

When word got out to the group, they were very upset at Yoni. They demanded that Yoni give them the \$2,800, the money for their phones. But Yoni retorted, "What do you mean? You were planning to burn them. You gave them up. They were hefker. Your whole purpose wasn't to sell, your purpose was to get rid of them. What difference does it make to you whether they were burned or sold? But they argued, "If it was worth it for you to sell, then we should get the money."

So then Yoni conceded and said, "OK, I think that I should get the money, but even if you're right that the money goes to you, at least I should be able to get a cut, a significant percentage of it, because I was the one who brokered the deal. I was the one who made the effort and found a buyer and arranged the deal. So, OK, maybe I'll give you part of it, but I should be able to keep a good percentage of the money, maybe 20% or 30%."

They brought this question to Rav Zilberstein. What do you think? If they were planning to get rid of the phones, was Yoni allowed to sell the phones? On one hand, you could say that since they were planning to burn them, what do they care if they were sold? On the other hand, they specifically wanted to burn them. If he had no right to sell them, and he did sell them, he has to give them the money, and he should not be entitled to any amount.

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appears. In both verses the meaning of pdus is 'redemption'. Baal Haturim points out that in our verse it is spelled without a vav and in the other two places it is written with a vav. He explains that in the other places the redemption is complete but in our verse it was to be a redemption from the animals alone. Hence, when the pdus is comprehensive it is spelled complete, with the vav.

One of those verses is found in Tehillim (130:7) which Jews around the world recite multiple times daily for a redemption for our people in Eretz Yisroel. "Trust, O Israel in HaShem because with Hashem is chessed and much pdus." Baal Haturim explains that the verse in Tehillim refers to our final redemption and that redemption will be comprehensive and complete. Therefore it is written with the vav.

Our Sages teach us that we merited the redemption from Egypt on account of our remaining distinct and separate from the rest of Egyptian society. A Jew was recognized by his outward ap-

pearance, by his language and by his name. In spite of living in Egypt for over 200 years and absorbing many of their idolatrous ways we were still able to maintain our own distinct culture.

As one tracks our travels through our long and difficult exile he will discover that as long as we remained separate from the current culture we were able to remain in one place. However, once we became comfortable in the culture of our host nation we were sent away shortly afterward.

Perhaps the Torah chose the word 'pdus' to indicate why we merited to have a redemption. Our redemption came because we were not Egyptians. Neither by ethnicity nor by culture.

As we continue reading Chapter 130 of Tehillim for our ultimate redemption we are reminded how we must stand apart from Western society and take pride in being ones chosen to usher in that period. May we see that final redemption soon in our days.

Have a wonderful Shabbos.

Paysach Diskind



SHABBOS: CELEBRATING HASHEM'S CREATION

A RAINBOW OF FROGS

This week, the Parsha discusses the plague of the frogs. Most people, when asked, would answer that frogs are green. But the truth is frogs come in all the colors of the rainbow.

Red: The Tomato Frog, renowned for its tomato-like coloration, is native to Madagascar. The striking red color serves as a warning to predators, a phenomenon known as aposematism, signaling their toxicity. During the day, they burrow into the soft ground to maintain moisture and protect themselves from predators and the heat. At night, they emerge to hunt, feeding mainly on insects like flies and crickets. When threatened, they puff up their bodies to appear larger and more intimidating. If this fails and they are seized by a predator, they secrete a sticky, white substance from their skin which is not only distasteful but can also numb the eyes and mouth of the predator, allowing the frog to escape.

Orange: The Pumpkin Toadlet, among the smallest frogs in the world, typically measures just about 10 millimeters in length, making them not much larger than a pea. Despite their small stature, Pumpkin Toadlets are quite conspicuous due to their vivid orange hue, which is thought to be a warning sign to predators about their toxicity. Another fascinating aspect of the Pumpkin Toadlet is their breeding behavior. They lay their eggs on land, and the developing embryos bypass the tadpole stage, emerging directly as miniature versions of the adult frogs. Recent research has uncovered another intriguing fact about these tiny creatures: they have fluorescent bones. Under UV light, their skeletons glow, which is visible through their thin skin. The biological significance of this fluorescence is still a mystery.

Yellow: The Golden Poison Frog is renowned for being the most toxic land animal in the world. Its vivid coloration is a warning to potential predators of its extreme toxicity. The poison of a single frog is potent enough to be lethal to 10 to 20 humans or about two African bull elephants. This incredible toxicity is attributed to a powerful neurotoxin called batrachotoxin, which the frog accumulates in its skin from its diet, likely from consuming certain insects. Intriguingly, captive Golden Poison Frogs, not exposed to their natural diet, do not develop this toxin, indicating that the frog's diet in the wild is a key factor in the development of its poison. Despite its lethal nature, the Golden Poison Frog is not aggressive and only produces toxin as a defense mechanism.

Green: An exceptionally unique green frog is the Vietnamese Mossy Frog, renowned for its extraordinary camouflage. Its remarkable appearance that allows it to blend seamlessly into its environment. Its skin is a vivid green with black, brown, and red patches and spines, closely resembling moss-covered rock. This camouflage is so effective that it can be nearly impossible to spot the frog when it's sitting still among the moss and lichen of its habitat. When threatened, it employs a "play dead" strategy, curling up into a ball and remaining motionless to avoid detection by predators.

