

A MITZVA DILEMMA FOR THE SHABBOS TABLE



THE GROUND CARP

By Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

Avi, who lived in Israel, saw a large advertisement for the local Jewish supermarket promoting carp fish for 15 shekels per kilo. Usually, it was 30 shekels per kilo, but the ad stated it had been reduced from 30 to 15 shekels, calling it a "great deal."

Excited about the discount, Avi went to the store to purchase the fish. At the fish counter, he asked for six kilos. The clerk handed it to him, and Avi then requested that they grind it up, as his wife made delicious homemade gefilte fish.

At the register, Avi expected to pay $15 \times 6 = 90$ shekels. He handed over his credit card, and the fish was rung up. However, when he received his receipt, the total came to 180 shekels. Confused, he questioned the



KNOWLEDGE NOT BELIEF

In the first of the Ten Commandments HaShem declares "I am HaShem Who took you out from the land of Egypt..." Rambam counts this as a mitzvah. Many commentators ask on Rambam how can this be counted as a commandment before acknowledging that there is an authority who commands? Before one could be held responsible to follow a command, it must first be established to that individual that the one who is ordering this command is an authority. It is therefore not possible to have a commandment to accept HaShem as an authority. HaShem's authority must precede the mitzvah.

Malbim offers an answer to Rambam's position as follows. It was a given by the entire world that HaShem is an authority. The nations, even those who worshiped pagan gods, acknowledged the existence of HaShem. They recognized that there was one super god who was the god of the gods. In their mind, however, one did not serve the super god since he is too far away from Man. If you have needs from a god, go directly to the god that specializes in that need. For rain you go to the rain god, for sun you go to the sun god and so on.

If it was axiomatic that HaShem is the commander, what then, is the first commandment?

Rambam explains the first commandment was for us to know the many facets of HaShem's Reality.

We must know that HaShem is the source of all existence; there is no existence outside of Him. Any form of existence is only an expression of His Will. We must know that He has no beginning; He exists and was not brought into existence.

MITZVA MEME

price.

The clerk explained, "Actually, the price is still 30 per kilo unless you meet the conditions of the sale. If you look closely, there is a star, and the fine print states that to get the 15-per-kilo price, you must buy 300 shekels' worth of fish. Until you reach that amount, the price remains at 30 per kilo, which is why your total is 180."

Avi was surprised. "I didn't realize there was a condition," he said. "I never buy 300 shekels' worth of fish. I'd like my money back, please."

The clerk, however, refused. "Sorry, but the fish has already been ground up, so we can't process a return."

Avi later brought this issue to a rav for guidance. He argued that the condition wasn't stated clearly—it was only written in fine print. He felt it was unfair that he was forced to pay the higher price and then unable to back out due to a lack of transparency.

The store countered by saying that most customers understood the deal and that it was standard practice—the discount only applied if all the conditions were met.

What do you think? According to the Torah, is Avi entitled to a refund? Was the store being deceptive, or is this simply a case of a customer not reading the fine print carefully enough?

See Upiryo Matok, Devarim, Page 171.



We must know that He has no end; His existence precedes time and continues when time will no longer exist.
We must know that everything that happens is His Will; there is no other force that can bring about anything.
We must know that He is attentive to every detail of every person; there is nothing that is irrelevant to Him.
We must know that He cares for every individual including all of his needs.

Malbim points out how Rambam states the mitzvah as an obligation to know these facts not to believe them. This indicates that these facts are self-evident or perhaps axiomatic. Every person who is intellectually honest will recognize these facts as being absolutely true.

This notion can be frustrating at times when we do not recognize them as axiomatic or when we encounter intelligent folks who refuse to acknowledge these truths.

At times like these you can draw a similar parallel to the question

of free choice. Intuitively every intelligent person recognizes that Man has free choice. If he was simply programmed to make the choices that he makes then he would not be responsible for his actions. Just as a lion who kills an innocent zebra is not liable for punishment, so would a person who kills the guy in the car next to him in road rage would not be liable for any punishment. It was his natural reaction.

In spite of this self-evident reality, there are 'intelligent' folks who will maintain that Man is programmed by the nature that formed him and has no free choice. Man is capable of avoiding acknowledgment of truths that hold him to a higher level of responsibility.

