

A MITZVA DILEMMA FOR THE SHABBOS TABLE



THE ANONYMOUS BENEFACTOR

By Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

Eli was a successful businessman who lived in Eretz Yisrael. He learned that the best way to give tzedakah (charity) was in a manner that the recipient does not know who is giving, and the giver does not know who is receiving. This way, the recipient is protected from any embarrassment.

One day, Eli went to his local grocery store and said, "I would like to give tzedakah anonymously. If you know of a customer who is struggling financially, I would like to pay their grocery bill—up to 2,000 shekels every month. Every two months, I'll give you 4,000 shekels to cover the cost."

The grocery store owner, Morty, thought this was very generous and said, "I know just the right person who would be a great candidate for this tzedakah." Morty then reached out to one of his customers, Zev, and told him, "I know a generous benefactor who wants to give tzedakah anonymously. He would like to cover your grocery bill—up to 2,000 shekels per month—and every two months, he will send me the payment."

Zev was deeply grateful and gladly accepted.



FREE AT LAST

Immediately following the Parsha of the revelation at Mount Sinai at which we received the Ten Commandments we enter the Parsha which introduces us to the plethora of mitzvos that relate to the relationship that man has to his fellow man. It deals with the financial relationships and responsibilities that we have to our neighbors and to those who entrust us with their belongings. We learn to be responsible for the list objects of our neighbor and to care for his animals and so on. It seems odd that the first mitzvah of the Parsha is that of owning a fellow Jew as a slave.

The Torah addresses the Jew who buys his fellow Jew as a slave. The owner must release him after working for six years. If the slave insists on remaining he may remain only until the Yovel year. After the Yovel the slave must be returned to his status of a free man.

I believe that if the Torah presents this mitzvah as the first of the set immediately following the Sinai experience there must be a great lesson.

As we consider the development of our nation from the early seeds of the Jewish people coming down to Egypt with Yaakov, these seeds germinated and began to develop into the embryonic stage of our nation. After two hundred years of gestation in the womb of Egypt HaShem finally took us from the state of slavery and oppression to become His own people. After being freed by Him we approached Mount Sinai at which we committed our lives and the lives of our children to observe His mitzvos and to live every moment of our lives in service to Him.

Behold! From our very inception as a people we find ourselves in a constant state of servitude. We began as slaves to Pharaoh and then we became the servants of HaShem. (I

For the next two years, everything went smoothly. Every two months, the grocery store received an automatic payment from Eli, covering Zev's grocery bill. Zev was happy, the grocery store was happy, and Eli was happy that he was in a position to give such tzedakah.

However, one month, Morty attempted to charge Eli, but the payment was unsuccessful. He tried calling him but couldn't get through. Since the payment of 4,000 shekels was a significant amount, Morty was concerned because he needed the money to manage his cash flow.

So, Morty went to Eli's home and finally found him there. Eli looked troubled and said, "I've been embarrassed to face you recently. My business has taken a serious downturn, and I actually owe an enormous amount of money. I'm actually bankrupt. I'm so sorry, but I just can't make the 4,000-shekel payment this time. I simply don't have the money."

Morty understood Eli's situation, but he still needed the money. So, he went to Zev and said, "I know this is the last thing you want to hear, but the benefactor who has been covering your grocery bill for the past two years is out of money. You've already used two months' worth of groceries, and I'm really struggling with my cash flow. I need you to pay the 4,000 shekels this time."

Zev was shocked. "What do you mean? You're the one who came to me and told me that you found someone willing to do this. How can you now ask me to pay for it? This was your idea, and you assured me that someone else would always cover it. How is this suddenly my responsibility?"

Morty responded, "I totally understand how you feel, but the bottom line is that you were the one who benefited from it. I need the money, and since the benefactor can no longer pay, I have no choice but to ask you."

They agreed to bring this question to a rav. What do you think? Does Zev, the poor recipient, have to pay the 4,000 shekels for the groceries he received? Or is this entirely Eli's responsibility, and Zev is not responsible at all?

See Upiryo Matok Devarim Page 182



use the word 'servants' because it sounds more comfortable to the ears rather than slaves of HaShem. However, our most honorable status is that we are 'avdei HaShem'. Being a slave has a dishonorable connotation because it carries the implication of being subhuman. That is because if one is a slave to a human he is actually subhuman; he is owned by a human, he is chattel of another human being. However, when one is a slave of HaShem, he is sub-GD! He is the chattel of HaShem, he belongs to the Creator! Without question, the status of belonging to HaShem is infinitely greater than being a free human being belonging to nobody. As a free human he is nothing but a creature that came nowhere and has no destiny. He is simply a mortal being. The one belonging to HaShem becomes immortally belonging to Him. Since HaShem committed Himself to forever keep us there is nothing that rises to that level of significance.) There is room for one to imagine that us Jews are perpetual slaves, never really being independent people. We might allow ourselves to think that if a fellow Jew sells himself into slavery the sale is valid and he returns to slavery permanently.

Therefore, the Torah sets the perspective straight; a Jew can never be sold into slavery. Even if he chooses to do so, the sale is not valid and must be freed after six years.

This is the introduction to all the laws that follow. All the following laws underscore the ownership that every Jew has to his property, to his body and to his family. Every other person must respect his property, his body and his family and in the event that his neighbor's property is lost he is responsible to care for till he finds him.

