

A MITZVA DILEMMA FOR THE SHABBOS TABLE



THE BROKEN BUS

This week's parsha discusses the importance of establishing a beis din to adjudicate monetary disputes. This leads us to the following true story.

Yanky had a job as a school bus driver. One day, he got a call from a Jewish school that wanted to hire him to drive their students on a three-hour, one-way trip to an alpine slide resort. They offered to pay \$100 an hour, and Yanky agreed. The school mentioned that they had their own bus he could drive. When Yanky saw the bus, it looked old and rusted, so he asked, "Are you sure this bus can make the drive?" Levi, the school administrator, assured him that it was fine. So, sure enough, Yanky drove a bus full of lively boys on the three-hour trip to the alpine slide park.



THE PEACE OF FIRE & WATER

In his introduction to this week's Parsha, Shoftim, Rabbeinu Bachya highlights the importance of 'shalom' (peace). He writes that shalom is the very foundation of the world. The heavens are held together with shalom as he explains that 'shamayim' (heavens) derives its name from aish (fire) and mayim (water) which are inherently opposites and the two cannot exist in the same plane. It is therefore that shalom is a prerequisite. Without shalom two opposites cannot coexist. He goes on to say that shalom is the goal and destiny of this world.

The word shalom derives from shaleim, or shleimus, which means complete. When something is complete there is nothing missing and there is nothing extra; every component plays its unique role and no component is extra, it is simply and absolutely perfect. This is in sharp contrast with how the world defines peace. The UN considers peace when the two neighboring states are not at war with each other. If the two nations totally ignore one another that would be absolute peace in their understanding.

Shalom, however, is only achieved when the various parties form a single unit and each one plays their distinct role in that unit. Hence, shamayim which is the single unit of the 'heavens' and is composed of fire and water, shalom allows the two to complement one another.

The question is how does one achieve true shalom if the components are inherently opposing each other such as fire and water? How can it work? The very nature of fire is that it evaporates the water and the very nature of water is that it extinguishes fire, how can each one accommodate the other? To answer this question using the

He had been driving for two hours and 45 minutes when, all of a sudden, the bus broke down. They were close enough to the destination that the boys, led by their teachers, made the rest of the way on foot. However, Yanky had to stay behind and wait for a mechanic and the tow truck to arrive, which added another three hours to his trip.

Eventually, Yanky made his way back home. When he approached Levi, the school administrator, for his payment, he said, "I know we agreed that for three hours you would pay me \$100 an hour, but I ended up with a six-hour trip instead of a three-hour one. So, I'd like to be paid accordingly."

Levi responded, "On the contrary. We hired you to drive them all the way to the Alpine Slide Park, and you didn't even do that. They had to walk part of the way on foot. We actually think we should reduce your pay."

They agreed to bring this question to a Rav.

What do you think? Is Yanky entitled to be paid for six hours, or should he receive less pay because he wasn't able to complete the trip? What do you think?



laws of physics is not possible because they cannot complement one another. However, on a metaphysical level the answer lies in the source of the energy of the fire and of the water.

The Source of all energies is the Ribono shel Olom, the Master of the Universe. All energy is created by Him and therefore all energies bow to Him. The energy of fire bows before HaShem as does the energy of water. Although they oppose each other, they nevertheless share a common Source. When each force stands by itself they oppose each other and there is no possibility for them to merge into a single unit and certainly impossible for them to complement the other. However, in the presence of their Source, before Whom they bow, they naturally merge into one.

This metaphysical explanation works in the Heavens where the Presence of HaShem is apparent. How can we expect shalom

in this world, this world is bound by the laws of physics? How will the opposing forces relinquish their natural opposition?

Rabbeinu Bachya continues in his introduction to explain that even though shalom is the foundation of the world and the goal of this world is to bring about shalom, nevertheless, judges and law enforcement is a necessary requisite for achieving shalom.

