



A MITZVA DILEMMA FOR THE SHABBOS TABLE



GARDEN VS PLAYGROUND

By Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

This week's Parsha deals with the great conflict between the Shevatim. Please enjoy this story about a much more minor conflict.

Ezra was an elderly man who lived in Eretz Yisrael. He lived in a condominium on the ground floor. There were four apartments in the building. Right in front of Ezra's porch was a beautiful flower garden. He loved cultivating the garden, often buying new flowers and plants to improve it. Ezra would spend hours on his porch, reading a Sefer or a book, and admiring the beauty of Hashem's nature, represented in the garden.

The other three condo units had families with young children. Unfortunately, there was no playground nearby, and the other three families thought they could turn the small piece of land in front of the condominium, which had



THEY JUST DON'T MIX

Our Sages teach us that the rise of Antiochus and his evil decrees occurred because there was an overwhelming hisrashlus (lack of passion and alacrity) in our performance of mitzvos. It is noteworthy that Chazal do not say that there was diminished observance, only a diminished passion. As long as the mitzvos are being performed why is passion so critical? Also, how did it diminish?

Historically, the period preceding the rise of Antiochus was the first time our people encountered the threat of assimilation. Until that time, even though we lived among the Babylonians and the Persians we were never attracted to their culture. However, with the arrival of the Greeks and their culture of mathematics, music, poetry, the sciences and even sports, we became attracted to them. Many of our people began associating with the Greeks and identified themselves more as Greeks than as Jews.

An integral part of the performance of mitzvos is the passion and love with which it is done. The function of mitzvos is to connect us to HaShem. It therefore follows that when mitzvah performance is filled with a passion to connect to HaShem it becomes an extremely powerful mitzvah. That mitzvah becomes a vehicle by which the one performing it connects to Hashem. If, on the other hand, the performance is done out of rote, with no sincere interest to connect, that mitzvah will be limp and the one performing it will fail to connect.

The tragedy of assimilation begins much before any abandonment of Torah and mitzvos occurs. The tragedy of assimilation directly diminishes our passion to connect with HaShem. As we assimilate and associate our identity with other cultures, cultures that do not connect to HaShem, we lose our desire and drive

the garden, into a playground for the kids to play in. They could buy a jungle gym with monkey bars, and the kids would greatly enjoy the activities.

All the condo members had a meeting and shared this idea with Ezra.

Ezra did not take the idea well. "I understand that having the playground would be very nice, but I don't want it to be at the expense of the garden. Looking at the garden and reading in front of it is one of the greatest pleasures I have had in my old age, and if you take it away, who knows how it might impact my emotional and mental health?

The others understood Ezra's argument but thought that since they were the majority, their desires should supersede. Ezra, however, argued that it was a matter of his emotional health. They were taking away something important for his health, and even though they were a majority, they didn't have a right to impact his health.

In addition, one can argue that the garden had a *chazaka*, it was there for a long time, and they couldn't simply decide to eliminate the garden. Finally, there is an additional argument. Can Ezra argue that perhaps removing the garden would be taking away from the beauty of Eretz Yisrael?

The elderly man brought his question to Rav Zilberstein.

What do you think? Do the other people in the apartment have the right to decide to replace the garden with a playground? Or did they have to be concerned about impacting the elderly Ezra's health?

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own Torah culture, then the solution should be to create a wedge between ourselves and our neighbors' culture. As we become distanced from the latter we will naturally gravitate to our natural selves, to our Torah culture.

The miracle of Chanuka is celebrated with the menorah and the oil with which it is lit. Olive oil and its insolubility with other fruit juices is the analogy of the relationship of the Jewish people and the nations of the world. The juices of all fruits mix with one another with the exception of the olive. No matter how much you mix and stir them, the two will separate and the olive oil will return to its original state.

How appropriate it is that there is much talk about anti-Semitism in recent days. Although anti-Semitism often invites trouble for our communities and individuals, nevertheless, there is a silver lining. If we can harness that anti-Semitism to create a wedge between us and the others' culture and way of life, we can turn it into a life-giving force. We can turn to our own Torah culture and imbue our families with what is ours. We can leave the dreams and aspirations of the nations for them and accept for ourselves and our families the dreams and aspirations that the Torah has set for us.

