

A MITZVA DILEMMA FOR THE SHABBOS TABLE



HALL BLOCKER

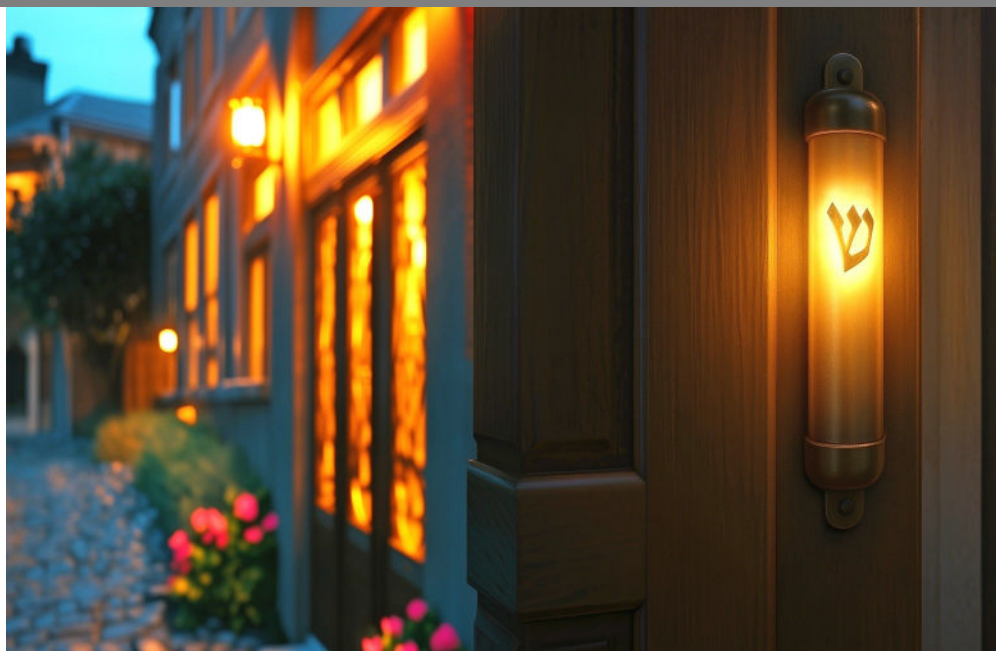
By Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

Last week, we learned a question about taking down a sign. Here is another question that involves a sign.

Dovid's daughter got married, and he was planning a Shabbos Sheva Brachos celebration. He had paid for the event to be held in a hall in Eretz Yisrael and was expecting 100 guests to attend.

On Friday night, Dovid and all the guests davened at the shul near the wedding hall. After davening, Dovid, his family, and all the guests proceeded to the wedding hall for the celebration. However, when they arrived, they encountered an unexpected problem.

Someone had placed a sign on the wedding hall doors. Normally, signs were permitted in designated areas on the doors. However, this particular person had carelessly placed their sign right between the double doors, making it impossible to open them without tearing the



OVERDOSE

The Ramak, Rav Moshe Cordovero, opens his Tomer Devorah with the following principle: Since HaShem created man in His Image, with a likeness to Him, it is therefore incumbent upon every person to follow in HaShem's ways. For if one does not follow in HaShem's ways, that man carries the Image of HaShem in a vessel that is not acting in accordance with its purpose. However, when a person conducts his actions and way of life in alignment with HaShem's ways, he brings honor to that Image.

Along the same lines, we can understand the opening verse in Parshas Kedoshim. HaShem instructs Moshe to tell the entire nation of Israel: "Be holy, for I, HaShem your God, am holy." Since we are so closely connected to HaShem, we must strive to reflect His holiness in our own lives.

The Midrash explains this verse as HaShem saying to His people: "Be holy just as I am holy. But do not think that you should be as holy as I am, for I am your Gd, and that level is not attainable by you." The implication here is that there is a level of kedusha (holiness) that is similar to HaShem's, though not identical. What are these levels?

Regarding the three levels of kedusha found in Yeshayahu 6:3, the Sefas Emes explains that the lowest level corresponds to the angels, who are completely detached from the material world. They live in an entirely holy environment, removed from physicality, and therefore possess the lowest level of kedusha. The next level is found in the Jewish people. Our level is

sign on Shabbos. As a result, the doors could not be opened.

They tried looking for a non-Jew to remove the sign, but were unsuccessful. With no other option, everyone went to a neighbor's or friend's house, where they served matzah and tuna fish. Despite the setback, they had a joyous and meaningful Sheva Brachos. However, all the food that had been prepared in the hall went unused and ultimately spoiled.

After Shabbos, the caterer sent Dovid a bill for \$2,000 for the costs of the food, the hall, and the waiters. They claimed that even though the food was not eaten, all of it had been cooked, the hall had been reserved, and the waiters were ready to work.

However, Dovid felt he shouldn't have to pay, since the food, hall, and waiters were never used. He argued that the person responsible for posting the sign was at fault.

