



A MITZVA DILEMMA FOR THE SHABBOS TABLE



RETURNING WHAT YOU STOLE ON SHABBOS

By Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

This story takes place in the 1800s. There was once a Jewish-owned store, and Zalman was one of the workers there. One day at work, Zalman came across a drawer that contained a large bundle of cash. At that point, he was strapped for money himself. Realizing no one was watching, he was overcome by temptation, put the money into his pocket, and stole it from his boss.

Later that week, it was Shabbos. Zalman went to shul and heard a powerful derashah from the rav. The message of the derashah, combined with the beauty and sanctity of Shabbos, moved him deeply. Zalman felt overwhelmed with remorse and wanted to return the money he had stolen.



A COMPLETE JEW

When Boaz saw Ruth collecting stalks in his field, he inquired of his workers about who she was. He was told that she was from the royal house of Moav, had converted, and had returned with Naomi from the fields of Moav. Boaz then approached her and said:

“I have been fully informed of all that you have done for your mother-in-law after the death of your husband, how you left your father and mother and the land of your birth and went to a people you had never known before. May HaShem reward your actions, and may your payment be complete from HaShem, under Whose wings you have come to seek refuge.”

Boaz highlights two special deeds of Ruth. The first is her care and devotion to her mother-in-law. The second is her decision to leave her parents' home and her birthplace to seek refuge under HaShem's wings. Boaz also references two forms of reward from HaShem: one for her actions, and one for her seeking refuge under HaShem's wings. The latter refers to Ruth's conversion to Judaism and her total commitment to HaShem and His Torah.

In explaining the distinction between these two forms of reward, the Malbim notes that the first type is similar to the payment received by a worker for specific tasks, like a tailor paid per shirt sewn. The second form of reward corresponds to the wages given to a day laborer, who is paid not necessarily for what he accomplishes, but for being present and committed to fulfill whatever his employer may need during that time. Whether he is asked to do much or little, or even nothing, he is still paid the same, for his availability and commitment.

He was inspired in that moment, but he wasn't sure if the same feeling would remain after Shabbos. Right then and there, he went to his rav and asked:

"I know there is a Torah mitzvah of *veheishiv es hagezeilah*, returning what one has stolen. Am I allowed to fulfill this mitzvah on Shabbos? On the one hand, the money is *muktzeh*, and you're generally not allowed to handle it. But on the other hand, I'm afraid that if I wait until after Shabbos, I might lose this inspiration and not return it at all."

So which mitzvah takes precedence? Does the Torah commandment to return what one stole override the rabbinic prohibition against handling *muktzeh* on Shabbos?

Is Zalman allowed to return the money and put it back in the drawer on Shabbos, since that would fulfill a Torah mitzvah, while *muktzeh* is only a rabbinic prohibition?

What do you think the halachah would be?

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Boaz was blessing Ruth for two great deeds. First, she stayed with her mother-in-law, Naomi, the widow of Elimelech, who was bereft of children and had no source of livelihood. Second, she left her royal home in Moav to join the Jewish people, expecting no material gain. Ruth gave up a life of comfort in a familiar environment to become a stranger and a beggar in a new land. Her conversion was truly altruistic; there was no personal benefit. She simply wanted to come under the Wings of the Shechina.

Regarding Ruth's devotion to Naomi, Boaz blessed her that HaShem should reward her for her actions. Each mitzvah she performed for her mother-in-law would earn its corresponding reward. But regarding her entering under the Wings of the Shechina and committing herself entirely to HaShem, she became a full-fledged member of Klal Yisroel, whose every act and decision would now be shaped by HaShem's will. For that total commitment, Boaz blessed her that her wages be complete. He recognized that her commitment was pure

and wholehearted. Since her dedication was total and without personal gain, her reward, too, must be total, regardless of the specific mitzvos she performed.

Perhaps this is the reason we read the story of Ruth on Shavuot. Every member of our nation experienced their own personal "conversion" and made a full commitment to serving HaShem. Boaz's double blessing to Ruth applies to every Jew who accepts a complete commitment to HaShem. Beyond the reward for each mitzvah performed, there is reward simply for being a committed Jew.

It seems to me that Boaz's special blessing to Ruth applies to every one of us. Even though most of us were not literal converts to Judaism, when any Jew makes the decision to find refuge under HaShem's wings and to commit themselves to Him and His Torah, they too become worthy of Boaz's great blessing.

