



A MITZVA DILEMMA FOR THE SHABBOS TABLE



THE FREE AD

By Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

Yaakov, who lived in a large Jewish community in Europe published a community phonebook, similar to the Eruv list, or Eruv book, that we have in Baltimore.

When the manuscript for the phonebook was complete, he saw that there was a whole page in the back that was totally unused. He figured it was a waste to leave that page blank. He had a close friend, Daniel, who owned a home renovation business, so he took an old ad from his friend and placed the renovation business advertisement on that entire final page of the phonebook.

The phonebook was printed and came out very nicely. Everyone was happy and very pleased.



WHAT APPEARS FUTILE

In last week's Parsha, Pharaoh asks Yaakov his age. The Malbim carefully analyzes Pharaoh's question and Yaakov's response. Pharaoh asks, "How many days are the years of your life?" This wording suggests that Yaakov appeared aged, prompting Pharaoh's curiosity about how long he had been living.

Yaakov responds, "The years of my sojourning are 130. Few and difficult have been the years of my life." In his answer, Yaakov differentiates between his years of sojourning, which are certainly many, and his years of life, which he describes as few.

Malbim explains that "years of life" refers to years of productivity—years during which one's life is meaningful and purposeful, not merely years of existence. Simply being alive while accomplishing nothing is not considered life. When a person exists on earth without achievement, he is no different from an animal.

In Yaakov's lexicon, achievement is defined by serving HaShem and becoming closer to Him. When Pharaoh asked Yaakov about the years of his life, Yaakov understood that Pharaoh defined "years of life" as mere existence, even without purpose. Yaakov therefore carefully answered him: his years of sojourning were many, but his years of life were, in fact, few and difficult. (Perhaps "difficult" indicates that even the achievements he did accomplish were limited or constrained.)

One day, surprisingly, someone from the city tax office came across this Jewish phonebook. He noticed the large full page ad for Daniel's renovation business and assumed that this must be a very successful company to be able to afford such an expensive full page ad.

He looked the business up and saw that the tax bill was nothing compared to what it should have been. The tax official looked further and realized that Daniel was significantly behind on his taxes.

Eventually, tax authorities went to Daniel's house. They made him pay a huge fine for back taxes and required him to pay all the taxes he owed.

Daniel eventually learned why all of this happened, and he came to his friend. He said, "I never asked you to put an ad in for me. Because you put that ad in, I had to pay this massive bill and this massive fine. I think you should pay for it."

Yaakov was not sure. He had genuinely tried to do a favor for his friend, and he did not think he should be responsible for paying the fine. They agreed to bring the question to a Rav.

What do you think? Who has to pay? Is Yaakov responsible to pay all or part of the fine that his actions caused his friend Daniel to incur?

See Chashukei Chemed Bava Kama Page 324

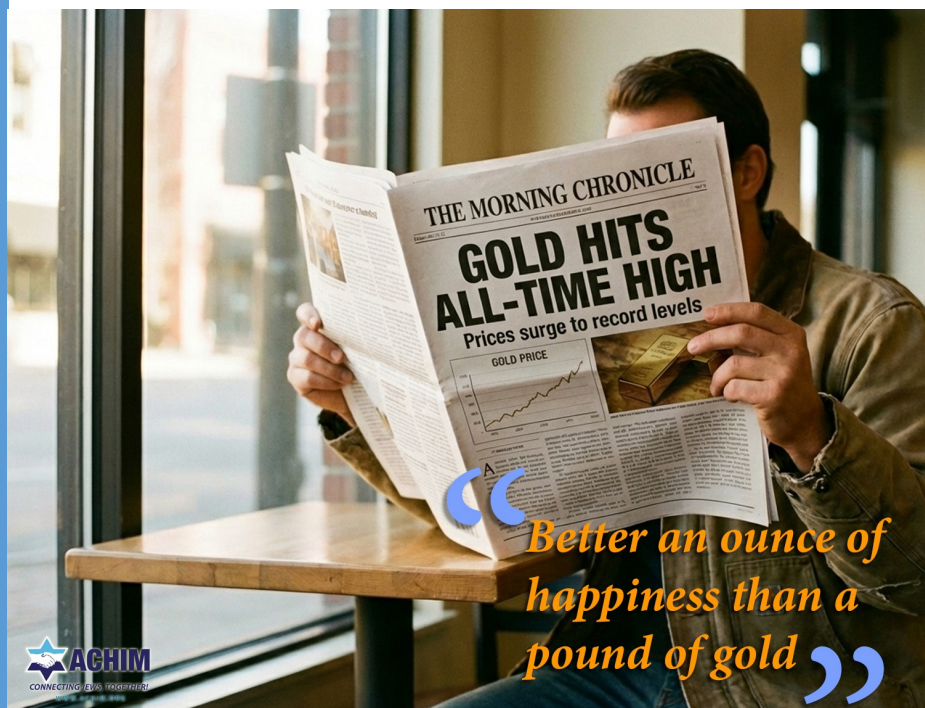
that all 147 years were in fact years of life.