The flyer poster felt bad about what had happened, but he believed that he shouldn't be responsible for covering the entire cost. After all, the damage seemed very indirect.

They agreed to bring the question to a rav: Who is responsible for paying the caterer? Should the catering company absorb the loss? Is Dovid, the ba'al simcha, obligated to pay, even though the food wasn't used? Or is the person who blocked the door with the flyer liable for the damages?

What do you think?

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MITZVA MEME



higher than that of the angels because we exist within and interact with the material world, yet still maintain our commitment to holiness. Even though our lives involve engaging with physical matter, we direct our efforts and choices toward holy purposes. Our kedusha actually elevates the material world. Hence, our level is higher than that of the angels.

The highest level of kedusha exists only with HaShem. HaShem is the source of all existence, including the material world. Despite being the source and sustainer of the physical world, His holiness remains entirely unaffected. The power of His kedusha is absolute and transcendent.

Let us return to the Midrash. HaShem implores us to be holy just as He is holy. His kedusha is one that coexists

with the material world. He therefore desires that we, as members of this material world, emulate that holiness. This level is higher than that of the angels, whose kedusha cannot mix with the physical at all.

HaShem tells us not to reach for His own level of kedusha, which would mean an even deeper involvement in the material world while still maintaining perfect holiness. We are not capable of that. If we were to immerse ourselves too heavily in the material, we would risk becoming overwhelmed and losing our spiritual integrity.

Our engagement with the material world must be governed by the parameters set by the Torah. The Torah provides the precise measure of material involvement that enables us to elevate it to holiness. Should we, Gd forbid, deviate from this prescribed measure, we could suffer from an overdose.

Have a wonderful Shabbos.

Paysach Diskind



SHABBOS: CELEBRATING HASHEM'S CREATION

THE THORNY DEVIL, MOLOCH HORRIDUS

If you ever find yourself wandering through the scorching deserts of Australia, keep your eyes peeled. Among the red sands and scraggly shrubs lives one of the planet's most bizarre reptiles: the thorny devil. At first glance, this lizard might look like something out of science fiction—a creature cobbled together from spines, camouflage, and desert dust. Let's take a wildy journey into the world of the thorny devil.

The thorny devil, scientifically named *Moloch horridus*, lives in some of the driest and most unforgiving regions on Earth: Australia's central and western deserts. These areas can go months without rain, and daytime temperatures often soar above 100°F (38°C). But where most animals would wither, the thorny devil thrives.

One look at this creature, and you can tell it's no ordinary lizard. Its entire body—head to tail—is covered in an armor of rough, cone-shaped spikes. These spines aren't sharp like needles. In fact, they're relatively blunt. But they serve a powerful purpose: camouflage and defense. Against a backdrop of thorny plants and cracked earth, the thorny devil disappears like a trick of the light. Those spines also help deter predators like birds, snakes, and goannas, who might think twice before biting into what looks like a prickly cactus with legs.

But perhaps the most jaw-dropping part of this armor isn't how it scares enemies away—it's how it drinks. Imagine being able to collect and absorb water without even opening your mouth. That's exactly what the thorny devil does. Its skin is crisscrossed with tiny grooves and channels, like a network of miniature canals. When dew or rain hits its body, water gets pulled along these channels by capillary action—all the way to its mouth. It can even stand in a puddle or rub against damp vegetation to soak up moisture through its feet and belly. This incredible gift from Hashem means the thorny devil doesn't need to find lakes or puddles. In fact, it rarely drinks standing water at all. In the desert, where every drop counts, that's a life-saving superpower.

In the desert, it pays to be invisible. The thorny devil's skin changes color with the environment and temperature. In the cool of morning, it darkens to absorb more heat. As the sun blazes overhead, the lizard turns lighter to reflect sunlight and avoid overheating. These color shifts also help it blend into its surroundings—red sand, brown rocks, dry twigs. From above, predators like hawks and falcons struggle to spot this master of disguise.

When danger looms, the thorny devil may freeze completely still. And if that doesn't work, it has one more trick up its scaly sleeve...

On the back of its neck, the thorny devil has a strange-looking bump that's more than just another spine—it's a decoy head. If a predator gets too close, the thorny devil will tuck its real head between its forearms and stick up this fake one. It's like holding up a shield made of spikes. Many predators strike at the head when they

attack, so offering a tougher, less vulnerable target can save the lizard's life.

And if that's not enough, the thorny devil can inflate its body with air, puffing up like a balloon to look bigger and more intimidating. For a creature that only grows to about 8 inches long, looking scary can be the best defense.

The thorny devil might look like it could take down a dragonfly with one swipe of its tail, but don't be fooled—it eats nothing but ants. Thousands of them. That's right—this creature is a myrmecophage, a fancy word meaning "ant eater." And it's a specialist. The thorny devil will find an ant trail, then park itself nearby and flick out its short, sticky tongue as ants march past. It can eat up to 3,000 ants in one sitting. That's like you or me eating hundreds of cookies one after another... except these cookies bite back! Its jaws and teeth are adapted to crush ant exoskeletons, and its long feeding sessions—sometimes lasting hours—help fuel its slow-burning desert lifestyle.

