TABLETALK

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A MITZVA DILEMMA FOR THE SHABBOS TABLE

REPLACED WITH AN OLD BIKE

By Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

This week's Torah portion talks about the mitzvah of returning lost objects. This brings us to the following true story.

Eli lived in Eretz Yisrael and owned a brand-new e-bike. An e-bike is a bit like a motorcycle: it looks like a regular bike, but it has a motorized engine. Eli kept the e-bike in his garage.

One day, Eli went to his garage and saw that the lock had been broken open. It was lying on the floor, broken. He was alarmed. The door was a slightly ajar, and when he went inside, he saw something shocking.

Before, he had a shiny, brand-new e-bike. Now, instead of his shiny, brand-new e-bike, there was an old, rusted one, a clearly used, different model. His bike was gone. It seemed obvious that someone had stolen it and, for

BLESSED WITH WISDOM

The world with all the creations that fill it are a most magnificent masterpiece demonstrating the infinite wisdom of its Creator. Every creature has its role to play in the operation of the world. And every creature is blessed with everything it will need to accomplish its purpose. Take for example, the beaver whose role is to manage waterways and make them eco-friendly for the creatures who live in them. HaShem blessed the beaver with a remarkable knowledge of physics. Their knowledge of physics and implementing these laws in engineering far exceeds Man's knowledge of physics. Man has learnt from the beaver many lessons in water management and other areas of engineering. The reason the beaver was blessed with this knowledge is because he needs it in order to accomplish his role.

It therefore follows that if the animals were given what they require certainly Man was given everything that he requires to accomplish his purpose. Especially considering that Man is the purpose of creation itself. The world was created so that Man will bring all of creation to the awareness of HaShem. Certainly Man was blessed with everything that he will need to achieve this goal.

Rabbeinu Bachya writes in Chovos Halvovos that HaShem implanted within the heart of every person a natural understanding of many truths. His list is extensive but to identify a few. They include;

- To admire truth and to frown upon otherwise
- To choose justice and reject injustice
- To do good for others

some reason, replaced it with this older one.

Eli was upset, but he thought, "At least the robber was kind enough to leave his old bike here." Then Eli wondered: was he even allowed to keep this bike?

On one hand, perhaps the interpretation of this story was that the robber didn't want to simply steal outright. Instead, he took Eli's new bike and replaced it with his own old one. If that were the case, the old bike belonged to the robber, and Eli could keep it.

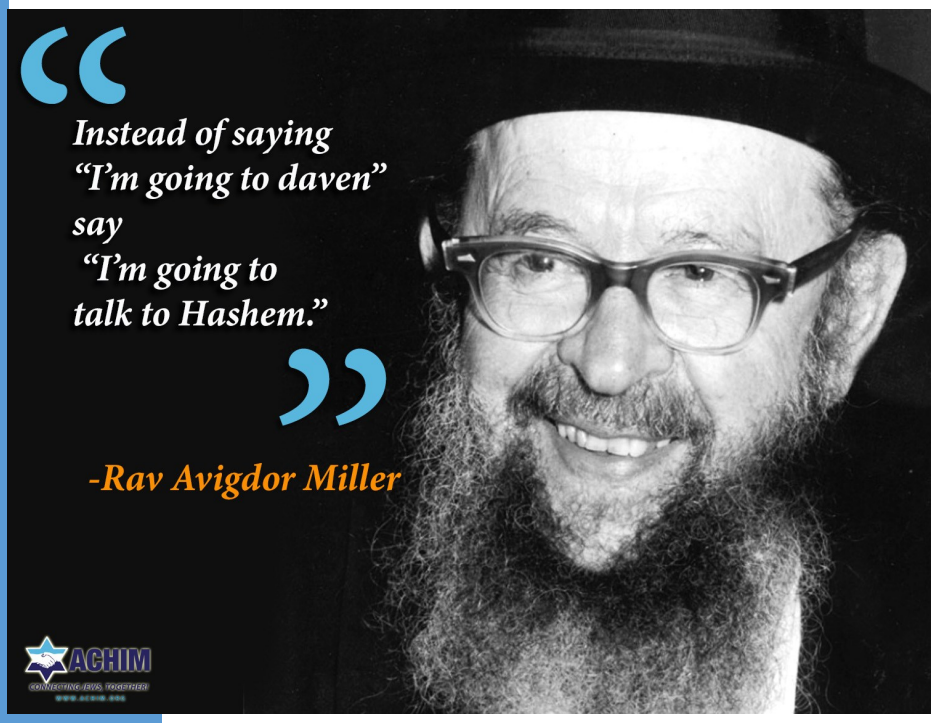
But maybe another scenario had happened. Perhaps the robber had stolen someone else's e-bike first and then went looking for more. When he found Eli's brand-new one, he left the previously stolen bike behind and took Eli's. In that case, the old e-bike wasn't the robber's, it might belong to another victim. And if so, Eli would have a mitzvah of hashavas aveidah (returning lost objects): he would need to try to find the rightful owner.

