

A MITZVA DILEMMA FOR THE SHABBOS TABLE



PUBLIC TAKEDOWN

By Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

This week's Parsha talks about lashon hara and the terrible consequences of speaking lashon hara. This leads us to the following true story.

A city in Eretz Yisrael was having an election for mayor. Chaim, a religious fellow, decided to take it upon himself to oppose one of the candidates. For whatever reason, Chaim felt that this candidate was unfit for the job and had a bad character. He made posters and flyers explaining why this person shouldn't be elected and put them in every single shul in town. He posted them in the shuls erev Shabbos, assuming everyone would see them over Shabbos.



PERSONAL MESSAGING

We are currently reading the Parshios of the Book of Vayikra which is referred to as the Toras Kohanim, the Laws of the Priests. In reality a significant part of Vayikra deals with laws that do not relate to the priests exclusively but to the entire nation such as the laws of kosher animals, permitted relations and prohibited relations, the laws of tumah and tahara and many laws that deal with interpersonal relationships and so on. The 'priests' that Vayikra discusses in the Jewish nation, who are to be HaShem's Nation of Priests. The entire nation is to be the priests of HaShem for the rest of the world. We were chosen to deliver the Word of HaShem to all members of Mankind. When we read the laws of this Book it ought to elevate us in appreciating how special we are and the responsibility that lies upon us.

With that in mind it gives us pause considering our Parsha which deals with the laws of tzoraas. Tzoraas is a skin disorder that is generated from a behavioral disorder from which the affected individual suffers. This behavioral issue may be a habit of speaking lashon hara, or they may suffer from jealousy and stinginess and other similar disorders. This disease has no physical source; it is generated by miraculous means. Our Parsha indicates that this disease only affects members of the Jewish people; non-Jews are not affected even if they suffer from those behavioral issues.

This is what should give us pause. For whatever reason it does not apply to non-Jews it certainly indicates some form of flaw that we have which the nations of the world do not share. If only we are susceptible to this malady and others are not there is clearly some shortcoming with our people. How is it that this week's double Parsha, the center of Vayikra, the Book which is focused on our Priestly

When Chaim got home that Friday night, he was approached by a close friend. The friend explained to him that what he had done was public lashon hara — he was embarrassing the candidate and setting himself up for severe divine punishment, as we see in this week's Parsha.

Chaim thought about it and felt very bad. He decided to remove all the signs. He planned to spend the rest of Shabbos going to every single shul to take down the posters.

But he wondered: would taking down the signs that were attached be a problem on Shabbos? Normally, it's not allowed to take down posters because of the prohibition of kore'a (tearing). But in this case, would there be a heter in order to avoid continuing the violation of lashon hara?

Chaim brought the question to Rav Zilberstein. What do you think? Would he be allowed to take down all the posters on Shabbos?

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position, is focused solely on this national flaw?

Sforno explains that the function of this disease is to communicate a specific message to the one who is infected; "Correct your behavior". It is a message sent to him by HaShem Himself. It is not sent through natural means. Although it is not private messaging because it is visible for all to see and for all to know about, nevertheless, it is definitely personal messaging from the Creator Himself. This is a heightened level of 'hashgacha pratis', personal attention by HaShem. HaShem becomes the infected person's personal trainer. This individual gets constant feedback on how he is progressing by simply monitoring the condition of his skin disease. Once he achieves the 'thumbs up' from his Trainer the infection will go away and he knows that his Trainer approves of him. So long as the infection is there he knows that HaShem has not yet approved of his changes and more work needs to be done.

Sforno writes that even among our people most members are, in fact, not worthy of this special attention; it is only those individuals who live their lives with HaShem as their sole source of decision. Most people, including most members of the Jewish people, make life decisions based on material attraction, what will afford them more honor, more respect, more money and other considerations. To such people HaShem does not offer this remarkable 'hashgacha'. Only those people who live their lives in constant awareness of HaShem, as Dovid Hamelach who writes "I place HaShem opposite me constantly". The one who lives every moment of their life with complete consciousness of HaShem's Presence in front of him will be one to whom HaShem will send messages. When HaShem knows the recipient will read the message, He sends it to correct the problem. The individual whose life decisions are directed by other considerations may not pay attention to any messages he receives from HaShem and hence that special hashgacha is not offered.