In discussing the mitzvah of knowing HaShem, the Chovos Halvovos explains that the mitzvah is an ongoing mitzvah which a person should be continuously engaged in. The way one grows in this mitzvah is by seeking more expressions of HaShem's manifestation in His world. This is done by studying astronomy and allowing oneself to be amazed at the awesome greatness of HaShem, by studying botany and being amazed by the sheer beauty of His genius, by studying human anatomy and being overwhelmed with gratitude for His watching over us that our health remains intact. HaShem's signature fills the world waiting for us to notice it.

Have a wonderful Shabbos

Paysach Diskind



SHABBOS: CELEBRATING HASHEM'S CREATION

RAFFLESIA ARNOLDII

Let's continue our exploration of some of the world's most unique and unusual plants.

Imagine walking through a dense rainforest and suddenly coming across a flower as big as a car tire! That's *Rafflesia arnoldii*—the largest individual flower in the world, growing up to three feet in diameter and weighing as much as 24 pounds! Unlike most flowers, which bloom from stems or branches, this enormous blossom seems to emerge straight from the forest floor, like something out of a fairy tale. But while its size is amazing, it's the stench that really gets your attention!

If you ever get close to a blooming *Rafflesia arnoldii*, you might want to hold your breath. The flower gives off a strong, putrid smell—just like rotting meat! Yuck! But there's a very good reason for this stinky perfume.

Most flowers use sweet scents and bright colors to attract bees and butterflies for pollination. But *Rafflesia arnoldii* has a different strategy. It mimics a dead animal to attract a very special group of pollinators—carrion flies. These flies are normally drawn to decaying flesh, where they lay their eggs. When they land on the flower, hoping to find a meal, they accidentally pick up sticky pollen. Then, when they fly off to explore another stinky flower, they transfer the pollen and help *Rafflesia* reproduce. This clever trick—using a rotten smell and a meaty, reddish-brown color with white spots—makes *Rafflesia arnoldii* one of nature's most fascinating masters of disguise. Not only does it smell like rotting meat, but its reddish-brown petals also look like decaying flesh! The mottled white spots on its petals resemble the texture of decomposing skin, making it even more convincing to carrion flies searching for a place to lay their eggs.

Unlike most plants, *Rafflesia arnoldii* doesn't have leaves, stems, or roots. It can't make its own food through photosynthesis because it has no chlorophyll—the green pigment that most plants use to turn sunlight into energy. So how does it survive?

This strange flower is a parasite. Instead of growing on its own, it lives inside a specific type of vine called *Tetrastigma*. It sends thin, thread-like structures into the vine, absorbing nutrients and water from its host. For most of its life, *Rafflesia arnoldii* remains completely invisible, hidden inside the vine's tissues.

Then, after months (or even years) of growing in secret, the plant starts to form a strange, round bud that looks like a small, brown cabbage. Slowly, this bud swells larger and larger—sometimes for up to 18 months—until one day, the enormous flower bursts open!

If you're hoping to see a *Rafflesia arnoldii* in bloom, you'd better have good timing! The flower's life is shockingly short—after taking months to form, it blooms for only five to seven days before it starts to rot and collapse.

Because of this short lifespan, pollination is tricky. *Rafflesia arnoldii* has separate male and female flowers, meaning that a male flower and a female flower must bloom at the same time, in the same area, for pollination to happen. To make things even more complicated, if no car-

tion flies happen to visit during the short 5–7 day bloom time, pollination fails entirely. With such a narrow window for success, it's no wonder this flower is so rare!

Once a *Rafflesia arnoldii* flower is successfully pollinated, it produces a berry-like fruit full of thousands of tiny seeds. But how do these seeds find a new host vine? Scientists believe that small mammals, such as tree shrews or rodents, may eat the fruit and spread the seeds through their droppings. However, because the seeds must land on the right type of *Tetrastigma* vine to survive, only a tiny fraction ever grow into new plants.

Despite its unusual ways, *Rafflesia arnoldii* is actually related to a group of plants in the order Malpighiales—which includes some very ordinary-looking relatives, like passion flowers and violets!

Scientists have been fascinated by *Rafflesia* for years because of its unusual adaptations. In fact, genetic studies have revealed something truly amazing: It has borrowed genes from its host vine! This rare phenomenon, called horizontal gene transfer, means *Rafflesia* has actually absorbed some DNA from *Tetrastigma*, the plant it parasitizes. This genetic mystery is still being studied, but it proves just how unique and specialized this giant flower truly is.

