



A MITZVA DILEMMA FOR THE SHABBOS TABLE



BREAKING A FRIENDSHIP

By Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

Sarah had a close-knit group of friends. One day, one of the girls in the circle, named Dina, became friends with Devorah, a girl who was not a member of the close-knit group. Over the weeks, Sarah noticed that this relationship was not a good one. Both Dina and Devorah were having a negative influence on each other, and they began to change their behavior and act out in unhealthy and decidedly unspiritual ways. Convinced that the relationship between Dina and Devorah was harmful, Sarah tried her best to convince Dina that Devorah was not a good influence, but Dina refused to listen. Sadly, Sarah watched as Dina and Devorah spiraled into a cycle of decline.

Finally, Sarah had an idea. She recalled



EVERLASTING ENCOURAGEMENT

Balak was concerned that the Jewish people should not destroy Moav and he therefore hired the services of Bilaam. Bilaam was a professional sorcerer whose success was widely acclaimed. This week's Parsha tells the story of Balak and Bilaam's enterprise to curse our people in great detail. It was clear from the outset that HaShem did not want Bilaam to curse them. Although He allowed him to go with Balak, He nevertheless kept Bilaam under tight control and Bilaam's attempt to curse the people was unsuccessful. Actually, HaShem placed prophetic words into Bilaam's mouth and he ended up blessing our people.

If the point of controlling Bilaam's words was to eliminate his curses upon His people, why did HaShem not tell Bilaam directly "You may not go, period!" So much drama could have been avoided.

Before addressing this question we must appreciate what magnificent accolades Bilaam attributed to us in the course of blessing us. Take for example when Bilaam tries to conjure up the image of how the Jewish people created the Golden Calf in order to bring curse upon them. "How wonderful are your tents, Yaakov; your dwelling places, Yisroel...His king shall be higher than Agag. His kingdom shall be exalted...Everyone who blesses you is blessed. Everyone who curses you is cursed." Behold! While focusing on the tremendous failing of our people by creating the Golden Calf, Bilaam using the words

how Aaron Hakohen would bring peace between two quarreling friends, and she decided to try the opposite. One day, she spoke to Devorah and said, "Do you really think that Dina is your friend? You should know that behind your back, she says all these horrible things about you." Devorah was shocked.

Then Sarah went to Dina and said, "Do you really think that Devorah is your friend? Behind your back, she tells me all these horrible things about you." Dina was equally shocked. Sure enough, Sarah's plan worked. Dina and Devorah had a falling out and stopped talking to each other. Dina quickly bounced back and rejoined her old circle of friends. Very quickly, she returned to her old, healthy, spiritual, and positive self.

Sarah was happy that she helped her friend Dina. However, when she saw how Dina and Devorah were not talking to each other, she felt bad. She had truly broken up their relationship. She wondered if she did the right thing. On one hand, she broke up an unhealthy relationship, but on the other hand, she told lies and made up things that weren't true. Although the result was positive, she literally lied to break up the relationship.

This question was brought to Rav Zilberstein. What do you think?

See Upiryo Matok Devarim Page 225



placed in his mouth by HaShem, identifies our people as worthy leaders of the world.

Balak decided to take Bilaam to a place from where he would be able to see the place where Moshe would die, in the hope that such an image would inspire Bilaam of the shortcomings of the people. Under that inspiration HaShem places the following words into Bilaam's mouth. "I have received a command to bless and I cannot reverse it. Ha-Shem has seen no iniquity in Yaakov nor has He seen crookedness in Yisroel. HaShem is his G.D and the Presence of their King is among them." Behold! While focusing on the death of Moshe, the leader who advocated for his people multiple times and will soon no longer be with them, Bilaam still receives the prophecy that HaShem's Presence will continue resting with them.