So Eli wondered: Was he allowed to keep this bike? Do we say it belonged to the robber, or do we say it belonged to someone else and he must return it?

What do you think?

See Vhaarev Na Hebrew Edition Volume Four, page 194

MITZVA MEME



- To thank those who do good and to pay back evil to the wicked
- To build positive relationships with others and do good with them

Once Man recognizes these axioms as truths HaShem is able to inspire him to live by these truths and serve HaShem with complete dedication.

Rabbeinu Bachya explains that Man must allow HaShem's inspiration to arouse him. So long as Man is entrenched in pursuit of material desires and acquisitions, HaShem's inspiration will be unable to arouse him. However, if Man is open for and anticipates HaShem's inspiration, he will awaken to the truths that HaShem implanted within his heart. He will be able to rise to great heights in his service to HaShem.

Dovid Hamelech writes in Psalm 27 "For You, HaShem, my heart tells me 'seek My Face" and therefore I seek Your Face". The Ibn Ezra explains that Dovid's heart speaks to him saying in Hashem's name "Seek My Face".

With Rabbeinu's Bachya's insight perhaps every Man's heart tells him "Seek My Face". This is what HaShem implanted within us. Dovid listened to his heart's message and was therefore motivated to seek HaShem's Face.

Perhaps one reason for reading Chapter 27 in the month of Elul when HaShem's Face is more accessible is to encourage us to anticipate His inspiration.

Have a wonderful Shabbos.

Paysach Diskind




SHABBOS: CELEBRATING HASHEM'S CREATION

INCREDIBLE BUILDERS: CORAL POLYPS AND CORAL REEFS

If you were to dive into the clear blue waters of the tropics, you might think you've landed in a bustling underwater city. Brilliant fish dart through towers and passageways. Crabs scuttle across balconies of branching coral. Brightly colored sponges and swaying sea fans line the avenues. You'd be right to call it a city, but the builders aren't people. They're some of the smallest animals in the sea: coral polyps. (Pictured top left.)

Tiny though they are, polyps are master architects. Working together in vast colonies, they build coral reefs (pictured right), one of the most spectacular and vital ecosystems on Earth. Let's take a journey into their hidden world to discover how these little creatures build giant underwater metropolises and why reefs are so important to life on our planet.

At first glance, coral doesn't seem very animal-like. It sits still, rooted to the seafloor, waving gently with the current. Many people mistake it for a plant, or even a rock. But coral is very much alive, and it belongs to the same family as jellyfish and sea anemones.

A coral polyp is essentially a tiny tube of soft tissue, often no larger than a pinhead. It has a central stomach with one simple opening. Around this opening stretch delicate tentacles armed with stinging cells called nematocysts. These help the polyp capture food, much as a jellyfish does.

Some polyps are so small you'd need a magnifying glass to see them clearly. Others, like the solitary mushroom coral, can grow to over a foot across. But most live side by side, cloning themselves into enormous colonies. In these colonies, thousands, or even millions, of polyps are linked by thin sheets of living tissue. They share food and energy across the entire structure, making the whole colony act like a single super-organism.

Polyps are builders. Each one slowly pulls calcium carbonate, or limestone, out of seawater and uses it to form a hard skeleton around its base. Generation after generation, polyps live, die, and leave their skeletons behind. Over centuries and millennia, these skeletons pile up to form reefs that can stretch for hundreds of miles.

Some corals grow quickly, adding as much as eight inches of skeleton a year. Others, like massive brain corals, grow only a fraction of an inch annually. But they are patient builders. Some colonies can live for centuries, and in the deep ocean, black corals have been found that are over 4,000 years old.

It's hard to believe, but the Great Barrier Reef in Australia, the largest living structure on Earth, (pictured second from left) was built by creatures no bigger than a grain of rice. Stretching more than 1,400 miles, it's so massive that astronauts can see it from space.