Thorny devils are not built for speed. They move with a strange, stop-and-start motion—walking forward a few inches, freezing, then moving again. This jerky gait is thought to confuse predators, breaking up their outline and mimicking how shadows or twigs might shift in the wind. They're usually active in the cooler hours of the morning and late afternoon, avoiding the blistering heat of midday. At night, they dig into loose sand or crawl under a bush to rest. These solitary reptiles don't wander far, and they live most of their lives alone—unless it's time to find a mate.

So where did this creature get its intense name, *Moloch horridus*?

The first part, *Moloch*, is named after the Canaanite avoda zara associated with terrifying rituals, and that is sometimes depicted with horns on its head. The second part, *horridus*, is Latin for "rough," "bristly," or "dreadful." Together, the name paints a picture of something fearsome and monstrous.

But the truth is, the thorny devil is anything but horrible. It's a slow-moving, ant-slurping, desert-dwelling marvel. It doesn't bite, doesn't chase, and doesn't want anything to do with humans. Its fearsome look is just a brilliant disguise for a peaceful life spent basking, burrowing, and bug-snacking.

Unlike most lizards that drop their waste wherever they happen to be, thorny devils are surprisingly tidy. These reptiles return to specific spots to leave their droppings, creating a kind of reptilian bathroom. Scientists believe this may help them avoid attracting predators or ants to sensitive areas like nesting burrows or resting spots. It's a small detail, but it shows that thorny devils are more methodical than they might seem.

For such a small lizard, the thorny devil can live an exceptionally long time—up to 20 years in the wild. That's rare for reptiles of their size, especially in such harsh conditions.

Thank you, Hashem, for Your wondrous world!

EMUNAH, BITACHON, & SIMCHA ARE ABLE TO CHANGE REALITY

Rabbi Zevy Golumbek shared the following beautiful story:

Reb Avraham was very close to the Telshe Rosh Yeshiva, Rav Chaim Stein (pictured in his youth and old age). One time, his grandfather went to the doctor because he wasn't feeling well. The doctors diagnosed him with cancer in the pancreas and told him, "There's nothing we can do for you. Your days are numbered."

Reb Avraham, heartbroken by what he heard, went to the Rosh Yeshiva and said, "Rav Chaim, the doctor just said that they found yenneh machlah (cancer) in my father's pancreas, and there's nothing they can do."

Rav Chaim replied, "These doctors don't know what they're talking about. Don't be nispoel. It's lo hayah v'lo nivra, it never happened." Shortly afterward, they discovered that indeed the doctors had made a mistake—he did not have yenneh machlah in the pancreas—and he was zocheh to a refuah sheleimah.

A short while later, the Landau family from Cleveland shared the following remarkable story they experienced with Rav Chaim Stein. The Landaus' daughter was expecting a baby. The doctor performed a sonogram and saw that the baby was not going to be healthy. The baby was diagnosed with Down syndrome among several other medical conditions.

The parents, heartbroken by the news, went to Rav Chaim Stein and reported to him the doctor's diagnosis. Upon hearing the situation, Rav Chaim Stein told the parents, "Accept upon yourselves the following two things, and you will see a miraculous deliverance. Accept upon yourselves to strengthen your emunah and bitachon (trust and reliance upon HaShem), and also accept upon yourselves to always be b'simcha, to be happy no matter what comes your way. If you accept these two things, you will see tremendous yeshuos."

That's exactly what the parents did throughout the duration of the pregnancy. They strengthened their bitachon, their emunah, and their simcha. Sure enough, after nine months, the baby was born 100% healthy—without a trace of any medical condition.

After their child was born, they went back to Rav Chaim Stein and asked, "Is it possible that maybe the doctors made a mistake?"

The Rosh Yeshiva replied, "No, no, no. The doctors knew exactly what they were talking about. There was no mistake. Your koach of emunah and bitachon changed the status of the baby. Bitachon made it so that the baby became 100% healthy. Never, ever underestimate the power of what emunah and bitachon can accomplish."

In contrast to the first story, these doctors made no mistake. But emunah and bitachon were able to change reality.



THE ANSWER

Regarding last week's question about the man who wanted to take down the signs on Shabbos, Rav Zilberstein wrote that, ideally, a non-Jew should be asked to remove them. If that is not possible, then, since removing the signs is only rabbinically prohibited due to it being mekalkel, when combined with the kavod habriyos (human dignity) of the person being slandered, along with the opportunity to prevent further lashon hara (harmful speech), it may be permissible to take the signs down.

This week's TableTalk is dedicated to the memory of

Leonid Gitelman z"l

by his beloved daughters Marina Vurgafman and Alina Dmitriev, grandchildren Toni, Benyomin, Eli, Daniella, and Katerina, and great-grandchild Gideon Shaya.

May his memory be for a blessing.



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