



A MITZVA DILEMMA FOR THE SHABBOS TABLE



BIDDING AGAINST HIMSELF

By Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

Elul has begun, which means Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are approaching. This week's dilemma actually comes from the very apex of the Yom Tov season, Simchas Torah. It is a fascinating question that also fits the spirit of Elul, because Simchas Torah is the goal and culmination of Elul. There was a Yid we'll call Reb Dovid. Every year, Reb Dovid had a special minhag. He would try to purchase Chasan Torah, the final aliyah of the Torah, when the congregation finishes reading the entire Torah on Simchas Torah. It meant a great deal to him, and most years he succeeded in buying it. In his shul, the aliyos and other kibbudim were auctioned off on Shemini Atzeres. Chasan Torah was one of the most valuable honors, and the bidding could sometimes reach several thousand dollars.

One year, Reb Dovid knew that he would not be present for the auction. An emergency would keep him away from shul. So he approached a good friend. "Would you please bid on Chasan Torah for me?" "Of course," his friend replied. "How high should I go?" "I usually spend around \$2,000," Reb Dovid said, "but if necessary, you can go as high as \$4,000. That is my absolute maximum." His friend agreed.

Later that day, however, Reb Dovid began thinking



A TIMELESS PLANE OF EXISTENCE

Moshe tells his people, "On this day HaShem your G-d commands you to perform His mitzvos, you should observe them with all your heart and all your soul." The Midrash asks that this statement was spoken 40 years after HaShem commanded the mitzvos. It was not today! Our Sages teach that every day a person should view the Torah as if it was given today. We must view the Torah as brand new.

If the Torah was given 40 years earlier, how can they expect us to view it as if it was first given today? Furthermore, the Sages are teaching that Jews living 3,300 years later are also to view the Torah as if it was given today! Is this not disingenuous? If the Sages instructed us to follow the Torah no matter how old it is, that is understandable, but how can they instruct us to pretend as if it was given today?

Allow us to imagine planes of existence other than the one we currently experience. We currently find ourselves in the plane of Nature, in which all matter and life are a result of process. The seasons of the year are the result of the movement of the Earth around the sun. The cycles of life begin with conception, then birth, maturation, reproduction, decay, and so on. Everything that exists comes from something else that brought it about. The oceans fill from the rivers, and the rivers flow from the oceans. Nature presents us with an existence founded in time and process. Process, by definition, requires time, since step one must occur before step two, and so on.

There is, however, a different plane of existence, that which is above the plane of Nature. In that plane, all existence is the direct result of HaShem's Will. HaShem wills the existence of Torah, and it exists! HaShem wills that Nature should exist, and Nature exists! (Within Nature, everything is subject to process; nothing is



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again about the auction. He was so preoccupied with being away that he completely forgot he had already arranged for someone to bid for him. He met another friend and made the same request. "Could you bid on Chasan Torah for me? I usually pay around \$2,000, but you can go up to as much as \$4,000 if you have to." "No problem," the second friend said. Shemini Atzeres arrived, and the auction began. The bids for Chasan Torah climbed quickly. "One thousand!" "Fifteen hundred!" "Eighteen hundred!" "Two thousand!" At around \$2,000, most of the shul stopped bidding. But two men continued. "\$2,100!" "\$2,200!" "\$2,300!" Each one was determined to win the aliyah for Reb Dovid. Neither realized that the man bidding against him was working for the very same person! The price kept rising. "\$2,800!" "\$3,000!" "\$3,500!" Finally, one of them called out, "\$4,000!" The other friend immediately stopped. Four thousand dollars was also his limit. The auction was over. Reb Dovid had won Chasan Torah for \$4,000. Later, Reb Dovid heard the good news. "You got it?" "Yes!" "Wonderful. How much?" "Four thousand dollars." "Four thousand?!" Reb Dovid exclaimed. "Why did it go so high?" His friend explained, "Everyone else dropped out at about \$2,000, but there was one fellow who just would not stop bidding against me." Suddenly, Reb Dovid remembered. He had asked two different people to bid for him.

In reality, once the rest of the shul stopped bidding, Reb Dovid might have won Chasan Torah for only a little more than \$2,000. The only reason the price reached \$4,000 was because his two agents had unknowingly bid against each other.