Perhaps the reason why these central Parshios of Vayikra discuss the laws of tzaraas is to teach us how to be the priests of HaShem and the benefits that come with it.

Have a wonderful Shabbos.

Paysach Diskind



SHABBOS: CELEBRATING HASHEM'S CREATION

THE MATA MATA TURTLE

Deep in the winding waterways of South America's Amazon and Orinoco basins lives one of nature's most astonishing reptiles: the mata mata turtle. At first glance, you might think you're looking at an alligator hiding in a turtle's shell. But look closer — that isn't an alligator. It's a turtle, a master of camouflage, and one of the most specialized hunters on Earth.

The mata mata (pronounced MAH-tah MAH-tah) is a turtle like no other. From its knobby, bark-like shell to its pointy "snorkel" nose, every part of its body has been shaped by Hashem to fit a very particular way of life: the life of an underwater ambush predator.

Let's dive in and meet this amazing creature face-to-face! First impressions matter — and the mata mata turtle definitely makes one! Its head is wide and flat, almost triangular, covered in fleshy flaps of skin and small knobby tubercles. These weird folds and bumps sway gently in the water like leaf litter, helping the turtle blend into its surroundings. It even sports whisker-like barbels on its chin and around its mouth that act like underwater antennae, picking up tiny movements and vibrations nearby.

And that long, giraffe-like neck! Unlike many turtles that pull their heads straight back into their shells, the mata mata has a neck so long that it can't retract it backward. Instead, it folds its neck sideways under the edge of its shell — like tucking an arm behind your back! At the very tip of its long neck sits a small, tubular snout. This snout acts as a snorkel, allowing the turtle to breathe air while the rest of its body remains perfectly still and hidden underwater.

Instead of swimming around looking for food, the mata mata specializes in sitting absolutely still for hours — just waiting for an unsuspecting fish to swim a little too close.

When it comes to camouflage, the mata mata is a true artist. Its shell, called a carapace, looks exactly like a chunk of old, rotting wood. It's rough, ridged, and covered with bumps, which help break up its outline and make it disappear against the muddy, leaf-strewn bottoms of rivers and swamps.

You might think a turtle that lives underwater would be a good swimmer — but not the mata mata! These turtles are awkward in open water. They don't glide gracefully like sea turtles or zip along like snapping turtles. Instead, they prefer to walk slowly and carefully across the muddy bottom, using their strong, webbed feet and sturdy claws.

This "bottom-walking" style fits their lifestyle perfectly. They live in slow-moving, shallow waters — like swamps, marshes, backwater pools, and slow streams — where stealth and stillness are better survival strategies than speed. With a body perfectly made for lurking in murky water, the mata mata becomes a ghost among the leaves, all but invisible to both predators and prey.

Patience is key for an ambush predator. The mata mata can sit motionless for hours, blending seamlessly into the underwater landscape. But when dinner swims by, this turtle moves faster than you can blink!

The mata mata uses an incredible technique called suction feeding. Here's how it works: the turtle spots a small fish swimming nearby. Suddenly, it lunges forward, opening its massive mouth as wide as it can.

In an instant, it creates a powerful vacuum that sucks both water and prey into its throat. Once the fish is inside, the turtle closes its mouth, slowly expels the extra water, and swallows the unlucky meal whole. No chewing, no tearing — just slurp, gulp, and done!

It's one of the fastest feeding strikes in the animal kingdom — and all done by a creature that otherwise moves slower than a drifting leaf. High-speed photography has captured mata mata feeding strikes. When they open their mouths to suck in prey, the action happens in less than 0.02 seconds — so fast it's hard for the human eye to even register the movement!

Let's talk about that funny name. The name "Mata Mata" is often said to mean "kill kill" in Spanish — a fitting title for a stealthy predator! However, some experts believe the name may come from a local Indigenous Tupi language, referring more to its appearance than its behavior. Unlike snapping turtles or other aggressive reptiles, the mata mata rarely fights when threatened. Instead, it relies entirely on its ability to vanish into its surroundings, proving that in nature, sometimes the best defense is simply not being noticed.

The waters where mata mata turtles live are often murky and dark. Light barely penetrates the dense, tannin-rich swamps and streams. That's fine by the mata mata, which has pretty poor eyesight anyway. Instead, it relies on an amazing set of built-in sensors.

