

A MITZVA DILEMMA FOR THE SHABBOS TABLE



PURIM AND PLUMB BOB

Our Sages teach that Esther recited Psalm 22 when she was taken to King Achashveirosh as a plea to HaShem to save her and perhaps the entire Jewish nation found this the appropriate expression of prayer to HaShem to save them from the evil designs of Haman and Achashveirosh. In his commentary on the Psalms, Malbim (see 22:2-10) explains how the Psalmist expresses his sense of desolation and isolation from his closeness to HaShem. "My GD, My GD why have You forsaken me? You are so distant from my salvation, You are so distant from even hearing my cries and You do not know my pains...our fathers trusted in You and You saved them. To You they cried and were saved, they trusted in You and were not embarrassed; You did not ignore them... today I am taunted as being the people who were close to You and now I have been left desolate..."

If we consider our history from when we left Egypt up until this point of history we can appreciate their indescribable despair. We left Egypt with miracles that resounded throughout the world. We then traveled through the desert for 40 years with the Mishkan among us. We then entered the Land of Israel with the Mishkan still serving as the bastion of HaShem's Presence among us. This continued for 440 years when King Solomon built the Beis Hamikdash which was more glorious than the Mishkan. Throughout all this time every time our people turned their backs on HaShem and did not live up to His expectations they were punished with war from enemies, drought or plague. Whenever these tragedies struck they returned to HaShem and immediately afterward HaShem sent a messenger to save them. Their relationship with HaShem was direct and straightforward; they cried, He listened and they moved on.

THE THIEF & THE TODLER

By Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

We recently learned about the Ten Commandments, where it says, "Lo signov"—"You shall not steal." Our sages explain that this particular "lo signov" refers to kidnapping, which is a capital offense and carries the death penalty. This brings us to the following story.

Chaim was a wealthy man. One day in Eretz Yisroel, a tzedakah collector came to his door holding his young child on his shoulders. Chaim asked the collector if he would like something to drink, and the man agreed.

Chaim went to get him a drink. When he returned, he could not believe his eyes: the collector had taken an extremely ex-

pensive diamond bracelet that was lying on the table and put it into his pocket.

Chaim immediately said, "Please return the bracelet right away."
The man replied, "What are you talking about? I don't know what you mean."

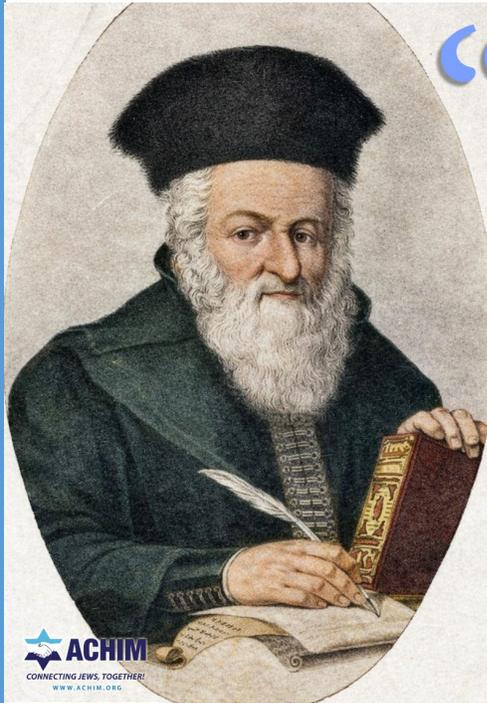
Realizing that he wasn't getting anywhere, Chaim acted on instinct. He grabbed the man's toddler from his shoulders and said, "I am not giving you back your child until you return the bracelet that I saw you take."

Seeing that he had no choice, the collector conceded. He reached into his pocket and took out the bracelet he had stolen. Chaim then returned the child, and the man left.

Later, Chaim began to question his actions. He remembered that there is a prohibition against kidnapping and wondered whether he had done the right thing. By taking and holding the child in order to retrieve the bracelet, had he violated the prohibition of kidnapping? Even though his goal was to recover his stolen property, was he permitted to act in that way?

He brought this question to Rav Zilberstein. What do you think?

See Chashukei Chemed Bava Kama page 383



“
The greatest chesed is Kavod Chaveirim, treating our friends with respect.”

-The Vilna Gaon,
Cited By Rav Shlomo Brevda in
Tefilas Chana p. 136

In their current state in Persia, they had no Temple, the grandeur of the past was only a memory. They had been relocated to Persia and other countries with nobody remaining in their homeland. It appeared that the 70 year window of their expected return was closing with no hope in sight. They felt truly abandoned. They had no place from where to draw hope.