A coral colony isn't just polyps. It's what scientists call a holobiont, a community of many different organisms living together as one. Each polyp hosts a bustling crowd of microscopic algae, bacteria, fungi, and even viruses. Together, these partners help the coral survive and thrive.

The most famous of these roommates are the algae called zooxanthellae. These tiny dinoflagellates live inside the coral's tissue, giving it its glowing green, red, and golden colors. By photosynthesizing, they produce sugars that provide up to 90 percent of the coral's energy. In return, the algae gain shelter and nutrients from the coral. It's a perfect partnership, one of the most successful symbiotic relationships in nature.

By day, corals are farmers. They rely on their algae partners to harvest sunlight and produce food. But when the sun sets, many polyps change their behavior. They extend their tentacles into the current, hunting for drifting plankton or even small fish. Their stinging nematocysts snag prey, which they pull into their central mouth.

In this way, corals combine two lifestyles: solar-powered farming and nocturnal hunting. This mix of strategies helps them survive in tropical waters that are surprisingly poor in nutrients. In fact, scientists long wondered how reefs could be so full of life when the surrounding water was so barren. The answer lies in the reef's incredible ability to recycle every scrap of energy and material. Hardly anything goes to waste in this underwater city.

The reef may look peaceful, but it's actually the site of fierce battles. Space is precious, and corals fight hard to claim it. Some extend specialized "sweeper tentacles" that burn their rivals with stinging cells. Others use digestive filaments to attack and partially digest their neighbors. These battles happen in slow motion, taking hours or days, but they decide who gets to grow and who gets crowded out.

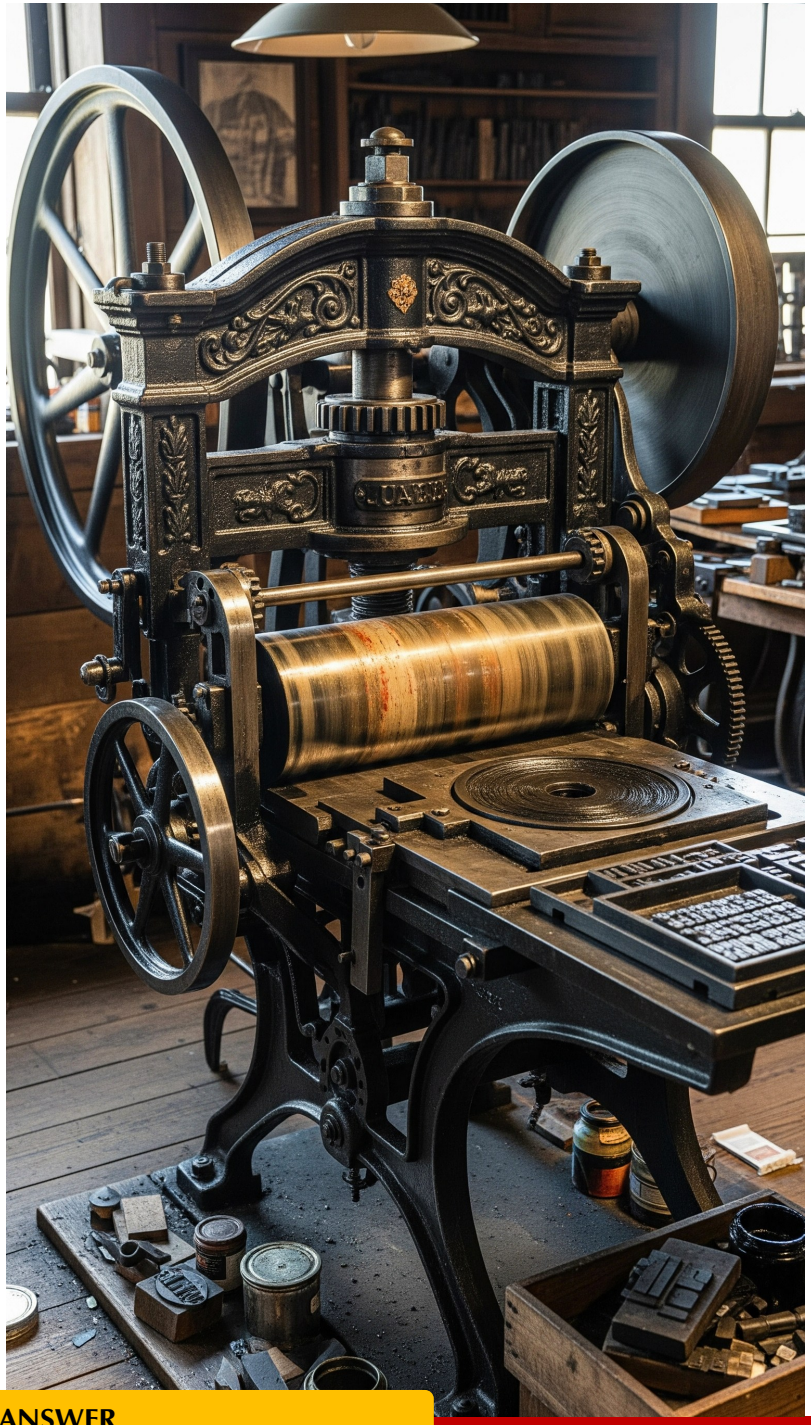
Even the creatures that nibble on coral, like parrotfish and sea urchins, are part of the struggle. They chew away at the reef, breaking off pieces and grinding them down. It may sound destructive, but it also prevents seaweed from smothering corals, keeping space open for new polyps to grow. In fact, the fine white sand on many tropical beaches comes from parrotfish droppings, ground-up coral skeletons that have passed through their digestive tracts. One big parrotfish can produce hundreds of pounds of sand each year!

