

A MITZVA DILEMMA FOR THE SHABBOS TABLE



EVERY DENOMINATION

In honor of Achim's campaign, I'd like to share an amazing story about tzedakah.

Rav Meilich Biderman shared the following beautiful story: There was once a young man named Dovid who became a chassan (groom). After he got engaged, his teacher told him it would be worthwhile to learn the laws of Shabbos. He began studying these laws and came across a halacha in the Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 242) that emphasized the importance of Oneg Shabbos (enjoying Shabbos). The halacha stated that one should even borrow money, if necessary, to enhance Shabbos. About this, it is said that Hashem promises, "If you borrow for the sake of Shabbos, I will repay you."

Not long afterward, Dovid's friend Yoni mentioned that there was an inspirational Shabbaton taking place in Tzfas. Yoni asked, "Would you like to join me?" Dovid replied, "I would love to come, but I don't really have the money." Then he remembered what he had just learned—that if someone borrows money for the sake of Shabbos, Hashem will repay them. So, Dovid said, "I don't have the money, but can I borrow from you? Tell me exactly what it costs, and I'll pay you back after we return."



ALL THE BROTHERS MUST JOIN TOGETHER

As our Father Yaakov approached his final day he called his 12 sons to come around him so that he may bless them. His first request of his sons was to "gather around" and I will reveal to you what will occur at the end of days. He then requested from them to "gather in" and listen to your father Yaakov. Malbim explains that the term 'to gather around' is addressed to a group of people who are already together but they are being asked to come close for a given purpose. In this case, it was to hear the secret time when we will reach our destiny. The term "gather in" is used to address people who are far away from each other and they are requested to gather together and become closer to each other.

It would therefore follow that Yaakov should have first requested the brothers to gather in and then gather around. Our Sages infer from this question that initially Yaakov wanted to reveal when the 'end' would be; when our people will arrive at our destiny, when Mochiach will arrive. To impress upon his sons that this is a secret he therefore told them to come close to him. However, before sharing this secret with his sons, HaShem took it away from him. Yaakov realized that there was something amiss which would hold up that destiny. He understood that there was a lack of brotherhood between the brothers and until they all came together that 'end' would be elusive. In fact, the cause of the destruction of the Second Temple was the hatred between brothers. Yaakov therefore abandoned the idea of revealing the 'end' and instead told them that they should gather in and become close to one another and to listen to their father

Yoni agreed and said, “Not a problem.”

They went to the Shabbaton and had a very beautiful and uplifting time. Yoni kept an itemized list of all the expenses, including the cost of lodging, food, travel, and gas. After the Shabbaton, Yoni informed Dovid that the total cost was exactly 388 shekels and 60 agorot.

Dovid promised to pay him back soon. When Dovid returned home, he discovered a gift waiting for him from his bride (kallah). He opened it to find a beautiful wallet. But the surprise didn't end there—when he opened the wallet, he found money inside. And what did he find? The exact amount he owed Yoni: 388 shekels and 60 agorot!

Dovid was amazed. This amount seemed too precise to be a coincidence. He immediately called his kallah to thank her for the thoughtful gift. He also asked, “I'm curious—why did you give me such a specific, seemingly random amount of money?”

She replied, “Well, since this is a new wallet, I wanted to ‘initiate’ it with one bill of every denomination: a 200-shekel bill, a 100-shekel bill, a 50-shekel bill, a 20-shekel bill, a 10-shekel coin, a 5-shekel coin, a 2-shekel coin, a 1-shekel coin, a 50-agorot coin, and a 10-agorot coin. When I added it up, it totaled exactly 388 shekels and 60 agorot!”

Dovid realized that Hashem had indeed repaid him the exact amount he had borrowed, as the halacha had promised.

However, this led to an interesting mitzvah dilemma that was brought to Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein. Normally, when someone receives a gift of money, they are required to give maaser (a tenth of the gift). But in this case, the gift was the precise amount he had borrowed. Since it was clear that Hashem had repaid the debt directly through this gift, Dovid wondered: Did he still have to give maaser on the gift, or could he simply use the entire amount to pay back Yoni?