When we have judges who adjudicate and a system which enforces the laws that were adjudicated then shalom becomes possible. Since, in this world where each person has his own interests and his own ego which so often conflict with the other person's interests and ego, without judges and law enforcement shalom will not be achieved. If we could achieve a state in which all men bow before the judges and the enforcers we would quickly achieve a state of shalom.

We have already entered the days of Elul and are approaching the days of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, the days of judgment. May HaShem grant us the strength to bend before Him and relinquish our personal interests and ego and merge into the single unit of Klal Yisroel to finally become the carriage upon which HaShem rests His Presence.

Have a wonderful Shabbos.

Paysach Diskind



SHABBOS: CELEBRATING HASHEM'S CREATION

THE SEA LEOPARD

Antarctica, the frozen southernmost continent, is one of the harshest environments on Earth. Amidst the icy waters and the barren, windswept landscapes, a creature thrives that embodies both the ferocity and the wonder of nature—the leopard seal (*Hydrurga leptonyx*, also called the Sea Leopard). Don't let the leopard seal's charming, smiling face fool you. Despite their seemingly harmless appearance, these animals are among the most fearsome predators in the Antarctic ecosystem. Named for their spotted coats, reminiscent of the land-based leopard, these seals are as cunning and deadly as their terrestrial namesakes.

At up to 11.5 feet in length and weighing up to 1,000 pounds, female leopard seals are larger than most other seals, second only to the massive Southern Elephant Seal. Their size and strength are matched by their powerful jaws, which are armed with sharp, 1.5-inch canine teeth, perfect for gripping and tearing through flesh. These qualifications make the leopard seal a top predator, feared by nearly all other creatures that share its icy habitat.

These seals are near the top of the Antarctic food chain, and their diet is as diverse as it is deadly. Unlike other seals, which eat fish, leopard seals prey primarily on warm-blooded creatures. Penguins are a favorite, with these agile hunters often lurking near ice shelves, waiting for the perfect moment to strike as a penguin dives into the water. The seals' long, thin bodies are perfectly designed for speed, allowing them to swim at impressive speeds of up to 25 mph in pursuit of their prey. Their powerful jaws, armed with sharp canine teeth, make quick work of catching and killing their prey.

But leopard seals don't stop at penguins. Their diet also includes smaller seals, such as crabeater seals, Antarctic fur seals, and Weddell seals. This makes them one of the few pinnipeds that regularly prey on other seals. Their ability to hunt such a wide variety of prey highlights their adaptability and skill as hunters, securing their position as one of the most feared predators in the Antarctic.

Leopard seals are ferocious and solitary animals, living most of their lives alone in the icy waters of Antarctica. They are only seen in groups during the breeding season, which occurs between November and March. Outside of this period, these solitary creatures are typically observed alone, patrolling the ice edges and open waters in search of food.

Leopard seals are incredibly skillful hunters. One of the most intriguing aspects of their behavior is their tendency to "play" with their food. Scientists have observed leopard seals engaging in what appears to be a game of cat and mouse with their prey, particularly penguins. The seals will catch a penguin and then release it, only to chase it down again. This behavior, while seemingly wasteful, may serve an important purpose. It is believed that younger leopard seals use this "play" as a way to sharpen their

hunting skills, practicing the techniques they will need to survive in the wild.

Another remarkable aspect of leopard seals' hunting strategy is their ability to burst through ice to catch penguin chicks. This dramatic method of hunting showcases not only their physical strength but also their ingenuity in capturing prey that might otherwise be out of reach. Once a penguin is caught, the leopard seal's powerful jaws and sharp teeth ensure that the hunt ends quickly. It can take as little as 4 to 7 minutes for a leopard seal to consume a penguin, a testament to their efficiency as predators.

Leopard seals also exhibit a behavior known as "yawning," which involves opening their mouths wide to display their sharp teeth. This action is often interpreted as a warning or a means of intimidation, both to other seals and potential threats, including humans.

