

A MITZVA DILEMMA FOR THE SHABBOS TABLE



CLEARING OUT HER LAWN

By Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

This week's Torah portion discusses the courtyard around the Mishkan. This leads us to the following interesting true story.

Elisheva was a widow who lived on the ground floor of a large apartment building. Her apartment had a yard and a garden, which she really enjoyed. The garden and yard provided her with a great deal of comfort and solace. However, there was one problem—because she lived on the ground floor, whenever people dropped things from their porches above, they would usually land in her garden.

Every day, toys, airplanes, and countless balls would end up in her lawn. Over time, this became very disheart-



ONLY EMPTY SPACE

There are many levels of performance by which one can do a mitzvah. The ideal manner in performing a mitzvah is to do it purely for the sake of HaShem, with no other motive. This manner of performance is a truly great level and is regarded highly with respect to the effectiveness of the mitzvah. Every mitzvah causes a positive effect in the world and the effect of any mitzvah depends specifically on the intent of the one who performs it. One can perform a mitzvah with the intent of anticipating a reward in the world to come or even a reward in this world. One can perform a mitzvah because of the honor and respect he will receive from others who will consider him a great tzaddik for his righteousness. Even though the performance with these ulterior motives are less than perfect, nevertheless, the mitzvah is considered a mitzvah, albeit less effective.

There is one exception, where the mitzvah is invalidated if the intentions are not absolutely pure; with no other intent other than to bring satisfaction to HaShem. That is the mitzvah of contributing to the building of the Mishkan.

The Parsha opens with the following mitzvah. "Speak to the Children of Israel that they should collect gifts to the Mishkan for Me from every person whose heart graciously offers it." The question all the commentaries address is why does the Torah not say directly "every person whose heart graciously offers should give..." The way it is written it appears that the mitzvah is placed on the public that they should collect these gifts. Why not address the people themselves that they should give the gifts?

Malbim explains that if the mitzvah were addressed to every individual member of our people, one might fulfill this mitzvah with somewhat slightly imperfect intentions. Maybe he would contribute because of peer pressure or to gain respect from others.

ening for her. Elisheva posted signs around the building, asking residents to be careful and mindful not to drop their belongings into her yard. However, her warnings were largely ignored.

One day, Elisheva was expecting guests when she noticed dozens of toys scattered across her yard—toy airplanes, balls, and other items. Frustrated, she lost patience. She gathered all the toys she could find and simply tossed them over the wall surrounding her yard, into the public street. As a result, some toys were stolen, while others were damaged by passersby.

Later, Elisheva felt bad about what had happened and began to wonder: Was she responsible for compensating the owners for their damaged toys? On one hand, she had warned them multiple times and had made it clear that she didn't want these objects on her property. On the other hand, perhaps she had a responsibility to collect the toys, store them safely, and place them somewhere secure rather than disposing of them in a way that led to their damage.

She brought this question to Rav Zilberstein: Was she obligated to compensate the owners for their broken toys?

What do you think?

See Chashukei Chemed Bava Kama Page 174



As mentioned, this would be acceptable with other mitzvos. For this mitzvah, however, HaShem needed absolute purity of intent. To accomplish this, the mitzvah was given to the community at large to collect only those gifts that were given with completely pure intentions.

The question is why should this mitzvah be different? Why must the gifts of the Mishkan be given with absolutely pure intentions?

Our Sages teach us that the function of building the Mishkan was to prepare us, the people of HaShem, to be receptacles capable of receiving the Presence of HaShem within ourselves; within our personal, family and communal lives.

What are the prerequisites necessary to becoming a receptacle to contain the Presence of HaShem? The primary requisite is to make enough space within ourselves that will accommodate HaShem's Presence. How much space is required? The space required to contain His Presence is a space where there is no other being around.

We recognize the concept regarding HaShem of "ein od bilvado", there is no other existence other than He. HaShem is the source of existence and nothing exists outside of Him. All of existence that we are familiar with is nothing but an expression of His Will.

To properly prepare a space for HaShem we must remove everything else that has its own existence so that in this space 'ein od bilvado". By extension, this means that my personal ego needs to be removed to make space for His Presence. Inasmuch as I feel that I exist and I have my own significance outside of my being here to serve HaShem, then there is no space for HaShem in me.

Therefore, when our ancestors collected gifts for the Mishkan it was imperative that the gift be given with no other intent. If, for example, the gift was given for the honor that the donor would receive, then that gift contains personal interest and could not create the space needed to properly house His Presence.

Have a wonderful Shabbos.

Paysach Diskind



SHABBOS: CELEBRATING HASHEM'S CREATION

THE MARY RIVER TURTLE

Deep in the fast-flowing waters of Queensland, Australia's Mary River lives a creature like no other. Meet the Mary River Turtle (*Elusor macrurus*)—a rare, ancient reptile with an unmistakable punk-rock look! With tufts of green algae "hair," an unusual way of breathing, and a history that dates back to very long ago, this turtle is one of nature's most fascinating wonders. But it's also in danger—this incredible species is critically endangered and in need of urgent protection.

Let's dive into the wild world of the Mary River Turtle and uncover why it's one of the most unique and mysterious creatures on Earth!

What's the first thing you notice about the Mary River Turtle? Its crazy green hair! This isn't just a fashion statement—those strands are actually algae growing on its head and body. Since the turtle spends most of its life underwater, algae spores settle on its rough skin and shell, slowly growing into wild green tufts. Over time, this gives the turtle an unintentional punk-rock mohawk!

This algae isn't just for show. Some scientists believe it might serve as a kind of natural camouflage, helping the turtle blend in with its environment and avoid predators. Others think the algae might even protect the turtle's skin from harmful bacteria. One thing's for sure—this turtle has one of the coolest hairdos in the animal kingdom!

