

A MITZVA DILEMMA FOR THE SHABBOS TABLE



THE DECLINED CREDIT CARD

By Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

In this week's Parsha, Rashi writes that the fate of the generation of the flood was sealed because of theft.

This leads us to the following true story that occurred recently. Avraham and Yosef were friends. Yosef asked Avraham for a favor. "Would you be willing to pick up a set of Sifsei Chaim when you go to the seforim store? I can give you my credit card to pay for it."

"Sure", Avraham replied, and he took the credit card and went to the Judaica store.

Avraham found the set that Yosef wanted. There was only one left. He



THE JEWISH COMMUNITY; NOTHING QUITE LIKE IT!

The Maharal teaches us that HaShem did not give the Torah to Avraham, Yitzchok or Yaakov because they were mortal. They would pass on. The Torah is immortal and must therefore be placed in the hands of an immortal custodian. For this reason HaShem waited for the children of the former to develop into a nation. A nation / a community can be an immortal entity.

It is for this reason the power of a community/nation is so great; it is the mechanism by which HaShem was able to bequeath His Torah to Humanity. Through the community of Israel Mankind has Torah in their midst.

Our Sages say "The tzibur (community) does not die" "The tzibur is not poor". When men unite to form a solid community to which every member commits himself, there is no stopping them; they are invincible, they are immortal. It is to them that HaShem can entrust His Torah.

Nimrod, the leader of all Mankind in the period preceding Avraham, recognized the strength of the community and utilized it for his benefit. Our Parsha tells us how Nimrod organized all of Man to build a metropolis with a tall tower in the middle. It was the first type of globalization. The purpose of this tower was to control the population to ensure that nobody leaves the region. He understood that once a fissure occurs and just a few people leave the community, it will begin to unravel.

Our Parsha tells us how HaShem was displeased with this community and dispersed it. What was wrong with it and how is this any different that our concept of

took it and went to wait at the register. When his turn came to pay, Avraham swiped Yosef's card. After a pause, the cashier told Avraham that the card was declined. Avraham was embarrassed and unsure of what to do next.

There was a tall, dark-skinned man in line behind him who noticed Avraham's embarrassment. He spoke up, "Here is \$100 to pay for the set. See it as a gift from G-d." The man passed the hundred-dollar bill to the cashier and paid for the set of sefarim. Avraham was extremely grateful to the kind man and thanked him profusely.

As Avraham left the store, he wondered to himself if he could now keep the set of sefarim for himself. "Am I obligated to give the set of sefarim to Yosef? After all, the stranger who paid for it intended to help me. Why should Yosef get them? He can buy a set when his credit card is working." Maybe I can keep it for myself.

But on the other hand, Avraham intended the whole time to buy it for Yosef. A minute before the man paid, Avraham was still intending to buy this set on behalf of Yosef.

What do you think? Is Avraham obligated to give the sefarim to Yosef?

This question was sent to Rav Tzvi Berkowitz.



community?

To answer this question we must ask ourselves "What was the purpose of Nimrod's community?" It is true that community is powerful and HaShem desires that Man have a community but for what purpose?

Nimrod's community was self-serving. Nimrod built a community to "make a Name for ourselves". The community used the resources of the individual to build a community but it was not intended to serve the individual. Quite to the contrary, the individual was there to serve the community. The Midrash tells us how they mourned if a brick fell and broke but they did not mourn if a man fell and died. The community was not built to recognize HaShem or to bring its members closer to recognizing HaShem. It was built to create a Name for itself. Effectively, Nimrod created this most powerful instrument, community, for its self-perpetuation.

Let us contrast Nimrod's community to the Jewish nation, which is the community that HaShem chose in place of Nimrod's. HaShem cares for every individual. He desires that every individual have their own personal relationship with Him. That relationship is built through the Torah that He entrusted to the hands of the Jewish nation. As we mentioned earlier, only a nation could be entrusted with the Torah. Hence, the role of the community is to serve the individual. The community is the custodian of the Torah and preserves it for every individual member. Only through the community can we approach the Torah. Every Jew needs the community but the community is not the end. She is only the means. As much as we value community we do not place our belief in her. Our belief is in HaShem and our community is the one who gets us there.

This past week and a half a close member of my family was hospitalized and I experienced first-hand the incredible strength of the community from Hatzalah to Bikur Cholim, from WellTab to private individuals. If you are fortunate to be a member of HaShem's community, enjoy, you are so lucky! In addition to all the benefits, use it to connect to HaShem Himself.

Have a most wonderful Shabbos.

Paysach Diskind



SHABBOS: CELEBRATING HASHEM'S CREATION

GOPHER WOOD, CEDAR AND ACACIA

In this week's Parsha we find that Hashem tells Noach to build a Teiva out of Gopher wood. What exactly is Gopher wood?

The Targum Onkelos translates this as "Cedrus", which is the Greek word for Cedar. In fact, the English word Cedar also comes from the Greek word Cedrus. In an interesting sidenote, the word Citrus also comes from Cedrus, because citrus has a strong smell like cedar.

Why was cedar wood chosen for the Teiva? The Mefarshim (commentaries) explain that this wood floats well (Radak), lasts a long time (Ralbag), and is waterproof (Rav Hirsch). Rashi writes that Gopher wood was chosen because of the sulfur in the water that killed people. It is possible that Rashi means that this wood would protect from the sulfur in the water.