We see an example of this in Yaakov's life when he wrestled with Eisav's angel during that long, difficult night. Yaakov never forced the angel to the ground; it was a stalemate. Yet at daybreak, Yaakov emerged victorious. That prolonged struggle seemed to be going nowhere, but in the end Yaakov achieved complete victory. The angel conceded to him the blessings he had "stolen" from Eisav, and his name became Yisrael.

As HaShem places us through difficult challenges, it may feel as though we are merely surviving, and we would certainly not define those times as years of achievement. Yet in the end, if we endure with our faith unshaken, those years become the true years of our life.

Have a wonderful Shabbos.

Paysach Diskind



The opening verse of this week's Parsha states: "And Yaakov lived in Egypt seventeen years, and the days of Yaakov's life were one hundred and forty-seven years." Remarkably, the Torah is now telling us that by the end of Yaakov's life, he had 147 years of life. Seventeen years earlier, when speaking to Pharaoh, Yaakov described his years of life as very few. Now, seventeen years later, all the years of his sojourning have been transformed into years of life.

Malbim cites a Midrash that those final seventeen years were so wonderful that they compensated for all his previous years.

Perhaps we can explain that every one of those difficult years—years that appeared to be futile struggles—were in fact years of accomplishment. As Yaakov looks back at his life and he sees what those "fruitless" years produced, he understood



SHABBOS: CELEBRATING HASHEM'S CREATION

THE SECRET WORLD OF IRISES

Recently we had Irises for our Shabbos table, and that inspired me to share some inspiring ideas about the Iris. Irises stand tall and regal, their petals unfurling like flags in the breeze. But if you stop and really look you will discover that the Iris is a marvel of biological engineering. From the secret tunnels built for bees in the deserts of Israel to the chemical laboratories hidden in their roots, the Iris is one of nature's most sophisticated creations. Let's peel back the layers of this living rainbow.

To understand this flower, we have to start with its name. The word comes from the ancient Greek Iris, which literally translates to "rainbow." To the ancients, the rainbow wasn't just a weather event but a personification of a messenger connecting the heavens and the earth. Centuries later, botanists looked at this genus of plants. They saw blooms in deep royal purples, sunny yellows, sky blues, ghost whites, fiery oranges, and earthy browns. They realized this single family of plants contained nearly the full spectrum of visible color. Naturally, they named it the "Rainbow Flower", the Iris.

But the connection goes deeper. Anatomists in the 15th century looked at the human eye. They saw a colored ring suspended around the pupil, filled with complex, multi-colored patterns. They called it the iris, the rainbow of the eye.

The legacy continues into the periodic table. Element number 77 is a silvery-white metal. But when you dissolve its salts in acid, they turn into a vibrant, shifting swirl of reds, greens, and blues. Scientists named this metal Iridium, the "rainbow metal." Even the word iridescence, which describes the shifting colors on a soap bubble or a beetle's wing, comes from this same root. It literally means "becoming a rainbow."

The Iris is built with the precision of the Master Architect. The Iris follows a strict "Rule of Three." It is trimerous, meaning every part of it comes in threes or multiples of three. It has three "standard" petals that stand upright like signal flags. It has three "fall" petals that droop downward. It even has three stigma branches.

This design isn't just for show; it's actually a high-tech airport for bugs. The "fall" petals are structural landing pads, strong enough to support the weight of a bumblebee. If you look at a "Bearded Iris," you'll see a fuzzy, caterpillar-like strip running down the center of the petal. That isn't just decoration. It's a non-slip doormat! It gives the bees traction so they can grip the petal as they crawl inside.