What do you think? Does Dovid have to give maaser on this gift?

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Yaakov. He was telling them that without all the brothers coming together the ‘end’ cannot come.

Every country and every region of the world has its unique culture and way of doing things. Even regarding the way they perceive things they differ one from another. This is the reason why Sefardim are different from Ashkenazim and Syrian Jews are different from Iranian Jews and so on. As we now approach the coming of Moshiach and all of our exiles are gathering close to each other, these differences create challenges. Now is the time for us to do what Yaakov instructed his sons. Gather in, do not stand far away from each other and listen to our father Yaakov. When we recognize that our common heritage is the words of our father Yaakov and the Torah he bequeathed to us and all the different trappings that differ from one group to another group are insignificant relative to who we are, then we can truly

gather in and respect those differences.

Every son of Yaakov and the tribes that derived from them was distinctly unique with their own purpose and goals just as no two pieces in a watch have the same function. These differences must not be cause for distancing one from another but quite the opposite, these differences must bring us together to serve HaShem following the words of Yaakov to become the complete People of Israel.

Since 1989 Achim has been dedicated to welcoming the Russian speaking members of Baltimore's Jewish community to Torah and to the ways of our people. Our work has been supported by the local community, American and Russian speaking alike. This week we are running our annual campaign that will enable us to continue ‘gathering in’ our brothers. Your participation would be greatly appreciated.

Have a wonderful Shabbos.

Paysach Diskind



SHABBOS: CELEBRATING HASHEM'S CREATION

THE MIGHTY RUSSIAN BEAR

Imagine a creature so large it towers above the tallest basketball player, strong enough to flip boulders, and fast enough to rival a galloping horse. Meet the Russian Bear, also known as the Kamchatka brown bear—the titan of the Russian wilderness! Found on the remote Kamchatka Peninsula in Russia's Far East, these incredible bears are among the largest in the world. But their size is just the beginning of their amazing story.

Standing on their hind legs, male Kamchatka brown bears can reach an astounding 9.8 feet tall—nearly twice the height of an average adult human! They can weigh up to 1,430 pounds, more than six times the weight of most people. Their powerful bodies are covered in dense fur, usually dark brown with a subtle violet sheen—a unique touch in the bear kingdom.

But these massive mammals aren't just about brawn; they're also built for survival. Their broad skulls and specialized molars help them chew through everything from tough plant roots to crunchy salmon bones. And they have the muscles and stamina to roam across vast landscapes, often traveling up to 40 miles in search of food.

Speaking of food, Kamchatka brown bears are the ultimate buffet enthusiasts. They are omnivores, eating whatever the land—and sea—has to offer. During the summer, salmon spawning in the rivers provide a feast fit for royalty. These nutrient-packed fish are crucial for the bears, helping them build up the fat reserves needed for their winter hibernation. When not feasting on fish, the bears turn to berries, nuts, roots, and even insects. Their diet is so varied that scientists call them "opportunistic feeders." If it's edible and within reach, they'll find a way to eat it!

Far from being landlocked giants, Kamchatka brown bears are exceptional swimmers. Their powerful strokes carry them across rivers, streams, and even open waters to access remote islands. Some have even been known to swim between the islands near the Kamchatka Peninsula!

Despite their size, they are surprisingly fast. They can reach speeds of up to 35 miles per hour—though only for short bursts. This speed comes in handy when chasing down prey or escaping danger.

Kamchatka brown bear cubs have an adventurous start to life. Female bears, or sows, usually give birth to three or four tiny cubs in the safety of their dens during winter hibernation. Born blind and helpless, the cubs rely entirely on their mother for warmth and nourishment. By

spring, the cubs are ready to emerge into the world, following their mother as she teaches them the skills they'll need to survive. Cubs stay with their mother for about two years before venturing off to live on their own. Mother Kamchatka bears are the epitome of dedication. Protecting their cubs fiercely, they teach vital survival skills while shielding them from predators. These lessons, learned in the first two years of life, are the foundation of a cub's survival in the wilderness. These bears can live up to 30 years in the wild, though many don't reach this age due to environmental challenges.