Have a wonderful Shabbos and a beautiful Shavuot.

Paysach Diskind



SHABBOS: CELEBRATING HASHEM'S CREATION

THE BLACK DRAGONFISH

Imagine plunging into an ocean so dark, so deep, and so cold that sunlight never reaches it. A place where pressure could crush a submarine and where temperatures hover just above freezing. Now imagine a creature perfectly adapted to this world of darkness, a living, glowing shadow with invisible teeth, a light-up chin, and skin darker than the night sky. Meet the Black Dragonfish (*Idiacanthus atlanticus*).

A Creature of Two Faces. One of the strangest things about the Black Dragonfish? There isn't just one kind, there are two! That's because males and females are so different, scientists once thought they were two separate species.

The females are the showstoppers, sleek and snakelike, with long, glowing barbels (chin whiskers), oversized heads, huge mouths, and terrifying, clear fangs. They grow up to 16 inches long and look like something out of science fiction. Their bodies are jet black and scaleless, with rows of glowing dots called photophores that they can turn on and off like twinkling lights. The males, on the other hand, are tiny, only about 2 inches long. They have no teeth, no barbel, and they don't even eat. That's right. Once they become adults, male Black Dragonfish lose their digestive systems altogether. Their one job is to find a female, mate, and then, poof!, they're done. This kind of difference between males and females is called dimorphism, and in the world of animals, the Black Dragonfish sets the bar high. No other vertebrate (a group that includes fish, birds, and mammals) shows such a dramatic difference between genders.

Glowing in the Gloom. In the pitch-black depths where Black Dragonfish live, light is a rare treasure. But that doesn't mean everything is in total darkness. Bioluminescence is the ability for living things to make their own light, like the glow of a firefly. And the Black Dragonfish is a master of it. Females have a long, glowing lure that dangles from their chin, a barbel with a light-up tip. Like a flashlight in the dark, this glowing appendage attracts curious prey who mistake it for something harmless, like plankton. Once the prey gets close, the dragonfish's invisible fangs close in for the kill. The Black Dragonfish has glowing photophores along its sides and belly that it can flash in patterns. Scientists think these lights might help with communication, confusing predators, or even attracting mates. And here's the coolest part: the dragonfish can produce red light, something almost no other deep-sea creatures can see. This gives the Black Dragonfish a kind of invisible flashlight that only it can use, helping it hunt in secret while staying hidden. Even more amazing? This fish has special pigments in its eyes that let it see this red light. In the deep ocean, that's like having night vision goggles that no one else can see through!

The Disappearing Fish. Now you see it... now you don't! If glowing like a tiny lighthouse wasn't impressive enough, the Black Dragonfish also has the power of near invisibility. Thanks to its ultra-black skin, this fish can absorb more than 99.5% of light. That makes it one of the blackest animals on Earth, even blacker than black paint! How does this work? The skin of the Black Dragonfish contains special pigment-filled cells called melanosomes that are shaped and arranged in just the right way to trap and absorb light. Even under a beam of light from a deep-sea submersible, the fish seems to vanish. It's like wearing an invisibility cloak in the ocean! And just to make sure it stays hidden,

even its internal organs are dark. That way, if it swallows a glowing creature, the light doesn't shine out of its belly and give away its location.

The Art of the Ambush. So, how does this sneaky, spooky fish catch its dinner? The Black Dragonfish is a sit-and-wait predator, meaning it finds a good spot to hide and then waits for something tasty to swim by. It uses its glowing barbel to attract small fish, shrimp, and even squid. The moment something comes close, it uses a jaw-hinge trick to swing its mouth open more than 100 degrees. That's wider than a human jaw by far! This lets it gulp down prey half its own size in one bite. And let's not forget those scary teeth. The dragonfish's fangs are long, curved, and so transparent that they're almost invisible. Not only do they help the fish snatch prey without being seen, but they're also packed with tiny crystals that make them stronger than shark teeth. Ouch! Once it finishes eating, the dragonfish doesn't go on the hunt again right away. Deep-sea animals often have slow metabolisms, meaning they don't need to eat as often as surface fish. That's helpful when meals are few and far between.

