



## A MITZVA DILEMMA FOR THE SHABBOS TABLE



### FAKE FORGIVENESS

By Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

Chaim and Dovid lived on the same block and had been close friends for years. Then something happened. Maybe it was a parking issue, maybe a money issue, but whatever it was, it turned into a major machlokes. The argument became public, and so did their anger. Dovid told Chaim, "After what you did to me, I am never going to forgive you." Chaim shot back, "Good. I don't want your forgiveness, and I am never going to ask you for it!" It was painful to watch. Two former friends were no longer speaking to each other, and both had publicly declared that they had no interest in making peace.

They had a mutual friend, Eli, who could not bear seeing them this way. Eli remembered how Chazal describe Aharon HaKohen as ohev shalom v'rodef shalom, one who loved peace and pursued peace. Aharon HaKohen would sometimes approach two people who were fighting and help each one believe that the other truly wanted to reconcile. But Eli knew that would never work here. Chaim and Dovid were too angry. If Eli told Dovid, "Chaim really wants to make peace," Dovid would probably answer, "I don't care."

### THE MISSING SIGNATURE

When an artist paints a painting, even if he does not actually sign his name on the painting anyone who knows his style can recognize that he is the artist. This is certainly the case with the creation that HaShem made. Everything HaShem creates should be self-evident that He is the creator. His signature ought to be all over it. Nevertheless, when He created the world of Nature, HaShem kept His Name anonymous. HaShem actually allowed Man to look at this incredible creation and not see His signature on it. The Hebrew word for 'world' is 'olam'. The Hebrew word for hidden is 'alam'. The reason for this similarity is because the function of the world is to create a hiding place for HaShem's signature.

It is the role of His people to bring HaShem's signature into this world. We were equipped with the tools and capability to 'expose' HaShem, to take HaShem out of His hiding place and place His Name upon the Throne of the Sovereign, to coronate HaShem as the Director of the World.

This is the responsibility of the Jewish people on the day of Rosh Hashana; to coronate HaShem and to place His Name upon this throne.

The idea of placing HaShem, the Creator of all, upon the Throne of Absolute Authority is a very humbling job. When one places HaShem's Name on this Throne, he must acknowledge that everything he has, and everything he is, was done by HaShem. He must acknowledge that his position, his family and any of his accomplishments were all gifts from HaShem. (He may certainly take credit for the work he put in to make it happen. However, the ultimate success that was achieved is a gift from HaShem.)



*The world will  
never starve  
for want of wonders;  
but only for want of  
wonder.*



*G. K Chesterton*



Although the responsibility of proclaiming HaShem as the ultimate Sovereign is so humbling, it is, at the same time, extremely elevating. Consider the infinite greatness of HaShem, and all that is created is His creation, and in spite of His infinite existence, He offers us the role of proclaiming His Name as the Sovereign of His world! Who are we? Do we really count as anything next to His great Name? But, yet, He chose us to bring about this coronation. What an awesome honor and what a responsibility this is!

In the beginning of his commentary on our Parsha, Malbim references the Ari z'l's explanation how all Jewish souls are interwoven with one another in a complex arrangement similar to that of the components of a tree. All the branches of the tree find their source in the trunk and all the offshooting smaller branches find their source in the branches from which they grow and the twigs, leaves and fruits all find their connection to their respective source. Ari z'l explains that In a structure

similar to this tree, all Jewish souls are interwoven with each other through. All Jewish souls find their source in the original 600,000 Jewish souls that exited Egypt. These souls were set into motion to carry out world history and bring the world to its ultimate goal.

We often have the image of HaShem in our mind in the context of our personal GD. He is the One we count on, He is the One in Whom we place our trust as we travel through our life's challenges. We know He is there to help us. We understand and accept our difficulties recognizing that He is with us. This is truly a worthy image to keep in the front of consciousness.