Have a very wonderful Shabbos and a lichte Chanukah.

Paysach Diskind

MITZVA MEME

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*Pride is concerned
with who is right.*

*Humility is concerned
with what is right.*”

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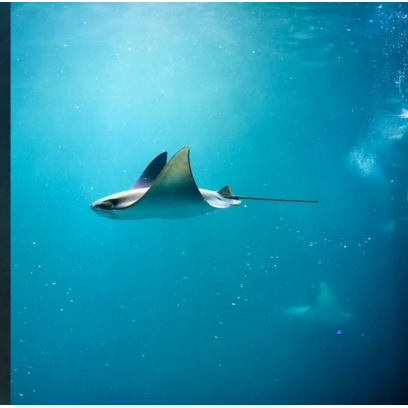
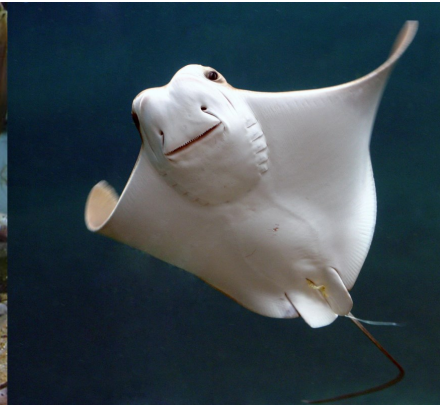
-Ezra T. Benson



to participate in the performance of His Torah and mitzvos. Even as we perform the mitzvos, because that is what our society expects from us, those mitzvos are hollow and contain no kedusha, they fail to attach us to Him. As time goes on, we can expect an abandonment of the mitzvos entirely.

We have become accustomed to measuring assimilation in terms of the rate of intermarriage. Given that assimilation begins with a process of diminished passion, perhaps we should measure assimilation by the degree of diminished passion. Intermarriage certainly quantifies assimilation at the far end of the spectrum, however, if we could ascertain the degree in which our passion to observe mitzvos diminishes we would be able to more accurately chart the rate of assimilation.

What is the solution? If assimilation occurs when we identify ourselves more with our neighbors' culture than with our



SHABBOS: CELEBRATING HASHEM'S CREATION

STINGRAYS, LARGE AND SMALL

Let's continue our exploration of Hashem's fascinating and unusual creatures.

This picture above looks like pieces of ravioli stuffed with little smiling aliens. What are they?

Believe it or not, they are baby stingrays.

Stingrays have flat, wide bodies, which may not look like fish. But they actually are fish. In fact, stingrays are closely related to sharks, which are also fish. Stingrays and sharks have a lot in common. Their bodies are both made up of cartilage, and they have the same type of teeth. In addition, they both have scales or teeth that cover the outside of their bodies, called dermal denticles. Imagine having teeth on your back!

Since their bodies are made of cartilage, they don't have bony skeletons. Instead, their bodies are made up of the same kind of material that we humans have in our noses and ears. Their predators are sharks and other large fish and seals. And what do stingrays prey upon? Most stingrays feed primarily on mollusks, crustaceans, and, occasionally, small fish.

While the baby stingrays above are a couple of inches, some stingrays can grow to be quite large. The largest species of stingray measure 6.5 feet in length and can weigh up to 790 pounds!

Even though a stingray is a fish related to the shark, it does not swim like a typical fish or a shark. Instead, stingrays swim by flapping their fins similarly to a bird. This manner of swimming allows them to swim quite fast for their size. Some stingrays travel at speeds of up to 30 miles per hour! The bird-like wave motion of their fins gives them a lot of speed.

What's with its name? Ray is like a ray of light or the rays of a fan. They look like rays. And sting because, yup, they have a long tail with a stinger and venom on the tail. Stingrays use this venom to protect themselves from predators.

But have no fear. Despite the spiky tails and strange look, stingrays are actually quite playful. They're very curious and friendly when snorkelers swim near them, although they can become a little nervous and often swim away. Stingrays are not usually aggressive and ordinarily attack humans only when provoked, such as when they are accidentally stepped on.

