

A MITZVA DILEMMA FOR THE SHABBOS TABLE



THE PRECIOUS STONES

By Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

I'm still writing this from Eretz Yisrael, as we are still unable to return because of the war. Hopefully, though, things have turned for the better, and we might be able to come home soon.

Parshas Korach teaches us about the dangers of Machlokes, of arguing. Let me share a fascinating true mitzvah dilemma that relates to this.

There was a man, we'll call him Daniel, who was extremely wealthy. He had three sons, and he had an idea: rather than wait until after he passed away to divide his estate, he figured he would do it while he was still alive to avoid any arguments. He thought that if everything was settled in advance, there would be no disagreements. However, this is not the approach encouraged by the Torah.

Daniel soon realized that after his sons inherited his wealth, they stopped calling and visiting him. He found himself alone and eventually moved into an assisted living facility. He rarely received any calls from his sons.

One day, he mentioned this problem to



KORACH THE TAKER

The Torah is filled with the lessons we need to learn to fulfill our mission here on earth. Most lessons are taught by our great ancestors who lived their lives based on those qualities and attributes. However, in this week's Parsha we are taught one important lesson by Korach as to what we should avoid and perhaps how to protect ourselves from falling into the same trap that he fell into.

Rabbeinu Bachya in his Chovos Halvovos writes that our greatest obligation to HaShem is to be grateful to Him for all the good that He bestows upon us. In his third section he explains how indebted one should be to anyone from whom we received goodness. Even the slave who is supported by his master and his master supports him only for selfish reasons, nevertheless, the slave owes appreciation to the master because at the end of the day, he is the recipient of the benefactor's goodness. Rabbeinu Bachya continues how much more so should a person be indebted to HaShem whose goodness was granted with no ulterior motive.

HaShem created Man with a strong sense of pride. When one is a recipient of goodness, there is a sense of indebtedness which he feels. This is a humbling feeling. Nobody likes to be dependent upon others. His reaction to the goodness he receives could express itself in one of two ways. To restore his sense of pride he may deny the goodness which he received and claim that he did not need that gift or perhaps the benefactor owed it to him. With this approach he is able to save his pride without having to concede any indebtedness to the benefactor who actually gave him something. This approach is usually taken when the gift was something very significant. The more the recipient needs that gift the more his pride will be hurt. If the benefactor gave him a drink he would certainly acknowledge

a rabbi. The rabbi said, "Let me give you a great idea."

He told Daniel to tell his sons that he had some very precious stones that were important to him, and to ask them to buy him a secure safe to protect the stones.

So Daniel called his sons and asked them to buy him a safe. Their eyes widened, imagining their father had hundreds of valuable gems worth millions of dollars. They began to believe that what they had already received was just a fraction of his true estate.

Sure enough, they each became very attentive toward their father. They called him every day, visited often with their children, and Daniel truly enjoyed this renewed connection.

This went on for quite a while. Eventually, Daniel passed away. After the funeral, the sons were eager to open the safe and find the precious stones. They opened it using the combination they had been given and found five ordinary stones from the street, plain pieces of granite. There was a note inside that read:

"This is for Kibbud Av Va'em, to honor your parents."

It became clear that Daniel's "precious stones" weren't valuable in any material sense. They were precious only because they brought his children back to him.

Word of this spread through the assisted living facility, and many other elderly residents thought it was a brilliant idea. They too considered asking their children to buy them safes to protect "precious stones," in hopes that it would bring their families closer again.

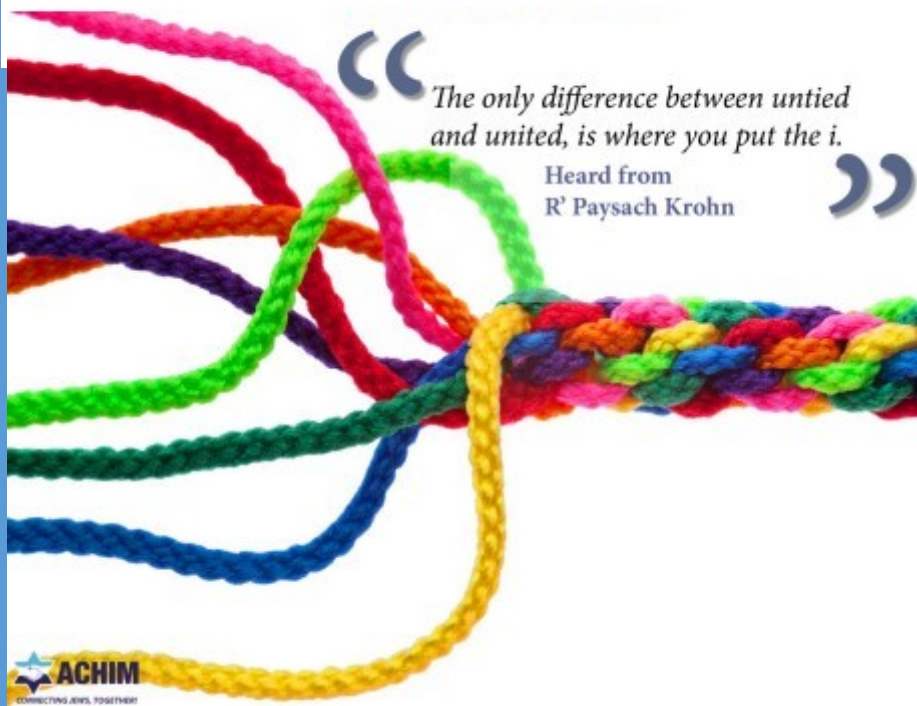
Eventually, one resident brought this question to Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein: "Is it permitted to ask our children to buy a safe for so-called precious stones in order to encourage them to visit?"