Its chin barbels and head flaps are loaded with special nerve endings that can detect the tiniest ripples and vibrations in the water. Even if it can't see a fish, the turtle can "feel" it swimming nearby. Add to that a well-developed tympanum (an external ear structure) for hearing underwater sounds, and you've got a reptile that navigates and hunts using a finely tuned cocktail of senses.

It's a bit like a submarine outfitted with sonar — except this submarine is alive and shaped like a pile of sticks!

If left undisturbed, mata mata turtles can live long, slow-paced lives. In captivity, they've been known to live 35 years or more, and some individuals might even push past 40 or 50 years.

Their slow metabolism, low activity levels, and hidden lifestyle help them avoid predators — though young turtles must still be wary of wading birds, caimans, and large fish. But once they reach adult size, with shells up to 18 inches long and bodies weighing over 38 pounds (about the weight of a four-year-old child!), there aren't many natural threats left.

Unlike many turtles that spend part of their lives basking on logs or riverbanks, the mata mata almost never leaves the water. It is a true aquatic specialist, perfectly suited to life underwater from hatchling to old age.

When baby mata matas hatch, their shells aren't dull and brown like adults. Instead, the edges are brightly colored with pink or reddish hues, which fade away as they grow older and settle into a life of camouflage.

Thank you Hashem for your wondrous world!

I THOUGHT I WOULD KEEP IT TO MYSELF

There are many middos that a person should acquire, but ayin tova is the entranceway to all the others. Having an ayin tova for a friend—being happy for him when things go well for him, taking care regarding what you say about another person, not speaking lashon hara or rechilus about him... Watch your mouth and have a good heart."

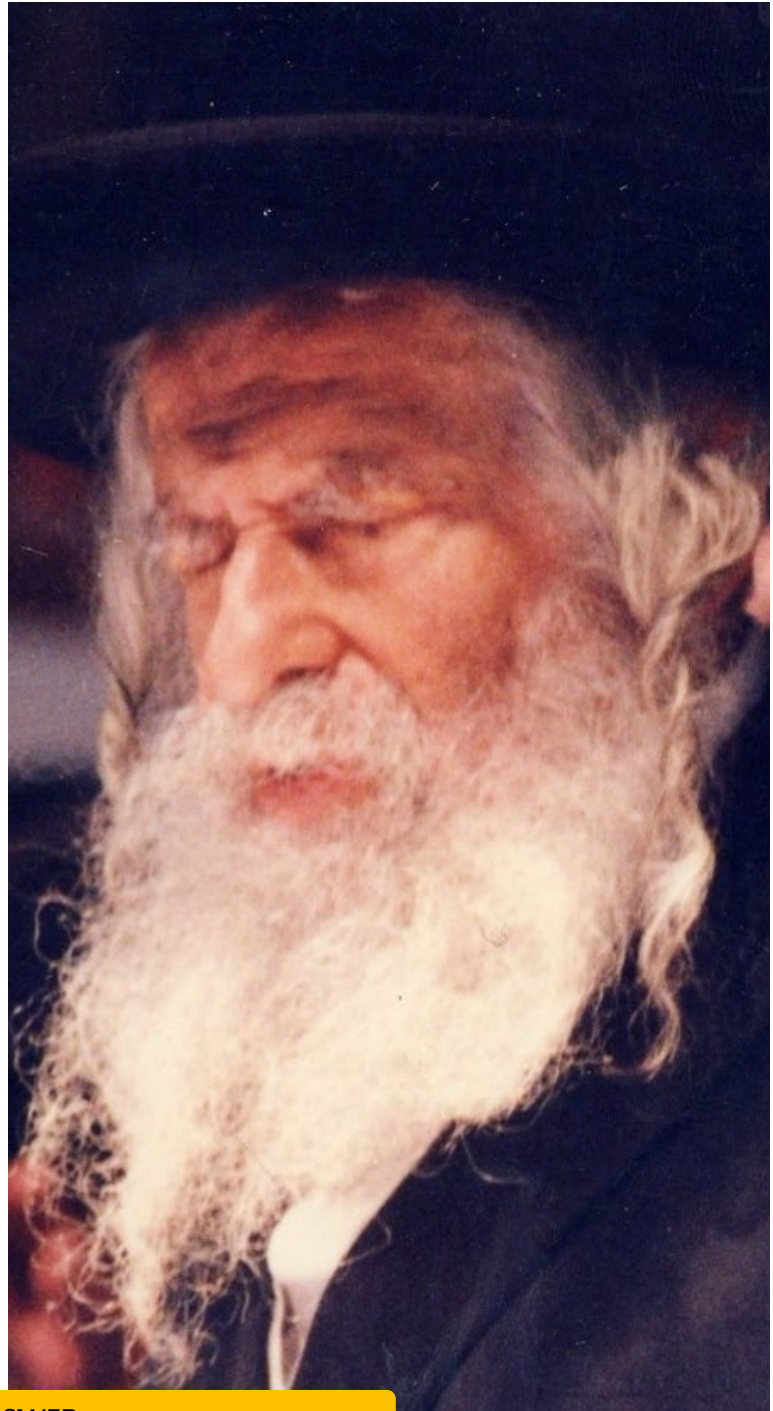
These words were said by the Pnei Menachem to a young bachur who sought his guidance. His words echoed the Chiddushei Harim, who taught that through the middah of ayin tova, a person could access all middos. Indeed, throughout his life, and especially in the years of his leadership, the middah of ayin tova, or in the Rebbe's words, "farginin yennem"—being happy for others—was a central component of his teachings. He felt that both on a macro level, the generation needed to improve in this area, and on a micro level, each individual needed to accept upon himself the desire to acquire this middah.

