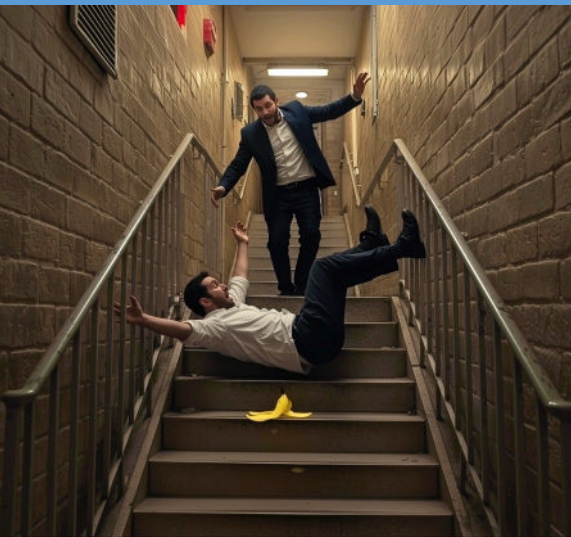


A MITZVA DILEMMA FOR THE SHABBOS TABLE



A SLIPPERY CASE OF RESPONSIBILITY

By Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

Eli was once walking down the steps of an apartment building in Eretz Yisrael. Just ahead of him was Yaakov.

Suddenly, Eli felt his foot slip—it was a banana peel that someone had carelessly left on the dark steps. He tried to catch his balance, but he wasn't successful. As he was about to fall, he instinctively reached out and grabbed Yaakov, the person in front of him, in an attempt to stabilize himself.

Very sadly, instead of steadying himself, Eli ended up knocking Yaakov down. Yaakov tumbled down



THE POWER OF HIS WORD

We begin the third Book of Vayikra, in which the Torah introduces us to the world of korbanos, offerings. These include animal, flour, and incense offerings. The offerings are called “ishei reiach nichoach laHaShem”—a fire offering that gives HaShem pleasure. In explaining why HaShem derives pleasure from the offerings, Rashi states: “It is a pleasure that I said the offering should be done, and it was done for My Will.” By extension, this applies to all mitzvos that we do for the sake of fulfilling the Will of HaShem. Every mitzvah was spoken by HaShem, and when we fulfill that mitzvah, His Will is being realized.

We find this same phenomenon in the creation of the world. When HaShem created His universe, He did so by uttering His Will: “Let there be light,” and there was light—and so on with the rest of creation. Behold! All of existence is nothing other than HaShem saying, and His Will being fulfilled. So why does He have special nachas when we fulfill His Will?

We know that before HaShem created the world, there was nothing—no space and no time. Naturally, this means that HaShem takes up no space and exists outside of time. If so, from what did He create the world? It certainly was not made from “nothing,” because nothing can be made from nothing. The answer is simple. The Torah tells us how He created the world: He said there should be a world. His Word is what the world is made from. His Word—His Will—is what brings time, light, space, and everything else into existence. We recite this every morning in Shacharis: “Blessed is He Who spoke and there was a world.”

The Torah, as well as our Sages who composed our prayers, teach us that exist-

the steps. Thankfully, no one was critically injured—but Eli did cause Yaakov to break his leg. This led to Yaakov incurring significant medical expenses.

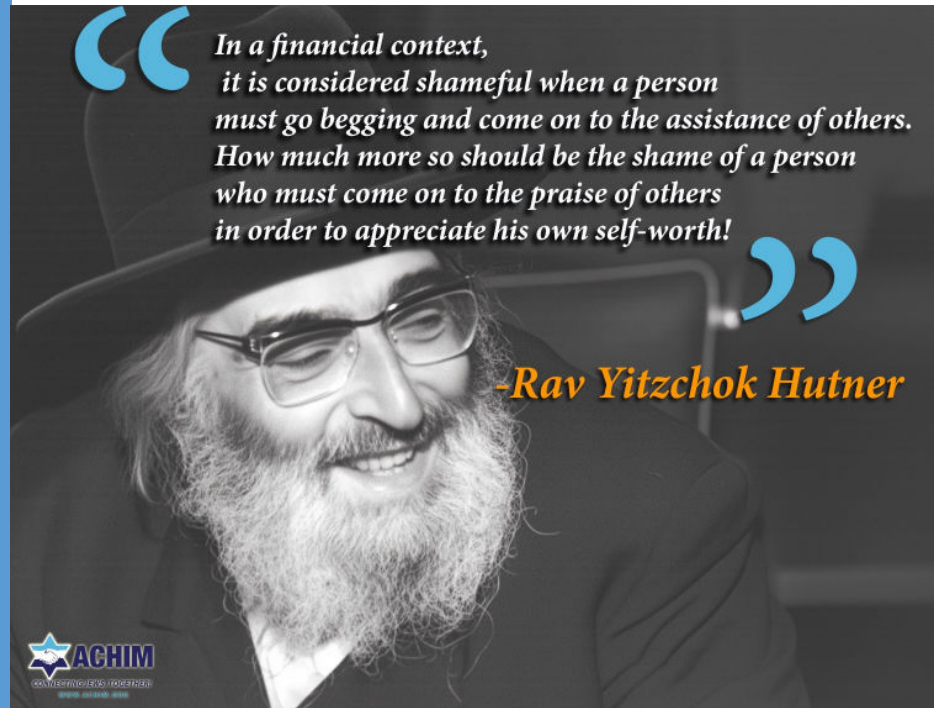
This raises the question: Does Eli have any obligation to pay Yaakov for the damage and medical expenses he caused?