Once the bee lands, the flower directs traffic. Intricate lines and veins on the petals act as nectar guides. Think of them like the runway lights at an airport, visually pointing the pilot exactly where to go. Some Irises even display patterns in UV (ultraviolet) light, colors invisible to us but glowing like neon signs to a bee.

The Iris is a survival machine. These plants are geophytes, which means they own a hidden underground bunker. They don't rely solely on fragile roots; they grow from a rhizome, a thick, potato

-like stem that runs horizontally just under the soil. This rhizome is the plant's backup drive. It stores nutrients and water, allowing the Iris to sleep through harsh summer droughts or freezing winters, only to wake up when the rains return. It also allows the plant to clone itself. You can cut a piece of the rhizome, plant it, and a genetically identical copy will rise from the earth.

The leaves are just as clever. Most plants have a "top" and "bottom" to their leaves, only photosynthesizing on the sun-facing side. The Iris features bifacial leaves. They stand vertically, like swords, which allows them to capture sunlight from both the morning sun on one side and the afternoon sun on the other. Plus, they are coated in a specialized wax that makes them waterproof, rain just beads up and rolls right off, channeling water down to the thirsting roots. Water irises have special "snorkels" inside the stems that help them breathe in swamps. The Siberian Iris has antifreeze proteins that let it survive -50°F temperatures. This plant is a testament to the resilient design of its Maker.

Nowhere is the genius of the Iris more apparent than in the arid landscapes of Eretz Yisrael. In Eretz Yisrael a unique group known as the "Royal Irises" (*Oncocylus*) reigns supreme. One of the most stunning examples is the Gilboa Iris (*Iris haynei*), which grows on the slopes of Mount Gilboa. These flowers (pictured center) are huge, solitary, and breathtaking. The real showstopper is the Black Iris (pictured right) found in the Negev and Judean deserts.

In nature, true black is incredibly rare. The Black Iris is actually a deep, dark purple-brown. This color serves a brilliant purpose in the wild. The dark color absorbs heat from the sun. In the chilly desert nights, the flower retains this warmth. Male solitary bees, looking for a safe place to sleep, crawl inside the flower tunnels. The Iris acts as a heated hotel, protecting the bees from the cold, while the bees ensure the flower is pollinated. Some of these Irises are so specialized that they are pollinated by only one specific type of bee. It's a delicate balance; if the bee vanishes, the flower vanishes.

If you dig up the rhizome of the *Iris pallida*, it doesn't smell like much. But if you dry it and let it age for three to five years, a chemical transformation occurs. The root, known as Orris Root, begins to smell exactly like violets. Orris Root is one of the most expensive ingredients in the world of perfumery, sometimes costing more than gold by weight. It acts as a fixative. Its molecular structure "locks" other scents in place, preventing them from evaporating too quickly. If you wear a high-end perfume that lasts all day, you likely have the humble Iris to thank.

Despite coming in purple, blue, yellow, white, pink, and black, there is one color the Iris refuses to give us: true bright red. Breeders have spent decades trying to create a "fire engine red" Iris, but the plant's genetics make it nearly impossible.

Thank you, Hashem, for Your wondrous world!

ONE MORE KNOCK

Rabbi Hillel Eisenberg told over the following story. A man from Rechavia once visited the Steipler. As he was turning to leave, the Steipler suddenly said, "Please send my warmest regards to a man named Reb Yitzchak Stolman. He lives in Rechavia."

He was a little puzzled. The man didn't ask any questions, but when he got home, he tracked down Reb Yitzchak and faithfully delivered the Steipler's regards. As he turned to go, curiosity got the better of him and he turned back, and he said, "Forgive me, Reb Yitzchak, but why did the Steipler send his regards to *you*? Not that he can't, of course, but it just seemed random. I assume there is a story here."

Reb Yitzchak smiled and he said, "In Europe, I learned in the Yeshiva of Novardok. And the Alter was extremely passionate about spreading Torah. He would urge the bochurim to go out and reach unaffiliated Jews, knocking on doors, asking people to learn or to consider sending their children to Yeshiva. From time to time, the Alter would send out pairs of bochurim to different cities to do just that."