Blue: The Blue Poison Dart Frog is known for its striking bright blue coloration. This species, found in the forests of Suriname, South America, is both beautiful and deadly. Like other poison dart frogs, the blue variant produces potent toxins through its skin. The primary toxin can cause serious harm or even death to predators. Interestingly, these frogs

derive their toxicity from their diet of ants, termites, and other small insects. These frogs demonstrate notable parental care. The female lays eggs on the forest floor, which the male then guards. After the eggs hatch, one of the parents (usually the male) carries the tadpoles on their back to water-filled bromeliad plants. Each tadpole is deposited in a separate plant to reduce competition for food.

Purple: The Purple Frog was officially discovered in 2003 in the Western Ghats of India, a biodiversity hotspot. However, local tribes were aware of its existence long before scientists formally described it. It has a bloated body, a small head, beady eyes, and a pointed snout. Its skin color ranges from purple to greyish. The Purple Frog spends most of its life underground, which is highly unusual for frogs. It surfaces for only a few days each year during the monsoon season to breed. While underground, it feeds primarily on termites using its long, fluted tongue. It has an unusual breeding call that sounds like a chicken cluck.

Black: Black frogs are relatively rare, but one such example is the Black Rain Frog, native to the southern coast of Africa. The Black Rain Frog is known for its round, plump body and characteristically grumpy expression. It has a dark, charcoal-black coloration, which can sometimes be interspersed with lighter shades or patterns. When threatened, the Black Rain Frog can puff up its body to make itself look bigger and more intimidating to potential predators. This also makes it harder for predators to swallow. Despite its grumpy appearance, the Black Rain Frog has a rather charming call, which is used during mating season to attract females.

Brown: Among brown frogs, the Smokey Jungle Frog stands out as particularly unique. Found in Central and South America, this large species has several fascinating attributes that make it distinct. The Smokey Jungle Frog is one of the larger species of frogs, with adults often reaching lengths of up to 7 inches. Its size alone makes it notable among other brown frogs. This frog has a variety of unique defense strategies. When threatened, it can emit a loud, piercing scream to startle predators. Additionally, it secretes a sticky, noxious substance from its skin, which can deter predators and cause irritation. The Smokey Jungle Frog is a voracious eater with a diet that includes insects, other small invertebrates, and even small vertebrates like other frogs, making it a formidable predator in its ecosystem. Uniquely, this species creates foam nests for its eggs. The male releases a special fluid, and the male and female then beat their legs to whip the fluid into a frothy mass that encases the eggs. The foam nest protects the eggs from dehydration and predators.

White: One of the most intriguing white frogs is the Snowflake White's Tree Frog. The 'Snowflake' variant has a genetic mutation that results in reduced pigmentation, giving them a white or creamy color with varying degrees of mottling. Unlike true albinos, they can have some coloration, often light blue or green hues. They are incredibly adaptable to various environments, which is part of why they are widespread and not considered endangered. This adaptability also makes them a resilient species in the pet trade. White's Tree Frogs have a unique ability to limit water loss through their skin, which is an adaptation to the sometimes arid environments of Australia.

A MEAL AND PHOTOS FROM THE WEDDING DELIVERED TO THE MORNERS

The following story was told by Rav Paysach Krohn:

I'd like to share a touching story about Rav Matisyahu Solomon, highlighting his concern for others. In 1997, Rav Matisyahu arrived in Lakewood to serve as the mashgiach, having relocated from Gateshead. He settled on 6th Street, next to Rav Shimon Epstein and his family. Rav Shimon was a respected figure in Lakewood, and both he and Rav Matisyahu had large families, including daughters of the same age. A year after Rav Matisyahu's move, Rav Matisyahu's daughter became engaged, much to the delight of her close friend, the Epstein girl, who eagerly anticipated dancing at the wedding.

However, tragedy struck two weeks before the wedding when Rav Shimon Epstein passed away, plunging his family into mourning (Aveilus). In their Aveilus, they could not attend or participate in the Solomon's wedding festivities.

On the wedding day, the Epsteins returned home from work to find a heartfelt note from their neighbors, the Solomons.

In the note, the Solomons expressed sorrow for their absence at the wedding. The Solomons insisted the Epsteins not worry about dinner, as a meal from the wedding – including dishes from the smorgasbord, main course, and dessert – would soon be delivered to them.

True to their word, the caterer from the wedding sent the exact meal being served at the celebration, allowing the Epsteins to partake in the joy from their home.

Furthermore, Rav Matisyahu arranged for the photographer at the wedding to quickly develop photos of the Bedeken and Chuppah and have them delivered to the Epstein family. As they dined, they were able to view these images, symbolically sharing in the celebrations.

That's greatness! Thinking about the other person.



THE ANSWER

Regarding last week's question about the diary, Rav Zilberstein (in Upiro Matok Vayikra 202) writes that if the diary has no positive purpose for anyone, the diary should not be returned, rather burned. This is because it is lashon hara and the children therefore never inherited this diary.

This week's TableTalk is dedicated to
Yaakov and Yocheved Lieder and their beautiful family
for being amazing role models for their children, for all the support they give me and for making sure I have TableTalk every single week.

I thank them.
By Sandra Klein



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