Despite its strange nature, *Rafflesia arnoldii* is beloved in Southeast Asia. In Indonesia, it is recognized as a national treasure, even appearing on postage stamps. Tourists travel from all over the world, hoping to catch a glimpse of its rare, fleeting bloom. Indonesia recognizes *Rafflesia arnoldii* as one of its three national flowers.

Many people mistake *Rafflesia arnoldii* for another stinky plant, which we have written about called *Titan arum* (*Amorphophallus titanum*), which also smells like rotten meat. But they are completely different species! While *Rafflesia arnoldii* holds the title for the largest individual flower, the largest floral structure in the world belongs to the *Titan arum*.

The first known record of *Rafflesia* came from French naturalist Louis Auguste Deschamps, who studied the plant in Java between 1791 and 1794. Unfortunately, his notes were seized by the British during his voyage home, and his work remained hidden for decades. It wasn't until 1818, during an expedition led by Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles in Sumatra, that Dr. James Arnold documented the flower again—earning *Rafflesia arnoldii* its name in honor of both men!

Unlike many plants that can be cultivated in greenhouses or botanical gardens, *Rafflesia arnoldii* cannot survive outside its natural rainforest home. This is because it is entirely dependent on its host vine, *Tetrastigma*, and the complex interactions in its ecosystem. Scientists have tried to grow it in controlled conditions, but without success.

This rare and unique flower only grows in the tropical rainforests of Sumatra and Borneo at specific altitudes, typically around 3,280 feet above sea level. Because it is so dependent on the health of its rainforest ecosystem, deforestation is one of its biggest threats.

Thank you Hashem for your wondrous world!

HE ARRANGED FOR THE DOCTOR'S OWN WIFE TO MAKE THE CALL

Rabbi Ephraim Shapiro told the following incredible story.

Dr. and Mrs. Joseph Rosenblatt, residents of Florida, live a comfortable life. Dr. Rosenblatt is a top oncologist, well-respected in his field.

One day, several years ago, Mrs. Rosenblatt was driving on the highway when she noticed an old, beat-up car several lanes over with a "For Sale" sign in the window. On a whim, she decided to call the number. As she later recounted the story to Rabbi Shapiro, she paused and admitted, "I have no idea why I called. My husband and I both have brand-new cars. We had absolutely no need for an old one." A young man answered the phone. "I just saw your advertisement," she said. "May I ask why you're selling your car?"

"Again, she paused in her retelling. "I have no idea why I asked that question either. He could have easily told me it was none of my business." But instead of dismissing her, the young man broke down in tears. "My wife and I got married a few years ago. We were living happily in South America until she was diagnosed with a severe illness. We came to South Florida for treatment, but every doctor we saw told us the same thing: 'The only doctor who can help you now is Dr. Joseph Rosenblatt.' But we don't have insurance here... so I'm selling my car just to afford an appointment with him."

Mrs. Rosenblatt was stunned. "Dr. Rosenblatt is my husband," she told him. "Go pick up your wife right now and bring her to the hospital. I'm calling my husband—he will treat her at no charge." Indeed, Dr. Rosenblatt was able to help save the young woman's life.

The man was desperately searching for a doctor, and Hashem not only led him to the right one—He arranged for the doctor's own wife to make the call, offering the appointment free of charge.

Hashem orchestrates every detail of our lives. He connects us to the right people at the right time. And when we turn to Him, we are never alone.

A song based on this story can be heard at bit.ly/tabletalksong



THE ANSWER

Regarding last week's question about the "buy one, get one free" sale and whether it is permitted to return the purchased suit in order to keep the free suit, Rav Zilberstein (Upiryo Matok, Devarim, page 168) answered that, technically speaking, there is nothing halachically forbidden about this. However, it is not proper to do so because it violates the principle of "speaking truth in your heart." This is similar to the famous story of Rav Safra, who was in the middle of reciting Shema when someone approached him with an offer to buy an item. Thinking that Rav Safra was not interested, the buyer kept increasing his offer. When Rav Safra finished Shema, he insisted on selling the item for the original price, as that was the amount he had committed to in his heart. Similarly, in this case, when the person initially bought the suit, he was satisfied with it. Changing his mind later in order to exploit the sale would be an example of not upholding the truth in one's heart.

This week's TableTalk is dedicated to the memory of
Margaret Guggenheim
מינדיל בת יעקב ז"ל

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