On one hand, children are obligated to honor and visit their parents. If this is what it takes to fulfill that mitzvah, maybe it's justified. On the other hand, it's somewhat deceitful. It's not an outright lie, but it is misleading, and it may set a poor example for the children, possibly causing more harm in the long run.

So, what do you think? Is this practice permitted? Is it advisable? Or is it not appropriate?

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MITZVA MEME



his thanks. But if the benefactor gave him his house in which he lives, it will be very difficult for him to acknowledge his indebtedness.

There is however a more appropriate response to the benefactor. If the recipient has a sense of humility he would express his gratitude to his benefactor and try to reciprocate the goodness that he received. This response will also change depending on the significance of the gift. If he received a drink, a simple thank you might suffice. If the recipient received his very life then he must spend his entire life in a state of gratitude to the benefactor.

This, Rabbeinu Bachya explains, is the root of all avodas HaShem. We have an moral obligation that we owe HaShem our complete indebtedness for all the good with which He shows us. Whenever we do a mitzvah it should be performed as an act of reciprocation to Him for all that we receive from

Him. Our attitude in life should be an attitude of 'how can I better express my gratitude for every moment of life, for every moment of joy, for every moment of nachas and so on.

The opening verse of our Parsha begins with an unfinished sentence. "And Korach the son of Yitzhar, the son of Kehas, the son of Levi took..." There is a subject and verb but the object is missing. What did he take? Perhaps the Torah is drawing a picture of who Korach was; Korach took, that is the picture of Korach. Korach was a taker. Korach had a pride that did not allow him to concede that he was a recipient of so much greatness. Rather, he felt that he was entitled to all the greatness that was bestowed upon him.

As we look back at what transpired since last motzei Shabbos; the overwhelming threat of a nuclear armed Iran has passed with no serious war. We certainly mourn the loss of so many lives and so much property but at the same time how much gratitude we do owe HaShem.

Have a wonderful Shabbos.

Paysach Diskind



SHABBOS: CELEBRATING HASHEM'S CREATION

STONEFISH, THE WORLD'S MOST POISONOUS FISH

Imagine you are in Australia's Great Barrier Reef. You slip off a boat and drift above a sandy patch dotted with coral rubble. The scene looks peaceful. You hover closer to what you think is a fist-sized rock, but the "rock" blinks! A jagged mouth yawns, sand puffs away, and a living vacuum cleaner sucks down an unlucky shrimp in the time it takes you to blink. Meet the stonefish: Earth's most venomous fish, a master of disguise.

Camouflage is common in coral reefs, but the stonefish takes it to superhero levels. Their skin is covered in lumps, warts, and ridges that perfectly echo rough coral, broken shells, and algae-slicked rubble. Many individuals even grow real algae on their skin, turning the fish into a tiny mobile garden. Some come in drab browns and grays; others flaunt splashes of pumpkin orange or raspberry pink that match sponges and soft corals. Pebbly textures, mismatched colors, and an uneven outline break up the fish's shape so completely that even veteran scuba guides can hover within arm's reach and never notice. Peer closer (but not too close!) and you'll see two little eyes set in low bumps. Because those eyes sit slightly above the skull, a buried stonefish can keep watch while everything else—mouth, gills, dorsal spines—vanishes beneath a sprinkling of sand.

Camouflage may keep a stonefish safe, but it also turns dinner into an effortless delivery service. The fish lies still, counting on its costume to lure small reef fish and crustaceans into the strike zone. When a snack wanders within reach, the stonefish erupts. Its jaws hinge open like a drawbridge, expanding the throat cavity and creating a split-second vacuum. In roughly 0.015 seconds, quicker than a camera's flash, the prey is sucked in whole. No chewing, no chase, just whoosh and gulp. Afterwards, the predator settles back, shuffling its wide pectoral fins to re-bury itself. From the unlucky shrimp's point of view, it's as if the sand briefly turned into a black hole.