The question was brought to Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein. Does Reb Dovid have to pay the full \$4,000? On one hand, he clearly authorized each friend to bid up to \$4,000. Both men followed his instructions exactly, and the winning bid was within the amount he had agreed to spend. On the other hand, the entire increase from around \$2,000 to \$4,000 came from an obvious mistake. Reb Dovid never intended to compete against himself! Perhaps this could be considered a mekach ta'us, a transaction made in error, and he should only have to pay a bit more than \$2,000, which was approximately what the highest genuine competing bidder had offered.

Is Reb Dovid responsible for the full \$4,000 because his own shlichim, his own agents, caused the bidding war? Or should the extra amount be disregarded because the "competition" was never real? What do you think?

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spontaneous.) There is no process. In that plane, there is no time, just as there is no process. Just as the very existence of HaShem Himself is simple, pure existence that is constant, so is His Will constant. The Torah which was created before the creation of Nature exists in a constant state of fresh creation. It is just as new today as it was 6,000 years ago because in that plane there is no duration of time.

The concept of Nature being subject to time is found in the beginning of King Solomon's Book of Koheles. When he refers to Nature, he calls it "under the sun." He writes, "Whatever has been is what will be, whatever has been done is what will be done. There is nothing new under the sun." Under the sun, within the confines of the plane of Nature, nothing is new. However, above Nature, everything is new. Nothing becomes old. Everything is as fresh today as it was at the moment of its creation. Above Nature, nothing is subject to time.

There are things in this world that we are able to grasp which actually transcend the plane of Nature. Those things include the Torah and her mitzvos, as well as the soul of Man. When Man, driven by his emotions and soul, performs a mitzva, he has transcended the limits of Nature. When he performs that mitzvah purely for the sake of fulfilling the Will of HaShem, with no other interest in mind, that pure mitzvah is elevated outside the confines of this material plane of Nature. He, too, enters that plane as well. He is then able to see Torah in that new light.

The Torah, in its true state, transcends Nature and is always new. It is always fresh. However, we, who are stationed under the sun, within the confines of Nature, perceive Torah as something old. It was given 3,300 years ago. Moshe is teaching his people that there is a way for us to perceive Torah in its true state, in its state of 'forever new' and 'forever fresh'. If we perform HaShem's mitzvos with our complete heart, namely, with our undivided desire, and our complete soul, with no other motives, then we will be able to transcend the barriers of Nature and see the eternal freshness of Torah. Torah will actually be new, as fresh as the day it was given.

Have a wonderful Shabbos.

Paysach Diskind



SHABBOS: CELEBRATING HASHEM'S CREATION

THE ANT THAT NEVER SAYS "MINE"

The Gemara in Eruvin makes an astonishing statement. Chazal say that even if the Torah had never been given, there are certain lessons a person could have learned simply by watching Hashem's creatures.

One of them is:

וגזל מנמלה

We could learn not to steal from the ant.

Rashi explains: "One ant does not steal the food of its fellow."

That sounds beautiful, but there is an obvious question.

Don't ants steal?

Scientists have observed ants raiding rival colonies, fighting over territory, and even carrying food or young ants away from neighboring nests. So how can Chazal tell us to learn about avoiding *gezel* from an ant?

The Chidushei Harim explains that the answer is hiding in one word used by Rashi: *chaverta*, "its fellow."

Rashi does not say that an ant never takes anything from anywhere. He says that one ant does not steal the food of its fellow. Modern science has discovered that ants treat members of their own colony very differently from outsiders.

That becomes especially interesting when we compare ants to many other animals.

Animals often fight over food, even members of the same group. Monkeys may grab food from one another. Birds steal food and nesting materials from their neighbors. Lions, hyenas, wolves, and many other social animals can push weaker members away from food or compete over the best pieces.

Food is often a perfect reason for a fight.

Yet inside an ant colony, the normal food-gathering system looks remarkably different.

Imagine a harvester ant walking across the ground with a grain in her jaws. She found that grain herself. Other ants pass right beside her. The food is fully exposed. Another ant could grab it.

But the grain is not treated as the private property of whichever ant happens to be carrying it.

Scientists studying harvester ants have found that one worker may carry a seed part of the way and then drop it. Another worker may come along, pick up that exact same seed, and continue carrying it toward the nest. Sometimes a single load can pass through several workers before arriving home.

Here is the amazing part.

The second ant does not take the seed and eat it for herself.

She continues carrying it toward the colony.

The ant can possess the food without appropriating it.