On one hand, you could argue that it was a complete accident—Eli was not able to see the banana peel, and he had no intention to knock Yaakov down.

But on the other hand, Eli did cause Yaakov pain and financial loss, even if unintentionally.

What do you think? Is Eli responsible for covering Yaakov's medical expenses caused by the fall?

See Chashukei Chemed Bava Kama Page 208



ence finds its Source in HaShem's Word. His Word creates. The converse is also true: the denial of His Word cannot exist. Existence can only continue if it is supported by His Word.

At this point, we encounter a difficult question. How can Man have free will to reject HaShem's Will? Rejection of His Will is, in effect, nonexistence. How can Man possibly have the ability to reject His Word? This is truly a paradox for which we have no explanation. Yet we know that we do have the free will to reject HaShem c'v. It is an incredible gift—that a person can actually live an entire life in total rejection of His Word. Of course, once we exit this world and enter the real world, all that nonexistence we created will come back to haunt us.

Why did HaShem empower us with the ability to block His Will from happening? It's a very dangerous gift, considering

what happens when we use it.

HaShem gave Man the free will to reject His Word so that when Man does accept it, the accomplishment of bringing HaShem's Word into reality becomes the greatest achievement Man can reach. When a Jew recognizes that HaShem said to keep Shabbos, and because of that mitzvah he observes Shabbos, that Jew has made the Will of HaShem real in this world. Without this Jew's observance of Shabbos, HaShem's Will would not have been realized. But since he did observe Shabbos, he brought more of HaShem's Will into the world. The world became more complete.

Perhaps the reason HaShem receives such pleasure when His Word is fulfilled is because it makes the empowerment of Man worth it. Even though there is risk in giving Man that freedom, when he uses it to fulfill HaShem's Word, the creation of the world is vindicated.

Have a wonderful Shabbos.

Paysach Diskind



SHABBOS: CELEBRATING HASHEM'S CREATION

THE BLEEDING TOOTH FUNGUS

Imagine walking through a quiet pine forest. It's late summer, and the ground is damp from a recent rain. You're looking down at a patch of moss when suddenly—what's that?! A strange white lump, studded with bright red droplets, is hiding among the pine needles. It looks like a pastry oozing raspberry jam... or maybe something even more startling. You've just stumbled across *Hydnellum peckii*, better known as the Bleeding Tooth Fungus—and you're about to discover why this strange little mushroom is one of the most fascinating fungi in the forest.

When it comes to weird and wonderful organisms, the Bleeding Tooth Fungus might just win the gold medal. With its young, pale cap and vivid red ooze, it looks more like a Purim prop than a real living thing. But don't be fooled—this "bleeding" mushroom is all natural, and it plays an important role in the ecosystems where it grows.

First things first: it's not really bleeding. The red liquid is actually a thick, pigmented sap that leaks out of the fungus in a process called guttation. This is a natural way for some plants and fungi to release excess moisture when the soil around them is especially wet. Think of it like sweat—only with a little more flair! In this case, the "sweat" just happens to be red and glossy, thanks to a pigment scientists are still studying.

This dramatic look has earned *Hydnellum peckii* some colorful nicknames: "Devil's Tooth," "Strawberries and Cream," and "Red-Juice Tooth," just to name a few. But whether you think it looks spooky or sweet, one thing is for sure—it's unforgettable.

So, what exactly is the Bleeding Tooth Fungus? It's part of a group of fungi called hydroid fungi, which produce their spores not on gills like a grocery store mushroom, but on tiny tooth-like spines that hang from the underside of the cap. As it grows older, the white cap darkens to pink, tan, or even chocolate brown, and the red droplets usually disappear. The cap's texture also changes, becoming more funnel-shaped and cracked. Underneath, those little spines go from pink to buff as they mature, releasing their spores into the air to start the next generation.

The stem, which is mostly hidden underground, is velvety and pinkish at first. It can grow surprisingly tall—sometimes over 10 centimeters—but it often stays buried in the forest floor, tangled in pine needles and moss.

But what makes this fungus really special is what it does beneath the surface. The Bleeding Tooth Fungus doesn't live alone. It forms a hidden partnership with trees—especially pine trees—through a relationship known as ectomycorrhizal symbiosis. That's a fancy way of saying that the fungus and the tree help each other survive.

Here's how it works: the fungus wraps itself around the tree's roots and helps the tree absorb water and nutrients like nitrogen and phosphorus from the soil. In return, the tree gives the fungus sugar and carbon made through photosynthesis. Everybody wins! This underground teamwork helps forests stay healthy, especially in poor soils where nutrients are hard to find.