There is, however, another image that arises in the front of our consciousness as we approach Rosh Hashana. On Rosh Hashana the image we see of HaShem is that of the Creator of the world. We see Him as He chose the Jewish people to carry out the mission He set for His world. We see Him as the Director of world history and planting His tree of life in the middle of His garden. When seen as such, our acceptance of His Sovereignty places the world in its proper context, and with that He rises to His Throne.

Have a wonderful Shabbos.

**Paysach Diskind**



## SHABBOS: CELEBRATING HASHEM'S CREATION

### THE FIRE SALAMANDER: THE SALAMANDER THAT WALKS OUT OF FIRE

Imagine gathering firewood on a cold night. You take a few logs from a damp woodpile, place them into the fire, and watch the flames begin to climb. Then something moves. Out from between the burning logs crawls a shiny black creature covered with brilliant yellow markings. It scrambles away from the fire and disappears. That creature is the fire salamander, a remarkable amphibian.

The fire salamander, whose scientific name is *Salamandra atra*, is found throughout much of Europe. Although it looks somewhat like a lizard, it is not a reptile. It is an amphibian, with moist, scaleless skin and no claws. Most fire salamanders have glossy black bodies covered with bright yellow, orange, or sometimes reddish spots and stripes. Those bright colors warn predators.

And the warning is worth noticing. Fire salamanders have large poison-producing glands behind their eyes and along their backs. When threatened, their skin can release a sticky, poisonous secretion containing chemicals such as samandarin. In some situations, they can even spray these secretions toward an attacker.

Their markings are also amazingly individual. No two have exactly the same pattern of spots and stripes, so researchers can sometimes recognize individual salamanders from photographs, almost like fingerprints. They are mostly creatures of the night. During the daytime, they hide in cool, damp places beneath leaves, rocks, roots, fallen trees, and logs.

After dark, especially following rain, they emerge to hunt worms, slugs, spiders, insects, and other small prey. Their skin must remain moist. Fire salamanders have lungs, but they also exchange gases through their moist skin, so drying out can be extremely dangerous. Like many salamanders, they can also regenerate portions of lost limbs and tails.

But none of these abilities explains the most famous part of their name. Why is this animal called the fire salamander?

The answer begins with firewood.

Fire salamanders love dark, moist hiding places, and a pile of logs sitting outdoors can be perfect. Deep between the pieces of wood, a salamander is protected from sunlight and dry air. It may remain so well hidden that someone collecting the wood has no idea an animal is inside.

Then the logs are carried indoors and thrown into a fire.

As the wood heats up, the salamander hiding inside is suddenly in danger. It crawls out from between the logs and races away. To someone watching, the sight would be astonishing. The wood goes into the fire, the flames rise, and then a salamander comes out. It can look as though the salamander was created from the fire. This connection between salamanders and burning firewood has been recorded for centuries and helps explain the fire salamander's extraordinary reputation and name.

But there is another fascinating piece of science that may help explain what people were seeing. A fire salamander cannot remain inside a blazing fire indefinitely. But its body does have something that can give it a small amount of protection during a brief encounter with intense heat: wet skin.

A fire salamander's skin is naturally coated with moisture and mucus. That moisture can absorb heat, and when the water begins evaporating, it carries heat away from the surface of the animal. This process is called evaporative cooling. Scientists studying amphibians have found that mucus helps bring water to the skin's surface, where evaporation can remove heat.

Think about those first moments of heat. Before the salamander's tissues become extremely hot, some of the incoming heat must first warm the water coating its skin. More energy is then used as that water evaporates. This does not make the salamander immune to flames. But it can give the animal a few seconds of resistance, perhaps enough to matter when a salamander hidden inside a log suddenly finds itself beside a fire and needs time to escape.

Here the story becomes even more remarkable.

Scientists studying the California newt, a close relative of the fire salamander in the same salamander family, observed something extraordinary during a controlled brushfire. Two newts moved directly through a small wall of flames. As the heat increased, the thick secretions covering their skin began to boil and foam, forming a white coating over their bodies. Researchers compared its appearance to whipped egg whites.