Here's a fact that will blow your mind: the Mary River Turtle can breathe through its tail! Well, not exactly—it performs cloacal respiration, meaning it absorbs oxygen through specialized glands near its tail. This bizarre superpower lets the turtle stay underwater for up to three days without coming up for air!

Most turtles have to surface regularly to breathe, but not this one. By staying submerged for such long periods, the Mary River Turtle can avoid predators and conserve energy. Plus, living in clean, oxygen-rich rivers helps it absorb enough oxygen through the water. It makes this turtle one of the most unique aquatic reptiles on the planet!

Unlike some freshwater turtles that prefer calm waters, the Mary River Turtle is a speedy, agile swimmer. It has large, webbed feet that help it zip through the rapids and fast currents of its home in the Mary River.

This ability helps the turtle escape predators, find food, and navigate through the rocky riverbed. But it also makes the species extremely dependent on clean, flowing water. If pollution, dams, or deforestation affect the river's water quality, the turtles lose their perfect swimming habitat.

Most turtles have short, stubby tails, but not the Mary River Turtle! This species has an exceptionally long tail, especially in males, where it can grow up to two-thirds the length of its shell. That's one of the longest tails of any freshwater turtle in the world!

The Mary River Turtle is no tiny pond turtle. Females can grow up to 20 inches in length, making them among the largest fresh-

water turtles in Australia! Males, while slightly smaller, still reach an impressive size.

Because of its size, the Mary River Turtle needs large, open, flowing rivers to thrive. They are built for speed, agility, and life in fast-moving water, which is why habitat destruction is such a big threat to this species.

With its large, round eyes and small, slightly upturned face, the Mary River Turtle looks like it's always smiling! This gives it a unique, almost expressive appearance that has made it a favorite among conservationists and wildlife enthusiasts.

A Turtle That Eats... Fruit?! Most freshwater turtles are carnivorous or omnivorous, but the Mary River Turtle has a particularly interesting diet. It eats a mix of aquatic plants, algae, small invertebrates, and even fallen fruits that land in the water.

This makes it a key part of its river ecosystem, helping to keep aquatic plant growth in check while also providing a food source for predators. The Mary River Turtle isn't just an amazing creature—it's a vital part of nature's balance!

While many turtles grow and mature quickly, the Mary River Turtle takes its time. Females don't reach adulthood until they're 25 years old, and males don't mature until they're 30! That means a single turtle could live for decades before it's ready to have babies. This slow growth rate makes it extremely vulnerable to population decline. If too many eggs are lost or too few young turtles survive, it takes a long time to rebuild the population.

Like many reptiles, the Mary River Turtle lays its eggs in sandy riverbanks. But here's the problem. Nests are often raided by feral predators like foxes and goannas, which dig up and eat the eggs before they can hatch. As mentioned, since Mary River Turtles take decades to mature, losing even a single generation of eggs can have a huge impact on their survival. That's why conservation programs are working to protect nests and raise young turtles in safety before releasing them into the wild.

For a long time, the Mary River Turtle was a mystery to scientists. In fact, it wasn't officially named until 1994—even though humans had been capturing it for decades!

Back in the 1960s and 70s, thousands of baby Mary River Turtles were collected for the pet trade. Known as "Penny Turtles", they were sold in pet stores across Australia. But no one realized just how rare and unique these turtles were until much later. By the time scientists discovered the species, its population had already dropped dangerously low.

Thank you Hashem for your wondrous world!

HE SEEMED TO HAVE MISPLACED THE NOTES HE HAD PREPARED

The following is a beautiful story about the Gerrer Rebbe, the Pnei Menachem. His son, Rav Shaul Alter, visited Baltimore this week.

Sometimes, true greatness is measured not by what one does, but rather by what one refrains from doing. The following moving story illustrates this:

It was a large asifah for chizuk haTorah. The main scheduled speaker was the venerated Rosh Yeshivah of Yeshivas Sfas Emes, Rav Pinchos Menachem Alter. As the Rosh Yeshivah was called upon to speak, he seemed preoccupied. He was searching his pockets for something.

With a look of embarrassment on his face, he began to speak—not with the usual smooth tone of the polished, inspired speaker that he was, but rather hesitatingly, while still fumbling through his pockets. Finally, he turned to the large crowd and apologized, explaining that he seemed to have misplaced the notes he had prepared in advance of the speech and would therefore suffice with a short vort that he would say from memory.

What had really happened?

The distinguished person who had spoken before the Rebbe had clearly not been prepared, and his derashah was not well received. The Rebbe felt that if he were to follow with an eloquent, powerful, well-prepared derashah, it would reflect even more negatively on the previous speaker. Thus, he was willing to embarrass himself rather than cause inadvertent shame and chalishas hadaas to that speaker.

When he was later asked how he could have withheld much-needed chizuk from an entire tzibbur because of this, he replied,

"It is not possible for one's avodas Hashem to become elevated when that elevation comes at the expense of another's feelings."

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THE ANSWER

Regarding last week's question about the benefactor being unable to continue his commitment to paying for the poor person's groceries, Rav Zilberstein (Upiryo Matok Dvarim Page 182) answered as follows: "There is a built-in understanding that the poor person is the customer and that someone else is covering the cost of their groceries. Additionally, there is an implicit understanding (umdenah) that if the benefactor can no longer pay, the groceries will not be free. Instead, the person who benefited from them will be responsible for the payment. The poor person should have anticipated that at some point, the benefactor might not pay, and he is responsible. Therefore, in this case, the poor person would have the obligation to pay for the groceries."

This week's TableTalk is dedicated l'iluy nishmas Mr. George Gelberman upon his first yahrtzeit

מנחם שמחה אברהם בן דוד ז"ל

By his family



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