"I," Reb Yitzchak continued, "was sent to the city of Hornsteipel. And I started knocking on doors to try to convince people to send their children to Yeshiva. One after another, I would knock, and every single door was slammed in my face. These Jews wanted nothing to do with Torah or any Yeshiva that taught it, and I was heartbroken. I was dejected. I was ready to give up."

"But I thought to myself, 'I'm going to try one more house.' I walked up to the next address. On the door, it said 'Kanievsky.' I knocked. And after a few minutes of convincing, the parents reluctantly agreed to send their young son, Yaakov Yisrael, to Yeshiva."

"That little boy grew up to become the Steipler. And his son became none other than Reb Chaim Kanievsky."

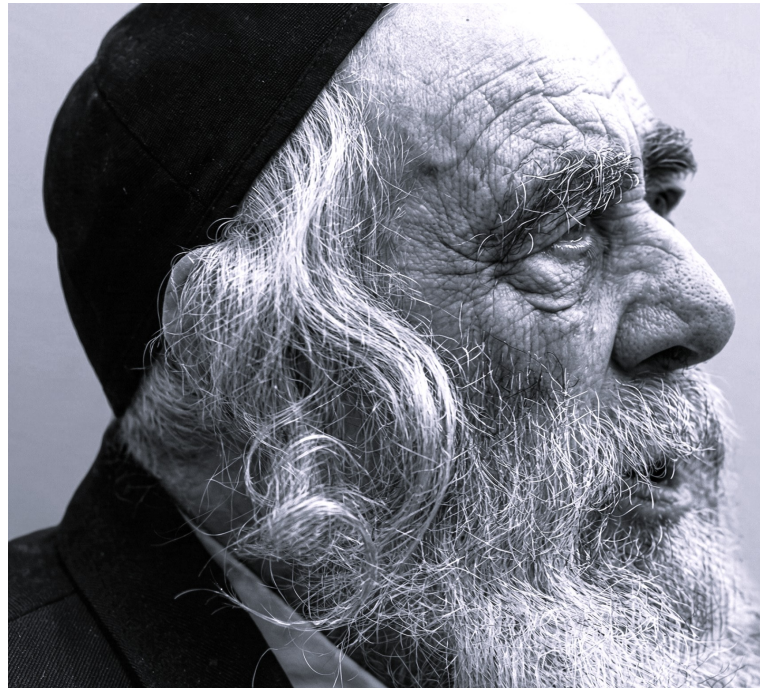
"If not for that one knock on the door all those years ago, there would not have been a Steipler, and there would not have been a Reb Chaim Kanievsky. That," Reb Yitzchak concluded, "is why he sends me his warmest regards."

From one simple knock—one simple, little, innocent knock on a door—came two of the greatest Talmidei Chachamim of the last 200 years. Two lighthouses of Torah who lit up the entire world with their Torah.

Can you imagine if he hadn't knocked? If he'd say, "Nah, it's not worth it. No one's listening." We wouldn't have had the Steipler and we wouldn't have had Reb Chaim. We wouldn't have had their Torah and the Torah that lit up generations.

That is the power of one Yid who refused to walk away. One Yid who says, "I'll try one more door." That's our mission. That's our legacy. To keep knocking, to keep teaching, to keep spreading the light until every heart in Klal Yisrael is burning again.

I thank Rav Nisson Dov Miller for sharing this story with me.



THE ANSWER

Regarding last week's question about the investigative journalist who left a suspicious briefcase, Rabbi Zilberstein (Chashukei Chemed Bava Kama Page 316) answered that the journalist did the wrong thing. However, after the fact, it turned out that he performed a mitzvah of saving lives. Therefore, one could argue that since he accidentally performed a mitzvah, he should not be obligated to pay at all. Rabbi Zilberstein says that this issue is still a tzarich iyun (requires further analysis). Nevertheless, he says that it would seem that the journalist would still be required to pay for the loss midinei Shamayim.

In honor of the upcoming bar mitzvah of our son
Hershel Meir.

We are so proud of him. May he grow in Torah and Avodas Hashem.

Love, his family
Sponsored by Dovid and Sara Kopel



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