This story of Bilaam occurred just months before Moshe's death and we can well imagine the thoughts of fear our ancestors had. They may have trusted the leadership of Yehoshua as a replacement for Moshe's leadership but they knew he was not Moshe. They knew that even if Yehoshua was a prophet and a disciple of Moshe, nevertheless, he did not have the same relationship with HaShem as Moshe did. So many times they had angered HaShem by failing His expectations of them. So many times HaShem said that He would destroy the people had Moshe not interceded on their behalf. They understood that sooner or later they would fail HaShem's expectations. Who would be there to advocate for them?

Perhaps the reason HaShem included the story of Bilaam and had Bilaam express those prophecies were specifically to give confidence and encouragement to His beloved people that they need not worry. Even when Moshe will no longer be here to advocate for us the Presence of HaShem will always be with us. We may have to suffer tragic events but never, not forever, will HaShem abandon us. We are His forever.

Have a wonderful Shabbos.

Paysach Diskind



SHABBOS: CELEBRATING HASHEM'S CREATION

POLYCEPHALIC ANIMALS

Have you ever imagined a world where animals have more than one head? It might sound like something out of a fantasy book, but two-headed animals, known as polycephalic creatures, exist in our world. Let's take a closer look at these fascinating beings.

Polycephaly is the scientific term for having more than one head. It is derived from the Greek words "poly," meaning many, and "kephalē," meaning head. The formation of polycephalic animals is akin to the process that creates conjoined twins. It occurs when monozygotic twin embryos, which are supposed to split and develop into two separate organisms, fail to fully separate. As a result, the embryos merge partially, leading to an animal with two (or more) heads.

Polycephalic animals often face significant challenges, especially in the wild. The two heads may "argue" with each other, leading to disoriented movement. This lack of coordination makes survival in the wild particularly difficult. Most two-headed snakes, for example, only live for a few months, although some, like a two-headed black rat snake, have been known to survive for up to 20 years.

With snakes, another challenge is that two-headed snakes might attack each other, mistaking the other head for prey. This behavior, along with their disoriented movement, significantly impacts their survival rates in the wild. However, in captivity, with proper care, some of these animals can lead relatively normal lives.

This past fall, an extraordinary discovery was made in Massachusetts—a diamondback terrapin with two heads. Named Mary-Kate and Ashley, the turtle has captured the curiosity of both veterinarians and the public. With six legs and two fully functional heads, this turtle is quite the sight! This turtle's condition includes separate digestive tracts and possibly two sets of lungs and hearts, yet they share one outflow path. Despite their unusual anatomy, Mary-Kate and Ashley are thriving. Tests revealed that the right side has a more developed digestive system, but both sides are working together. It's essential for them to cooperate for swimming and feeding, as one side could inadvertently harm the other.

In an Australian reptile park, a truly rare discovery has captured the hearts of reptile enthusiasts and the public alike—a two-headed blue-tongued lizard. Found by the excited handlers at the park, this unique lizard has been affectionately named Lucky, earning the title of the 'most unique lizard in the entire wildlife sanctuary.' Animals with such deformities often

struggle with eating and defending themselves from predators. Despite the challenges Lucky faces, the dedicated staff at the Australian reptile park are committed to providing the best care for this extraordinary lizard.

In 2009, something extraordinary happened at Hlíðartungu farm in Ölfus, South Iceland—a two-headed lamb was born! This rare and unusual event caught the attention of many, including local veterinarian Páll Stefánsson. When farmer Björgvin Ásgeirsson noticed his sheep struggling during labor, he knew something was wrong. Soon, the lamb was born, and it became clear why the birth was so difficult. The lamb had two heads. Ásgeirsson described the lamb's first moments. As it opened both mouths to bleat, only one set of vocal cords produced sound. All of the lamb's nostrils flared simultaneously when it breathed, creating an eerie sight. Despite being born alive, the lamb's condition was severe. Deformities like these, though uncommon, prevent animals from living naturally. He felt compelled to put the lamb to sleep as it could not survive in its natural environment.