This actually happens more often than you'd think. Stingrays tend to hang out in shallow waters and bury themselves in the sand, so people walking in shallow water often step on them. When this happens, the stingray's survival instinct kicks in, and its tail is thrust into the person's foot or leg, releasing venom. Stingrays can have one, two, or three blades. Contact with the spinal blade or blades causes local trauma (from the cut itself), pain, swelling, and muscle cramps from the venom. The injury is painful but rarely life-threatening unless the stinger pierces a vital area. The blade is frequently barbed and usually

breaks off in the wound. Surgery may be required to remove the fragments. Fatal stings from stingrays are very rare.

It is interesting to note that it is said that the ancient Greeks would use the venom of captured stingrays as an anesthetic to perform certain surgeries.

They give birth to live offspring rather than laying eggs. This means that they are 'ovoviviparous', meaning they give birth to fully formed offspring rather than laying eggs. Female stingrays can give birth twice a year.

Why do stingrays dwell under the sand? This is how they hunt. Most stingrays are ambush hunters. This means they wait in ambush, under the ocean sand, for their prey. As their prey approaches they use a strategy called "tenting". With its fins pressed against the ocean floor, the ray will raise its head, generating a suction force that pulls the prey underneath the body. They ambush their prey with whole-body suction.

To properly lay that ambush, Hashem gave them the perfect camouflage. The flattened bodies of stingrays allow them to effectively conceal themselves under the sand. They do this by agitating the sand and then hiding beneath it. In addition, stingrays have a wide range of colors and patterns on their dorsal surface to help them camouflage with the sandy bottom. Some stingrays can even change color over several days to adjust to new habitats and lay their ambush.

You might ask, if stingrays live under ocean sand, how can they see or breathe?

To address this, Hashem designed the stingray with two amazing features. First, rather than relying on their eyes on top of their body, they rely on their sense of smell and electroreceptors. Electroreceptors are special pores around their faces that can detect the electrical currents emitted by other ocean dwellers to find food. This is particularly helpful when swimming in the sand.

In addition, stingrays have special breathing openings called Spiracles that allow them to breathe under the sand. Spiracles are openings just behind the stingray's eyes. Stingrays usually take in water using their mouth and then send the water through the gills for gas exchange. This is efficient, but the mouth cannot be used when the stingrays bury themselves in the ocean sediment and wait for prey to swim by. Instead, the stingray switches to using its spiracles. With the spiracles, they can draw water free from the sand directly into their gills for gas exchange. Breathing from the spiracles is less efficient than the mouth because spiracles cannot pull the same volume of water. However, it is enough when the stingray quietly waits for its prey.

A SIMPLE HONEST JEW

This week a dear friend of mine, Eugene Levin, passed away. He was a simple honest Jew. He was a very great person but that is what simple honest Jews are - great!

His daughter related the following story which occurred when Eugene was 19 years old. He was serving in the Soviet Army for two years following his graduation from high school. The day was over, and the boys had free time to chill. As most young men will do in the former Soviet Union, all of Eugene's friends enjoyed a couple of bottles of Vodka. Eugene did not drink. Shortly after the whole group was drunk, they received orders from a commanding officer that some difficult work needed to be done on top of a tall crane.

The work was too difficult for Eugene so he could not offer to go. However, a friend of his who was quite inebriated volunteered to do it. His friend prepared himself for the trip up to the top of the crane and Eugene watched in horror. He understood that this may not end well. Climbing up a crane is hard by itself, but when the fellow is drunk it becomes dangerous.

His friend began the climb and Eugene followed shortly behind. The fellow succeeded in getting to the top and corrected the problem. But as the friend began to head back he looked down and realized how high up he was. He froze. "Eugene, I cannot go back down. I am stuck." Eugene had him maneuver into a position that he was able to mount onto Eugene's back and the two of them returned to the bottom safely, Eugene on his feet and the friend on his back.

Told By R' Paysach Diskind



THE ANSWER

Regarding last week's question about the person who dressed up as a Gadol, Rav Zilberstein says that if this question had happened on any other day but Purim, it would have had a different answer. But because it happened on Purim, after the fact that he drank the brandy, he would not have to pay for it because the Rama (695) says that there is a special halacha on Purim that one is exempt from damages that happen in the course of Purim.



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