But hiding and ambushing are only Act One. Act Two is defense, and that's where the legendary venom enters the playbill. Running the length of a stonefish's back are thirteen wicked spines, each one a pre-loaded syringe. Two venom glands nestle at the base of every spine. When danger, or a careless foot, presses downward, those glands squeeze lethal proteins skyward and straight into the offender. The principal toxin, stonustoxin, can scramble heart rhythms, crash blood pressure, and flood tissues with blistering pain within minutes. Just eighteen milligrams, less than a grain of rice, may be fatal to an adult human. The spines are strong enough to punch through neoprene dive boots or the rubber soles of reef shoes, and in northern Australia, the only antivenom used more often is the one for snakebites.

How do you defuse that biochemical trap if you're unlucky enough to step on it? Heat is your friend. Stonefish venom is a bundle of delicate proteins, and proteins unravel in hot water. Doctors

advise soaking a sting in water around 45 °C (about as hot as you can stand) for up to ninety minutes while you hustle to a hospital. Australia's first stonefish antivenom was introduced in 1959, and it still saves lives today. The sooner the toxin is denatured by heat, the better the outcome. So remember: in the tropics, keep your eyes open, shuffle your feet, and treat every lumpy "rock" with respect.

Venomous though it is, the stonefish isn't aggressive. It strikes people only by accident and saves its precious toxin for genuine emergencies. Even the amount of venom it injects is pressure-sensitive. A light poke might trigger a mild dose, while the full weight of a booted foot unleashes every drop. And if spines weren't warning enough, some species boast a secret switchblade. Tucked beneath each eye lies a bony "lachrymal saber" that can flick forward like a tiny dagger. It's one more reason predators think twice before testing the "rock."

Hover beside a stonefish long enough and you'll notice something else: it almost never swims. Instead, the fish prefers to walk. The lowest rays of the pectoral fins have separated from the rest, forming stubby finger-like limbs. By flexing those little "legs," a stonefish can creep across the seabed, hoist itself over small ledges, or shovel sand across its back to refresh the camouflage. Slow walking means it burns little energy, so the fish can sit motionless for hours, even days, without going hungry.

Slow and steady also helps on land. Thanks to a slimy coat that locks in moisture and to skin that can absorb oxygen, a stranded stonefish may stay alive for up to twenty-four hours if it remains damp. During extreme low tides, beachcombers in northern Australia sometimes find a "rock" that wasn't there the day before. A quick prod with a stick—and a quick retreat—usually reveals faint gill slits flexing in and out as the fish bides its time until the sea returns.

While people fear the sting, others savor the meat. Throughout parts of Japan, China, and Vietnam, stonefish appear on dinner plates steamed, fried, or simmered in soup. Because the venom is protein-based, thorough cooking destroys it, and chefs carefully snip away the dorsal spines before wielding the cleaver. In coastal markets, you may even find stonefish served as sashimi. Raw flesh is safe once every venomous spine is removed.

What may be the most fascinating, however, isn't the venom, the disguise, or the lightning gulp. It's how every part of the stonefish's design fits together like pieces of a perfect puzzle. Slow muscles? No problem. Camouflage handles the hunting, and walking fins conserve energy. Vulnerable body? Solve that with hypodermic spines, controllable toxin, and a pop-out saber. Risky habitat exposed at low tide? Give it skin that breathes air and a mucus cloak that seals in water. Each ability makes sense only when you believe that the world was designed by a Master Designer.

MIXING CEMENT & LAYING BRICKS

R' Dovid Katz recalled that one day in Kfar Saba, some students saw R' Aharon Leib Shteinman (pictured, in Kfar Saba) mixing cement. Then he was laying bricks. After that, he was assisting construction workers who were extending the yeshivah building.

R' Katz assumed that R' Aharon Leib was doing the labor to try to save the yeshivah money. He offered to take R' Aharon Leib's place and help the workers himself.

R' Aharon Leib smiled and told him that he wasn't trying to save money. Rather, he was fulfilling the mitzvah of building in Eretz Yisrael, as the Ramban writes that there is a mitzvah to build Eretz Yisrael even in contemporary times.

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THE ANSWER

Regarding last week's question about whether the young man could accept the motorcycle, Rav Zilberstein (Shabbos Besimcha Page 256) wrote that if the father had given it to him unconditionally, then even if the brother had used it on Shabbos, it would not be a problem to accept it. However, because it was specifically designated for use on Shabbos, it would not be permitted to accept the present.

This week's TableTalk is dedicated to the loving memory of
Shmuel Fleischman z'l
שמואל יודל בן בנימין יעקב
By his family



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