That foamy layer absorbed and carried away heat as its water evaporated. The newts remained in the fire zone for roughly 20 to 30 seconds, then crawled out. When researchers examined them afterward, the dried coating flaked away, and underneath, their skin showed no visible blistering. The scientists concluded that the foaming skin secretions helped dissipate heat and protect the animals while they crossed the flames.

Think about that. A member of the salamander family produces a substance from its own body. That substance coats its skin. When exposed to fire, it turns into a protective foam. For a short period, that coating can help shield the animal from heat.

Now consider what Chazal tell us about the salamander. More than 1,500 years ago, Chazal (Chagigah 27a) described the salamander as **תולדת האש** a creature associated with and produced from fire. They describe it as emerging from fire, and they describe a substance from the salamander's own body as capable of providing protection from fire. Today, those descriptions are fascinating to consider alongside what we can observe. Fire salamanders really do hide deep inside logs and firewood and can suddenly come crawling out after the wood has been placed into a fire. And another member of the salamander family really does produce a bodily secretion that, when exposed to flames, can foam around its body and protect it from heat for as long as 20 to 30 seconds. The more closely we examine this extraordinary creature, the more remarkable these words of Chazal become.

Even the name salamander contains a mystery. Its origin is unusually unclear. The ancient Greeks used the word *salamandra*, but linguists believe they probably borrowed it from an older, now-lost language spoken in the Aegean before Greek. There is one intriguing connection. In ancient Sumerian, a word written *sa-lah* has been translated as "mucus." Salamanders are fire resistant because of their moist, mucus-covered skin and heavy skin secretions. Could some ancient form of the salamander's name have originally described it as a mucus-covered creature? At present there is no evidence connecting the Sumerian word to *salamandra*, so this remains only an interesting possibility.

Hashem's world is filled with wonders. And sometimes, discoveries in nature allow us to appreciate the words of Chazal with entirely new eyes.

Thank you Hashem for your wondrous world.

## WHO DO YOU WIPE FIRST, THE RAV OR THE GEMARA?

Rav Moshe Fensterheim was the first talmid at Yeshiva Torah Vodaath in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. The rosh yeshivah of Torah Vodaath at the time was Rav Dovid Leibowitz, who would later lead his own yeshiva in Queens.

Each Friday night, the talmidim of Torah Vodaath would visit the home of Rav Leibowitz, who would regale the young bnei Torah with divrei Torah.

One Friday night, the boys arrived at the Leibowitz home to find none other than Rav Moshe Soloveitchik, (pictured) the great gaon and son of Rav Chaim Brisker, seated next to their rosh yeshivah. (Rav Soloveitchik had been Rav Leibowitz's rebbi back in Europe.)