Have you ever heard of a two-headed shark? These fascinating and rare creatures are becoming more frequently discovered, shedding light on the mysterious and diverse world of marine life. Fishermen off the coast of Florida recently found a two-headed bull shark fetus, while in 2008, a two-headed blue shark embryo was discovered in the Indian Ocean. The phenomenon is not isolated; a 2011 study reported conjoined twin blue sharks in the Gulf of California and northwestern Mexico, and Spanish researchers found a two-headed Atlantic sawtail catshark embryo, the first known from an egg-laying shark species. Scientists believe genetic disorders are the primary cause of these anomalies; however, in the wild, factors such as pollution, viral infections, and inbreeding from overfishing may contribute to these deformities. Overfishing reduces the gene pool, leading to more frequent genetic abnormalities. Blue sharks, known for producing many offspring, have the most recorded two-headed embryos.

In 2016, a woman in Waco discovered a baby two-headed western rat snake in her backyard. Life with two heads isn't easy. Their two brains often send conflicting signals to their body, making their movements a bit uncoordinated. In February 2021, this unique challenge led to an injury when the snake's heads tried to move in different directions, hurting the left neck.

Thank you Hashem for your wondrous world!

OFFICER, I AM A JEW

In 1991, little Misha Turovskiy sat in his second-grade class in a Moscow private school. This was during the days of Perestroika, when the Soviet Union was entering a new period of religious awakening. The second-grade teacher decided to introduce prayer to her class. She called for the children's attention, instructing them to remain in their seats and repeat after her as she recited her prayers aloud. Little Misha sat in his seat and did not repeat after the teacher. The teacher called out, "Misha, stand up!" Little Misha stood up, quite embarrassed. "Why are you not reciting the prayers?" she asked. Little Misha answered confidently, "I am a Jew, and we do not pray in this way."

The teacher then told him to pray in the Jewish way. Misha told her that he did not know how Jews pray.

Later that day, when Misha came home, he asked his mother, "How do we pray?" His mother had no answer, but she knew that if her child was asking such a basic question, she must find the answer.

That Sunday, Margarita Turovskiy and her second grader found their way to the new Sunday Hebrew School that had recently opened in Moscow. Together, mother and son began their journey home.

There is more to this story, which will add much meaning and can perhaps serve as a lesson to us all.

Fifty-one years before this story, in 1942, 19-year-old Alexander Josef Katz, the father of Margarita, was on the front lines fighting the Nazis for the Soviet Union. His commanding officer was creating documentation for Alexander and asked him where he was from.

"Ukraine, sir," Alexander replied.

"Okay, I will write that you are Ukrainian," said the officer.

"No, officer, I am a Jew," Alexander insisted.

"That's okay, I will write Ukrainian for your nationality," the officer responded.

(To have documentation that reflected your nationality as Jew meant you would carry your shame with you every time you showed your papers. For this reason, many people grabbed the opportunity to have Russian or Ukrainian as their nationality instead of Jew.)

"Officer, I am a Jew," Alexander repeated.

His papers were processed, and Alexander Josef Katz remained a Jew.

He built a family that continues being Jewish 80 years later on a different continent.

Alexander Josef Katz's yahrzeit is this Friday, 20 Sivan.



THE ANSWER

Regarding last week's question about sending his friends to inquire about the house and ask about the price in order to convince him to lower the price, Rav Zilberstein (Upiryu Matok, Dvarim Page 220) writes that this is forbidden because of the prohibition of Onaas Dvarim, of hurting another's feelings. It's forbidden to give the impression that one wants to buy something when they, in fact, are not interested because it hurts the seller's feelings by raising their expectations and then dashing their hopes. Furthermore, it is forbidden because they were being deceitful in order to get the owner to lower the price.

This week's TableTalk is dedicated to the memory of our father

Alexander Josef Katz

whose Yahrzeit is the 20th of Sivan.

He was a great father who passed on his love for Yiddishkeit to his children.

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