Even after receiving the Torah and making a total commitment to HaShem, we remain with an inherent freedom; we can not be sold.

A gentile can sell himself as a slave if he so wishes and that status remains forever; he never goes free.

The irony! When we become slaves to HaShem, we gain an inherent freedom and those who are free can be sold into perpetual slavery.

Have a wonderful Shabbos.

Paysach Diskind



SHABBOS: CELEBRATING HASHEM'S CREATION

RAFFLESIA ARNOLDII

Let's keep exploring some of the world's most unusual plants! Deep in the rainforests of Central and South America, a plant with bright red, lip-shaped leaves stands out among the greenery. Meet *Psychotria elata*. This eye-catching plant has amazed nature lovers with its bold look and important role in the rainforest. But there's more to it than just its famous "lips."

At first glance, *Psychotria elata* might look like a pair of red human lips growing on a plant! But these aren't flowers—they're actually bracts, which are special leaves that protect the plant's real flowers. These red bracts last only a few weeks and act like a giant "Welcome" sign for pollinators like hummingbirds and butterflies. The bracts feel smooth and waxy, which helps the plant hold onto moisture in the hot, humid rainforest. As the plant gets ready to be pollinated, the red color may become even brighter to attract more visitors. When the job is done, the bracts may turn purple before falling off, revealing small, white, star-shaped flowers hidden inside.

But why does *Psychotria elata* need such a flashy appearance? In the busy rainforest, where thousands of plants compete for attention, standing out is important for survival. The bright red color helps attract pollinators, and some scientists think the shape might even mimic insects or fungi that pollinators like. Interestingly, no two plants look exactly the same—each has its own unique "lip" shape.

This plant is part of the Rubiaceae family, which means it's a distant cousin of the coffee plant. It grows as a

small tree or shrub in countries like Costa Rica, Panama, Colombia, and Ecuador, usually reaching about 13 feet tall. Its deep green leaves and red bracts make it one of the most recognizable plants in the rainforest. Sadly, deforestation is threatening its survival, and it's becoming rare in the wild. Thankfully, some botanical gardens grow *Psychotria elata* to help preserve it. This plant can be grown in warm, humid places with partial shade. After its flowers bloom, it produces small, dark blue berries, which birds love to eat. As the birds spread the seeds, they help grow the next generation of *Psychotria elata* plants.

Besides being a fascinating plant, *Psychotria elata* has also been used by indigenous communities for medicine. The bark and leaves have been used to treat earaches, coughs, and skin irritations. Some groups also use it in traditional ceremonies and as a natural remedy for relaxation. Scientists are studying a chemical found in the plant called strictosidine, which may have antibacterial and antifungal properties. However, more research is needed, and using the plant as medicine without professional advice is not recommended.

With its one-of-a-kind look and important role in the rainforest, *Psychotria elata* is a true natural wonder. Thank you Hashem for your wondrous world!

HE DID NOT WANT TO TAKE HONOR AWAY FROM THE BEIS HALEVI OR SHIFT THE SPOTLIGHT ONTO HIMSELF.

Rabbi David Ashear told over the following beautiful story. Rabbi Yitzchak Blazer, (pictured) otherwise known as Reb Itzele Peterburger, was one of the leading masters of Mus-sar, and one of the primary disciples of Rabbi Yisrael Salanter.

At a young age, Reb Itzele became known as a great Torah scholar. He was once invited to join a rabbinical conference alongside the great Torah luminaries of his generation. At that conference, the Beis HaLevi, Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, presented a very difficult question in Gemara, which led to a heated debate among the rabbis. When no one could find a solution, the Beis HaLevi proceeded to deliver a brilliant answer. Everyone in attendance was in awe. Then, the Beis HaLevi asked his renowned son, Reb Chaim, for an answer. Remarkably, Reb Chaim offered a solution even more brilliant than his father's. The rabbis were amazed.

Later that day, the Beis HaLevi reflected on the conference and wondered why Rabbi Yitzchak Blazer had remained silent the entire time. He had heard that Rabbi Blazer was a great scholar, but it had not been apparent. Curious, he went to the bookshelf and pulled out Pri Yitzchak, a sefer on Gemara authored by Rabbi Blazer. Turning to the pages discussing the very topic he had raised earlier that day, the Beis HaLevi was astonished to discover that not only had Rabbi Blazer posed the same question, but he had also recorded both answers that were suggested during the conference.

This is true humility. Rabbi Blazer did not want to take honor away from the Beis HaLevi or shift the spotlight onto himself. Instead, he chose to remain silent, keeping his wisdom between him and Hashem. This made him even greater—and Hashem even prouder. The more we acquire this beautiful trait, the more peace of mind it will bring us.

A song based on this story can be heard at bit.ly/tabletalksong2



THE ANSWER

Regarding last week's question about the fine print for the fish sale, Rabbi Zilberstein (Upiryo Matok, Devarim, page 171) answered that if most customers understood the details, then this person is not entitled to a refund. However, if most customers made the same mistake, then he is entitled to a refund

This week's TableTalk is dedicated l'ilui nishmas
הניא רבקה בת ר' חיים ז"ל

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