A coral reef is often called the "rainforest of the sea," and for good reason. Though reefs cover less than one percent of the ocean floor, they provide homes for about a quarter of all marine species. More than 4,000 kinds of fish live among the crevices and caves of reefs, along with crabs, sea stars, octopuses, sponges, and countless others.

Besides being home to thousands of species, reefs are also valuable to people in surprising ways. Many reef creatures produce powerful chemicals to defend themselves from predators and disease. Scientists have discovered that some of these compounds can be turned into medicines for humans. Substances from corals and sponges are being tested as treatments for cancer, and arthritis. Corals also produce fluorescent proteins that glow under certain light. These have become essential tools in medical research, allowing scientists to track how cells behave.

It's humbling to think that some of Earth's largest, most spectacular structures are built by creatures barely visible to the naked eye. Coral polyps, simple animals with no brain and no bones, work together over centuries to create bustling underwater cities that teem with life. Thank you Hashem for your wondrous world!

I'LL HAVE MORE TIME TO LEARN, DAVEN, AND DO MITZVOS BUT MY INCOME WILL REMAIN THE SAME



The Oitzer Seforim brings the following powerful story.

There was once a man who owned a printing press. He was very successful and made a comfortable parnassah (livelihood). One day, another man decided to open a printing press , not just anywhere, but directly across the street. The original owner thought to himself, "This fellow is opening right across from me?"

After considering what to do, he made a decision. "I know what I'm going to do. I'll go over and greet him warmly."

He walked across the street and said, "Shalom aleichem! I've been in this business for many years. Baruch Hashem, I have good equipment and have learned a lot along the way. If you ever need any utensils, any advice, anything at all, I'd be glad to help."

When his family heard what he had done, they were astonished. "Tatti," they said, "this man is your direct competitor. He's taking away your customers and your parnassah. And you're offering him your tools and inside knowledge? What are you thinking?"

The father explained, "You don't understand. I owe this man hakaras hatov (gratitude). On Rosh Hashanah it is decreed exactly how much I will earn this year. As long as I make my proper hishtadlus (effort), I will receive that amount, not a penny more, not a penny less. Now that this person has opened across the street, some of my customers will go to him. That means I'll be less busy, I'll have more time to learn, daven, and do mitzvos but my income will remain the same. So in truth, this man is helping me, and for that, I should thank him."

THE ANSWER

Regarding last week's question about the duped locksmith, Rav Zilberstein wrote (Chashukei Chemed Bava Kama, page 313) that regarding the lock that the locksmith broke directly, the locksmith would have to pay for it, even though this could be considered an ones, an unavoidable accident. With regard to the damages caused by the house being robbed, Rav Zilberstein says that it appears this would be considered an ones, an unavoidable accident, and the locksmith would not be liable because he was tricked. He concludes, however, that this is still a tzarich iyun (requires further study).

This week's TableTalk is dedicated as an expression of hakaras hatov to
HaShem
for granting a warm and supportive family.

By a TableTalk reader