It wasn't only his own chassidim whom the Pnei Menachem encouraged in this matter. His eye doctor, Dr. Mordechai Silenfreund, related a fascinating story: "As a result of being involved in the Rebbe's care, I became one of his great admirers. Once, before I left Israel to attend a major medical conference on eye disease, I went to take leave of the Rebbe and receive his blessing. He told me, 'When you are together with other doctors, it is important to tell them that part of cultivating ayin tova, "good eyesight," in patients is by having "a good eye." If any doctor has discovered some type of new, innovative method of treating a patient that can improve the patient's condition, he should not keep it to himself in order to get credit as the only doctor who can provide this unique treatment. Rather, he should have an ayin tova! Share that knowledge with other doctors so that they too can help their patients have an improved quality of life.'"

During Dr. Silenfreund's presentation at the conference, he conveyed the message that the Rebbe had shared with him. A bit later, a renowned specialist approached him and said, I want to tell you something. I recently figured out something that is a medical breakthrough in my field. Initially, I thought I would keep it to myself so that I would be the exclusive provider of this treatment. But now that I heard the message from the Rabbi that you gave over to the doctors, I have decided to share it with the other doctors at the conference so that their patients can also benefit."

The Rebbe would add, "A person who has been blessed with a particular talent, whatever that talent may be, should do his utmost to share it with others. Not only is it good for them, but it is good for him as well. We know that a well that is not used will ultimately dry up. Only when one continuously draws water from it does it produce its maximum. So too, a person who shares his talents with others is himself enriched as a result. I know numerous people," the Rebbe expounded, "who, when they were young, were brilliant bnei Torah with a great future ahead of them. But now, when I look at them, they are broken men. Why? Because they did not share their abilities with others. From sharing, from ayin tova, one only gains."

From The Pnei Menachem, By Rabbi Avrohom Birnbaum, Published By Artscroll Mesorah and reprinted with permission



THE ANSWER

Regarding last week's question about the man who blew the shofar, Rabbi Zilberstein does not give a conclusive answer and presents opinions that consider it a problem, as well as opinions that do not. Rav Akiva Meister answered that we pasken this would not be considered a mitzvah haba'ah b'aveirah, and the person who blew the shofar, along with everyone else, would fulfill their mitzvah of shofar.

This week's TableTalk is dedicated in honor of this year's 24th yahrzeit of our dear father

נחום משה בן מיכאל בן ציון

Rabbi Nahum M. Ben-Natan, z"l And in memory of our dear mother

יפה בת מנחם מנדל ע"ה

Mrs. Janet Ben-Natan

Our parents dedicated their life to bringing Jews from all walks of life closer to Hashem. Their life revolved around Shabbos and having guests and lively discussions at the Shabbos table. May the Torah discussions generated from this week's TableTalk be an aliyah for their neshamos.

Adeena and Moshe Pelberg



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