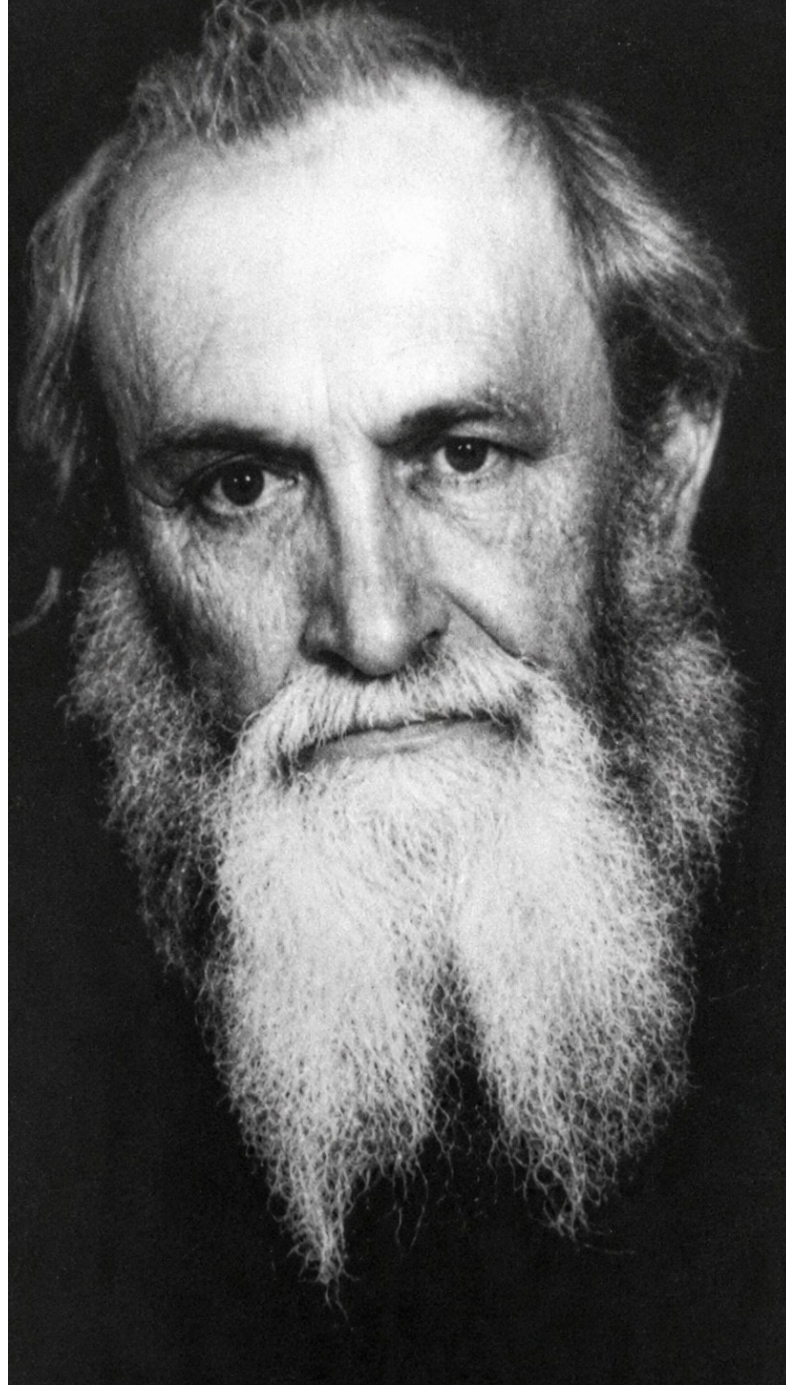
Large tomes were opened in front of the Torah giants, who were engaged in a spirited Torah discussion, with glasses of hot tea on the table. At one point, one of the glasses of tea was knocked over. The hazel-colored beverage drenched Rav Soloveitchik and the Gemara before him.

Not wasting a moment, Rav Fensterheim ran into the kitchen and returned holding a rag. He stood there for a moment, unsure of what to do. Was he to first wipe off the Gemara? Or was he to initially wipe up the liquid that had spilled on Rav Soloveitchik?

Rav Leibowitz immediately sensed Rav Fensterheim's unarticulated quandary. In an instant, he took the towel and began to wipe off the tea that had spilled on Rav Soloveitchik, explaining, "Ehr iz ah lebedige Sefer Torah (He is a living Sefer Torah)."

As much as the latter lesson remained with Rav Fensterheim, he was equally moved by how quickly his rosh yeshivah had picked up on his tacit dilemma.

From Food For Thought Two, By Rabbi Yitzchok Hisiger with permission from Artsroll



### THE ANSWER

Regarding last week's question about the person who accidentally appointed two people to bid for Chasan Torah, Rav Zilberstein (Chashukei Chemed Nedarim Page 687) answered that the minui shlichus, the appointment of the second person as his agent, was not valid. He had forgotten that he had already appointed someone else, so the second appointment was made under a false impression. Therefore, the second person's bid was not valid, and he should only have to pay the amount that the first shliach bid above the rest of the shul.

Wishing all the readers of TableTalk a  
**כתיבה וחתימה טובה**

From the members of the Achim community



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