The shimmering violet sheen on a Kamchatka bear's dark brown fur is a striking feature unique to this subspecies. While lighter-colored individuals do exist, they are rare. This darker, gleaming coat not only makes these bears stand out but also reflects the unique environment they inhabit, where the bear's appearance mirrors the rugged beauty of its home.

Kamchatka brown bears are powerhouses of strength. With the ability to flip massive boulders and logs, they expose hidden treasures like insects and small animals beneath. Their immense power even enables them to lift objects heavier than themselves. This sheer physical prowess is crucial for survival, whether it's uncovering food or defending their territory.

Despite their size and power, Kamchatka brown bears are surprisingly shy around humans. They prefer to avoid us, with only about 1% of encounters resulting in aggression.

The Kamchatka Peninsula is a bear lover's dream, boasting one of the highest densities of brown bears in the world. With estimates ranging from 8,000 to 14,000 individuals, the region's rich salmon streams and bountiful resources support these magnificent creatures, creating a thriving population unlike anywhere else.

The Kamchatka brown bear isn't just a star in its habitat—it's also a key player in keeping the ecosystem balanced. As apex predators, they regulate populations of smaller animals. When they dig for roots or flip rocks to find insects, they unknowingly aerate the soil and spread seeds, helping plants grow. Even the leftovers of their meals, like salmon remains, provide essential nutrients for forests and rivers. In this way, the bears act as "ecosystem engineers," shaping their environment in ways that benefit countless other species.

Thank you Hashem for your wondrous world!

THE POWER OF CLARITY

Earlier in the week, I paid a shiva visit to the family of Nachum Pechatnikov z"l. His daughter, Dr. Esther Krug, shared the following story about her great-grandfather, Reb Zalman Yosef Pechatnikov.

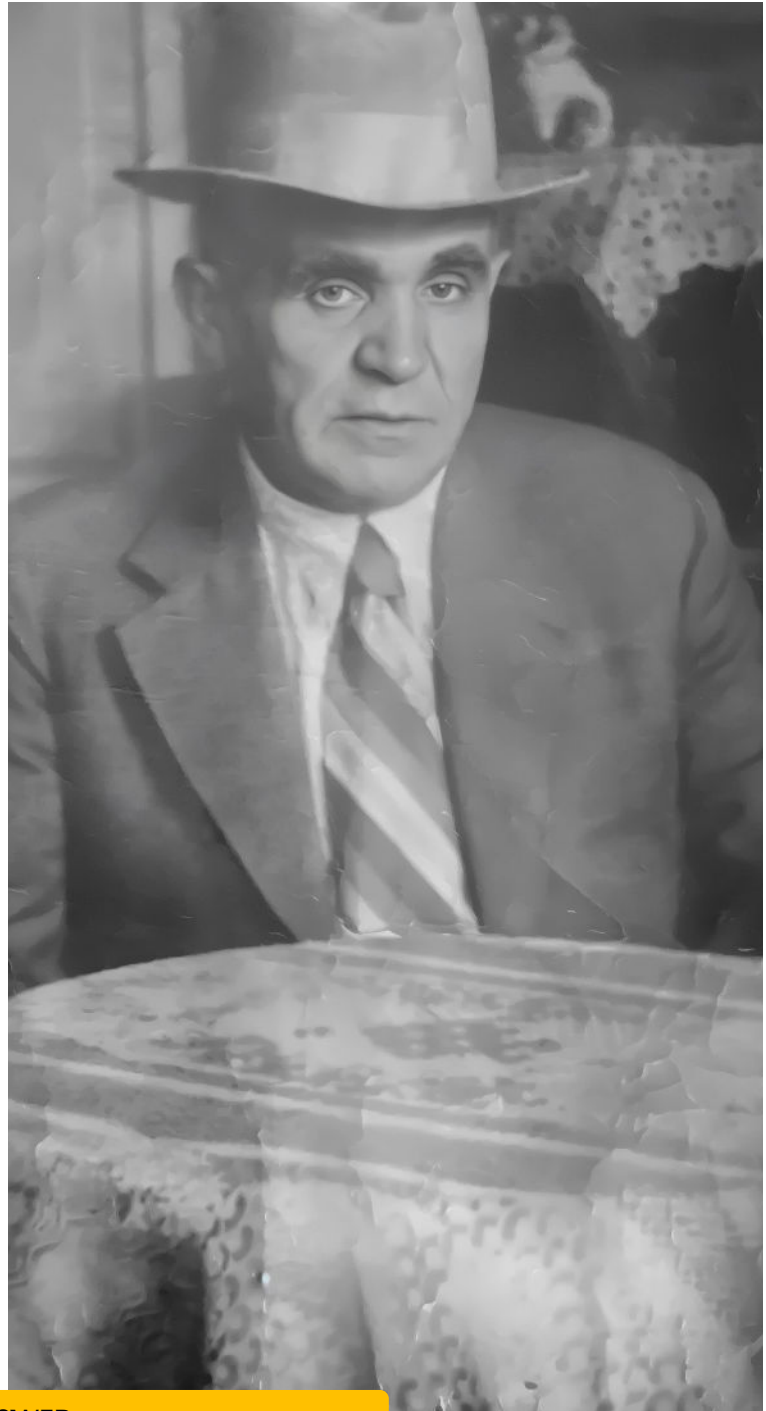
He was an affluent Jew who committed his life and the lives of his family to HaShem and His Torah during the darkest periods of Jewish history. He ensured that his children and grandchildren maintained Jewish names and that all had bris milah. For us American folk, this might sound quite benign. However, anyone who understands what was happening in Russia after the Bolshevik Revolution would be astonished that such a man lived in the heart of St. Petersburg.