A Wild Start in Life. Even baby Black Dragonfish are weird and wonderful. Dragonfish larvae look like tiny glass ghosts. Their bodies are nearly transparent, and their eyes sit on long stalks, yes, stalks! These eye-stalks can be as long as half their body, allowing them to scan the ocean around them for signs of danger. As they grow, the larvae undergo an incredible transformation called metamorphosis. Those long eye-stalks get absorbed, the fish begin to darken in color, and their adult features start to form. If they're females, they'll start developing the famous chin barbel. If they're males, their bodies stay small and simple, and their time as adults is short-lived.

Harmless... But Handle With Care. With all these fangs and glowing parts, you might be wondering: are Black Dragonfish dangerous to humans? The good news: not at all! These fish live far below the reach of human divers or swimmers. They're rarely seen unless a deep-sea research sub brings them up. And while their fangs look fierce, they're too small to do much damage to people, though scientists handling them do wear gloves, just in case. Some reports mention that dragonfish might have venom in their spines or saliva, but there's no solid evidence that this poses any real danger to humans. Mostly, these creatures just want to stay hidden in their cold, dark world, far from our reach.

Deep-Sea Inspirations. Believe it or not, scientists and engineers are paying close attention to the Black Dragonfish, not because they're spooky, but because they're smart. The fish's ultra-black skin is helping researchers design better materials for telescopes, solar panels, and camouflage. Its bioluminescent tricks are inspiring new kinds of lighting, and its invisibility teeth are teaching us how to make anti-glare coatings and stealthy designs. Every detail of the Black Dragonfish's body is a masterclass in natural engineering. Hashem gave these fish the tools to live in the most extreme places on Earth. Now we're learning from it.

A special thank you to my friend Effie Price for this idea!

THE KEVARIM WILL ALWAYS BE THERE, GO TO THE LEIBEDIGER!

Rav Chaim Segal was my menahel in Mesivta Rabbi Chaim Berlin.

Born around 1926 to Ger Chassidim in pre-war Poland, Chaim Segal fled east with his family when the Nazis advanced. Siberian exile, displacement camps, and a brief stay in France followed. By 1947, he stepped onto Brooklyn pavement with a cardboard suitcase and one cherished volume of Gemara. From his first day at Yeshiva Rabbi Chaim Berlin, he gravitated toward the Rosh Yeshiva, Rav Yitzchok Hutner. The Rosh Yeshiva soon began addressing him as "mein Chaim'l," inviting the newcomer to private vaadim and planting in him the seeds of a uniquely American chinuch.

For forty years, Rav Segal ran the Mesivta with a rare blend of warmth and steel. He insisted on polished shoes and respectful speech to reflect the dignity of a ben Torah. "To raise iluyim, you must be a gaon," he told the faculty, "but to raise the weak ones, you need to be a gaon ha'gaonim." That quip concealed his demand: every student deserved greatness from his teachers.

Rav Segal kept a card file listing each talmid's strengths, challenges, and home life. Twice a year, he updated the notes by hand. One entry might read, "Worries about father's health, encourage during bein hazmanim." Another: "Brilliant in math, find a tutor to translate that discipline into Gemara."

Here is one insightful story.

A talmid once told Rabbi Segal, "Rebbi, I am going to Eretz Yisrael. Rebbi has gone many times, which kevarim (graves) should I daven at?"

"Tzaischem l'shalom," Rabbi Segal replied heartily. "But why are you asking about kevarim? The kevarim will always be there. Go to the leibediger, the living tzaddikim."



THE ANSWER

Regarding last week's question about whether to split the minyan, Rav Akiva Meister answered that in our case, we were discussing a shul with 50 people. Splitting it would result in 25 people in each minyan. Since each group would still have more than 20 participants, it would still be considered berov am. Once you have 20 people, having more doesn't make it more berov am. Therefore, in this case, it would make sense and be acceptable to split the group, allowing both people the opportunity to lead the minyan. However, some shuls choose not to split a minyan for other reasons. For example, they want the minyanim to be more orderly, or they want the minyanim to daven with the Rav. So even though there may not be a problem of berov am with splitting, some shuls may still choose not to allow this.

This week's TableTalk is dedicated l'aliyas neshamos for our parents Yechezkal & Rosa Roth
Yechezkal ben Yaakov HaLevi whose yahrzeit is on 3 Sivan
Miriam Rochel bas Yaakov whose yahrzeit is on 14 Sivan
by their children Idie & Isser Goldsmith.



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