In fact, the fungus's underground network of mycelium—thin, root-like threads—can stretch for several feet beneath the forest floor, cre-

ating an invisible web that connects not just one tree, but many. Some scientists even call these fungal webs the "Wood Wide Web" because of the way they let trees communicate and share resources. The Bleeding Tooth Fungus is just one of many forest fungi helping to keep that network alive. Because it's so good at mineralizing organic compounds in the soil, *Hydnellum peckii* is especially useful in nutrient-poor, acidic forests. Its role in the ecosystem helps keep forests stable, especially coniferous ones.

Now you might be wondering: if I found one of these in the woods, could I eat it?

Well... technically yes, but we wouldn't recommend it. *Hydnellum peckii* is not poisonous, but it's definitely not a treat. People who've tried it say it's extremely bitter and hot, with a peppery, burning taste that lingers even after drying. One brave forager described the experience as "bitterness and regret." So while it probably wouldn't hurt you, it also wouldn't do you any favors. Its strong taste might be nature's way of saying, "Don't eat me!" And most animals seem to agree—it's rarely nibbled by wildlife.

Even though it's bitter to taste, the Bleeding Tooth Fungus can actually give off a sweetish scent. Some mushroom hunters have described its odor as faintly fruity, especially when the fungus is fresh. But don't let your nose convince your mouth—its taste is harsh, peppery, and lingering. Definitely not dessert.

But while it's not good for dessert, the Bleeding Tooth Fungus might have a future in your medicine cabinet. Inside those vivid red droplets are more than just pigments. Scientists have discovered that this fungus contains special chemical compounds that could help in medicine. One of them, atromentin, has been found to act as a natural anticoagulant—something that can prevent blood clots, like the medicine heparin. It also seems to have antibacterial effects, fighting off certain harmful microbes. Another compound, thelephoric acid, is being studied for its potential use in treating neurodegenerative diseases like Alzheimer's. Imagine that—a fungus that looks like it's bleeding, but might actually help people stop real bleeding or heal from disease! Hashem never ceases to amaze.

Believe it or not, some studies have shown that the Bleeding Tooth Fungus can accumulate certain metals from the soil—like caesium. This property could make it useful for environmental research, especially in studying soil contamination or natural remediation processes.

The Bleeding Tooth Fungus may look like a forest horror story, but it's really a symbol of how complex, interconnected, and incredible Hashem's creation can be. It thrives in hidden places, helps its forest neighbors, creates strange beauty, and may even contribute to medicine one day. And it's not alone—there are thousands of fungi out there playing equally important roles in the web of life, many of them just as strange and wonderful.

Thank you Hashem for your wondrous world.

HALF A BAR OF CHOCOLATE

An incident from Rav Shimshon Pincus's childhood clearly revealed an important character trait he would carry throughout his life: caring deeply about other people's spiritual well-being, even if it meant sacrificing something important to him.

This happened during Chol HaMoed Pesach, when the young Shimshi asked his mother, Chava Pincus, for half a bar of chocolate. His mother was surprised, as chocolate was expensive and not usually given out casually especially in large amounts. She wanted to teach her children to appreciate special treats and not take them for granted.

Shimshi was determined, so he made an offer: "If I learn Torah for three hours straight, could I get the chocolate as a reward?"

Impressed by his dedication, Chava agreed. Shimshi kept his promise and studied Torah seriously for three hours. He earned the chocolate bar, but to Mrs. Pincus's great surprise, instead of eating it himself, Shimshi immediately gave it to a friend.

Only afterward did Mrs. Pincus discover why. Earlier that day, Shimshi had seen his friend eating chocolate that lacked a proper hechsher (kosher certification). This upset Shimshi deeply especially because it was Pesach, making the concern even more serious. Shimshi knew that just talking wouldn't convince his friend, so he decided to act.

He made a deal with his friend: "If you throw away that chocolate now, I promise to get you half a bar of kosher chocolate."

His friend trusted him and agreed right away. Shimshi then took on the difficult task of learning Torah for three hours to fulfill his promise.

This anecdote reflected a character trait that would guide Rav Shimshon throughout his life: an unwavering commitment to helping others uphold their spiritual integrity, even when it meant considerable personal sacrifice.

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THE ANSWER

Regarding last week's question about the car that was blocked in by taxis: Rav Zilberstein (Chashukei Chemed Bava Kamma page 193) answered that the Gemara in Bava Kama states that if a person blocks an entire public road with barrels, a passerby is permitted to break the barrels in order to get through. Therefore, in this case, you may call the taxis and tell them to drive to a random location. Normally, that would be considered causing damage, but it is permitted if it is the only way to clear the way. However, one may not send them to an extremely distant location. The destination should be just far enough to incentivize them to leave their meal or current activity. Furthermore, the caller is not permitted to lie and say, "I'm in this place waiting for you," if that is not true.

This week's TableTalk is dedicated to the memory of
Alla Chernova
Alla bas Isaac
the dear mother and mother in law of Albina and Leon Kisilenko



Brad E. Kauffman Esquire and Kauffman and Forman P.A.
specializing in corporate and construction law,
estates, wills and trusts and business litigation.