So we learned that cedar was chosen because of its ability to float, last, and resist the harsh elements.

Let's learn a bit more about the nature of the cedar tree (pictured, top left) and cedarwood. We find Erez, Cedar, referenced in the Torah many times, like Arzei Halevanon, and Erez Balevanon.

Cedars are native to the mountainous areas of the Mediterranean region and Eretz Yisrael. They are coniferous which means that they reproduce with cones. They are also evergreen. Cedar trees make large beams and can grow up to 120 feet tall. The Lebanon Cedar is among the tallest of cedars. They also have a wide diameter and they can be as wide as 8 feet across. Cedar can survive more than 1000 years in the wild. Jōmon Sugi, an 83-foot-high Japanese Cedar located on Yakushima island (a UNESCO World Heritage Site), in Japan, is one of the oldest trees in the world, estimated to have an age of more than 2,000 years.

Cedar has a strong and very pleasant smell. Its smell is a natural repellent against bugs and insects. Closets made of cedar are moth-free. Native Americans used cedar oil to repel mosquitoes. Cedar also deodorizes, and that is why it is used in shoe inserts (shoe trees).

Cedarwood is prized for its fine grain, attractive yellow color, and fragrance. It is exceptionally durable and immune to insect ravages.

It is because of these qualities that cedar was commonly used in boat building in ancient times and even today. The Cedar of Lebanon was

used to build the ships for the Phoenicians' trading empire, legend says that Alexander the Great built his ships with cedarwood, and the tall North American cedar masted the dominating British navies of the 18th and 19th centuries. Cedar is a light but stable wood. It has a very high strength-to-weight ratio. It has twice the stability of most commonly available softwoods due to its low density and shrinkage factors.

It does not absorb water readily and it has natural chemicals that make it highly resistant to decay and rot. Rot is the common enemy of most other boat building timbers but that is not an issue with cedar and that is why cedar lasts a long time. This might be a reason why the ancient Egyptians used cedar oil in their embalming practices.

Cedar produces long, lightweight lengths of timber with a fine straight grain and uniform texture. This makes it easy to cut, saw and nail with common tools. It can hold glue bonds. It is also valued for its distinct aroma that discourages moth and carpet beetle larvae infestations. All of these factors make it the premier choice for either interior or exterior home use as well as boat building.

Interestingly, the Sefer Tiferes Tzion By Rav Benzion Yadler, the Magid of Yerushalayim, writes that Gopher wood is the same wood as Atzei Shittim, the wood that was used to make the mishkan. He writes that this is because the holiness of the Teiva was to resemble the holiness of the Mishkan.

Atzei Shittim is known to us as Acacia Wood (pictured, top right). Like Cedar, Acacia is also an ideal wood with which to make boats.

Acacia is the hardest of all hardwoods, characterized by high density and resilience. Acacia is a hard wood that withstands climatic variations well. Acacia wood has high resistance against denting. This strong resistance and its natural durability make it an ideal species for exterior works. Acacia is also water-resistant – ideal for heavy-use items that are in frequent contact with liquids as well as making it perfect for humid climates. Its water-resistant properties means it won't warp readily and is highly resistant to fungus. Acacia is naturally antibacterial, and is therefore safe to use for preparing or serving food. Acacia wood is lightweight and durable, making it a perfect material for musical instruments.

Like Cedar, Acacia is rot, insect, termite, and fungal resistant.

YOU ARE MY OWN SON!

A student of Rav Dovid Trenk had permission to bring his car to yeshivah, but it broke down on Route 9, not far from the yeshivah. He trekked to the nearest pay-phone and called Rabbi Trenk, who arranged for a tow truck to pull the car to a garage.

Then Rabbi Trenk came by and sat with the bachur, waiting for the tow truck to arrive. Lots of time passed, and the talmid said, "Rebbi is so busy and I am fine waiting here by myself. Rebbi can go."

"I know that I can go" Rabbi Trenk replied, "but if it was my own son stuck out here, I would wait with him and you are my own son!"

There was once a talmid who consistently missed Shacharis — he simply never came. One day, however, he got out of bed and made his way to the beis medrash, arriving as the minyan was starting Aleinu, the very last part of davening.

He sauntered to his seat and slowly started to remove his tefillin from the bag in order to put them on...

"You made it," a beaming Rabbi Trenk ran up the aisle to greet him, "you made it, I'm so proud. You came to say Aleinu with us... you came to say Aleinu with us, that's wonderful!"

(From Just Love Them, The Life and Legacy of Rabbi Dovid Trenk, By Rabbi Yisroel Besser, Published By Artscroll Mesorah)



THE ANSWER

Regarding last week's car with the broken rear windshield, Rav Tzvi Berkowitz answered that the one who borrowed the car is responsible for all damages. Whether the worker is responsible depends on whether he broke it when he closed the door. If he is responsible, the owner of the car can collect from him or the borrower of the car. However, it will be difficult to prove that it broke when he closed the door.

This week's TableTalk is dedicated to the memory of
Zoya Emma Shalom bat Gavriel Simchayeva
By her children and grandchildren

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