"I am holding this grain" does not automatically become, "This grain is mine."

And there is another level to this honesty. The ant does not only avoid taking food away from another ant for herself. She also does not take food that belongs to the colony and turn it into her own private meal.

A harvester ant may find a whole grain, carry it in her own jaws, and travel a long distance with it. Yet she still brings the complete grain intact home. If another worker takes over the load, that worker continues bringing it toward the same communal nest.

The food may pass through several ants, yet none of them says, so to speak, "I have it now, so it is mine."

The grain remains part of the colony's shared food supply.

Once the seed arrives, the ant that found it may never deal with it again. Other workers move it deeper underground. Other workers store it. Larger workers may crack the hard shell. Smaller workers may help process the inside.

Eventually, some harvester ants chew seed material and mix it with saliva into a soft food sometimes called "ant bread."

Only then is the food eaten and distributed within the colony.

In other words, the ant does not only refrain from stealing from another individual ant. She also does not steal from the collective. Food gathered for the colony is not quietly diverted into a private snack. It is brought home, stored, processed, and only afterward eaten as part of the colony's shared food system.

That is unusual even among other highly social creatures.

Termites also cooperate and share food, but many termites actually eat the wood or plant material they encounter and later share processed food with others.

Honeybees also work devotedly for their hive, but nectar is carried inside the bee's crop, and some of that nectar can be used to fuel the bee's own flight.

The harvester ant gives us an especially vivid picture. She discovers a complete edible object. She picks it up herself. She carries the whole thing in her jaws. And instead of first taking her own "finder's fee," she brings the resource intact to the colony.

Even liquid food can become communal.

Many ants have a special storage area called a crop, sometimes nicknamed the "social stomach." A forager can fill it with sugary liquid, return to the nest, and then pass that food mouth-to-mouth to other ants.

Scientists have tracked marked food moving through ant colonies. Food that began inside one ant spread to many others. An ant that received food could later become a donor herself.

So even food, physically inside an ant's body, can still function as part of the colony's shared supply.

Chazal also describe how much food ants gather.

In *Devarim Rabbah*, the Midrash says that an ant needs only a tiny amount for its own lifetime, yet it keeps gathering and storing enormous quantities. The Midrash dramatically describes an ant hole containing 300 kor of food.

Modern researchers have discovered the same basic wonder. Florida harvester-ant colonies can maintain underground granaries containing hundreds of thousands of seeds.

Picture that.

Tiny ants, each carrying one seed at a time, can build an underground warehouse containing hundreds of thousands of pieces of food.

And those seeds are not little private piles belonging to the ants that found them. The colony treats the granary as a shared food supply. Different workers gather, transport, store, process, and eventually distribute the food.

Many animals find food and immediately think, so to speak, "Eat!"

The ant can find food, hold it in her own jaws, carry it for a long distance, and still act as though she is saying:

"I found it, but it is not for me. It's for the community"

Thank you Hashem for Your wondrous world!

I WOULDN'T HAVE WANTED ALL OF THEM TO THINK THAT I SIMPLY WALKED BY YOU WITHOUT GREETING YOU

My dear friend Rabbi Shraga Freedman told the following story.

Rav Yosef Zimbal, rav of the West Gate kehillah in Lakewood, NJ, met Rav Shmuel Kamenetsky, Rosh Yeshivah of the Philadelphia Yeshivah, at a wedding.

Before the chuppah, Rav Zimbal had a lengthy conversation with the rosh yeshivah, yet, after the chuppah was over, when Rav Kamenetsky passed him, he greeted Rav Zimbal effusively, as if he were seeing him for the first time.

Rav Zimbal respectfully pointed out that they had already conversed.

"I am aware of that, of course," Rav Kamenetsky replied with a smile, "but there are many more people in the vicinity now who are not aware of that. I wouldn't have wanted all of them to think that I simply walked by you without greeting you."



THE ANSWER

Regarding last week's question about the smuggled siddur, Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein answered that with regard to the woman, she does not have an obligation to daven with a minyan. Therefore, if davening with the siddur will give her greater kavana, she should daven with the siddur rather than with the minyan. However, with regard to the man, the halacha is different. There is a clear preference for a man to daven in a Beis HaKnesses with a minyan. Therefore, even if he would have greater kavana davening at home with the siddur, it would still be preferable for him to daven in shul with a minyan, even though he would lose the advantage of the increased kavana from the siddur.

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