At the beginning of the 1900s, Reb Zalman Yosef owned a palatial seven-room flat with plumbing and electricity in St. Petersburg. After the Bolsheviks successfully overthrew the Czar, they began confiscating homes and businesses from the bourgeoisie in the name of Communism. Reb Zalman Yosef understood that his flat would also be taken and reallocated to the proletariat. Despite his comfortable living quarters, he had the insight and clarity of mind to take swift action and make the best of a terrible situation.

At that time, there were many displaced, honest Jews who were on the run from the KGB for being religious or committing similar "crimes." The first place a displaced Jew would go was to the shul. Reb Zalman Yosef made it a point to find such homeless Jews at the shul—those who had no place to go—and bring them into his home. He even told his guests that he wanted them to relocate permanently to one of his rooms. In a short time, his entire flat became fully populated with six families, in addition to his own. Each family had one room, and they shared a common bathroom and kitchen.

As it turned out, the daughter of one of his "guest" families married his son, Shimon Mordechai, from whom Dr. Krug's father, Nachum, was born. He was zoche to have descendants who are yirayim and shleimim—honest, upstanding, G-d-fearing Jews.

Told by Paysach Diskind



THE ANSWER

Regarding last week's question about the undercover soldier who wanted to know when to put on makeup, Rav Zilberstein did not give a final psak (halachic ruling). However, he did point out that if the makeup was not lasting, like powder makeup, then it might only constitute a rabbinical prohibition. In such a case, it would seem preferable to apply the makeup on Shabbos to minimize the prohibition of lo silbash. However, if the makeup was lasting, like nail polish, then it would involve a Torah prohibition. In that case, it would be preferable to apply it before Shabbos to avoid breaking Shabbos. To minimize the prohibition of lo silbash, the individual should try to stay separate from other people while wearing it.

Since 1989 Achim has been reaching out and supporting Baltimore's Russian speaking community.

We are now running our 2025 campaign and ask you to contribute.

In addition to working with the Russian speaking population Achim has been producing TableTalk as a service to the community.

Please consider a gift of 50 to 100 dollars (one to two dollars an issue)

I thank you
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