Leopard seals have a reputation for being aggressive, and there have been instances where they have attacked humans. In one tragic case in 2003, a biologist was killed by a leopard seal in Antarctica when it dragged her underwater. Despite these rare attacks, leopard seals have also exhibited surprising behaviors that suggest a more complex relationship with humans.

In 2006, photographer Paul Nicklen had an extraordinary encounter with a female leopard seal. The seal, instead of attacking, repeatedly brought him live penguins, seemingly trying to feed him. This behavior was unprecedented and left scientists puzzled. It is speculated that the seal may have perceived Nicklen as a "useless predator" who needed help catching food. This nurturing side of the leopard seal, so at odds with its fearsome reputation, adds yet another layer to its fascinating character.

Even leopard seals have predators to contend with. The only known natural predator of the leopard seal is the killer whale, or orca. These highly intelligent and social marine mammals have been known to hunt leopard seals, often working together in pods to isolate and capture them. Despite their size and strength, leopard seals must rely on their speed and agility to escape from these formidable hunters, swimming at speeds of up to 23 mph in a bid for survival.

Leopard seals also face threats from their harsh environment. Although they are well-adapted to the extreme cold of the Antarctic, with a thick layer of blubber for insulation, the challenges of survival in such a remote and unforgiving place are immense. The mortality rate for leopard seal pups is high, with nearly 25% not surviving their first year. This high mortality rate is offset by the seals' relatively long lifespan, with some individuals living up to 26 years in the wild.

Thank you Hashem for your wondrous world!

THE "CURSE" THAT WAS A BLESSING

Rabbi David Ashear related the following beautiful story:

There was a Jewish boy who was conscripted into the Polish Army during World War I. His parents were devastated, understanding that both his physical and spiritual future were in danger. They went to the Chafetz Chaim to ask for a blessing that their son would be saved from the draft. After a few moments of silence, the great sage said, "What would be so bad if he learned how to shoot a gun?"

The parents were stunned. It sounded as if the Rabbi was cursing their son, suggesting he should be conscripted and taught how to fight.

They decided to bribe the doctor who conducted the medical evaluations of the conscripts, asking him to write a negative report about the boy's condition. Right after the examination, just as the doctor completed the false report describing the boy as unfit for the military, a general entered and caught them. The general announced that the boy should be placed in his own division, where he would be in charge of assembling machine guns under live fire. And so, the boy went into the army and learned how to assemble and use guns.

He ended up surviving the war, and several decades later, during World War II, he found himself in the Warsaw Ghetto. He managed to escape from the ghetto with a group of friends, and they ran deep into the woods, where they met a band of partisans. The Jews offered to join the partisans to fight against the Germans, but the partisans were also anti-Semites and threatened to kill the Jews.

Just then, the man who had served in the Polish Army spoke up. "I can really help you," he said. "You see that broken machine gun on the ground? I can fix it and hit any target."

"O.K.," they said, "let's see."

He proceeded to fix the gun and then shot an apple from a distant tree, dividing it into quarters. The partisans were very impressed, and this is how that man and his friends were saved. For the rest of his life, he remembered the words spoken by the Chafetz Chaim: "What would be so bad if he learned how to shoot a gun?" This remark, which initially sounded like a dreadful curse, actually foretold the way Hashem would save this young man's life.



THE ANSWER

Regarding last week's question about the person who let the dog outside his house, Rav Zilberstein (Upiryo Matok Devarim Page 279) writes that when a person says they are not accepting responsibility ("achrayos"), it means they are exempt from the laws of "shomrim," the laws of guardianship. This means that even if the person is negligent, they would be exempt from responsibility under those laws. However, stating that one does not accept "achrayos" does not absolve them from the laws of "nezek," the laws of damages. Therefore, because putting the dog outside is considered an act of damaging it with one's own hands, the person would still be liable for the loss of the dog.

This week's TableTalk is dedicated to the memory of Arkadiy Berezin

אהרון בן יצחק ז"ל

May the merit of all the hundreds and hundreds of beautiful Shabbos tables bring an elevation to his neshama

By his beloved family



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