This is reminiscent of the not so well-known children's story of the Little Plumb Bob who was a character who hung from a plumb line and was used by a contractor to establish a perfectly perpendicular line. Little Bob and his line were attached to a beam ten feet high. From time to time Bob would get kicked or blown by the wind and would feel like he would fall but he never was concerned because he could always look up and see the top of his line was securely attached to the overhead beam. It was not pleasant getting

kicked around but he never feared that he would be lost. Little Bob's contractor once needed Bob for a very big job. He was involved in building a skyscraper and needed to attach Bob's line to a beam 20 stories high. After his line was attached Bob looked up and could not see where the top of his line was attached. He was not able to see that high. He feared that he had no anchor. Shortly after his line was hung he was hit by a tractor and went flying in the air. Never in his life was he thrown so high. He was certain that this was his end. He would surely fall and never be retrieved. However, as he fell, and he fell fast, he was suddenly jerked by his line. He did not hit the ground. It was then that he realized that even when his anchor was so far away he remained closely attached and would never fall to the ground.

The story of Purim remains for us that first experience of being so far away from our Anchor. We could never imagine how He is still connected to us. Mordechai, the leader of our people who was a member of the Anshei Knesses Hagadola, the body of Sages who began the unfolding of the Oral Law demonstrated to us that through the study of the Oral Law our Anchor will hold us steadfast to the Beam above. No matter how high up the Beam may be we will always remain secure.

Have a wonderful Shabbos and a very happy Purim!

Paysach Diskind



SHABBOS: CELEBRATING HASHEM'S CREATION

THE SECRETS OF URANIUM

When hearing "uranium," you probably picture glowing green rods, secret labs, or massive explosions. However, its true story is far more fascinating.

When the German chemist Martin Heinrich Klaproth discovered the element Uranium in 1789, he named it after the planet Uranus, which had been found just eight years earlier. In a way, the name is fitting, since uranium's origins are truly out of this world.

One of the most mind-blowing things about uranium is just how common it is. Most people assume it must be incredibly rare because of its association with nuclear energy and weapons, but uranium is actually about 40 times more common than silver and roughly 500 times more common than gold. It is about as abundant in Earth's crust as everyday metals like tin or zinc. Beyond the rocks beneath our feet, there are an estimated 4.5 billion tons of uranium dissolved in the world's oceans, which is theoretically enough to power human civilization for over 10,000 years. Even your kitchen might contain trace amounts. Granite countertops typically hold about four parts per million of uranium, which can slowly release tiny quantities of radon gas.

Uranium is not just sitting around doing nothing inside the Earth, either. The radioactive decay of uranium and thorium deep within the planet generates a significant portion of Earth's internal heat. That heat is what drives plate tectonics, the slow movement of continents, and powers the geodynamo that creates our planet's protective magnetic field. Without uranium quietly decaying miles below our feet, Earth might be a geologically dead world without the protective magnetic shield that deflects harmful solar radiation.

In its pure, refined form, uranium is a heavy, silvery-white metal that quickly develops a dark oxide coating when exposed to air. Its density is truly remarkable. At 19.1 grams per cubic centimeter, uranium is about 70 percent denser than lead. A cube of uranium just four inches on each side would weigh over 42 pounds. If you could somehow melt it, which requires heating it to about 1,135 degrees Celsius, it transforms into a luminous golden liquid. On the other end of the spectrum, if uranium is ground into a fine powder, it becomes pyrophoric, meaning it can spontaneously catch fire in open air at room temperature. These extreme properties make uranium one of the most fascinating metals on the periodic table.

Natural uranium is made up of three isotopes. The vast majority, about 99.27 percent, is uranium-238, with a half-life of 4.468 billion years. A tiny fraction, just 0.72 percent, is uranium-235, which is the only naturally occurring isotope capable of sustaining a nuclear chain reaction. That small percentage is what makes nuclear energy and nuclear weapons possible. The energy locked inside uranium is staggering. Depending on the type of reactor and the level of enrichment, a single kilogram of uranium can release as much energy as burning anywhere from 14,000 to 20 million kilograms of coal. After uranium finally finishes decaying

through a chain of 14 steps, it permanently settles as stable lead-206, which is why scientists can use uranium-lead dating to determine the age of Earth's oldest rocks.

The history of uranium is packed with incredible stories. In 1896, the French physicist Henri Becquerel accidentally discovered radioactivity when he left uranium salts in a drawer next to a photographic plate and found the plate had been mysteriously exposed. Marie and Pierre Curie later refined tons of uranium ore in their quest to discover the new elements radium and polonium. In the early twentieth century, uranium was used in surprisingly ordinary ways. Glassmakers added it to create what is now called Vaseline glass (pictured, second from left), which glows a brilliant neon green under ultraviolet light. Photographers used uranium salts in a process called uranotype printing to produce rich, reddish-brown images.

Perhaps the most astonishing natural phenomenon involving uranium happened thousands of years ago in Oklo, Gabon, in West Africa. There, natural uranium deposits achieved sustained nuclear fission entirely on their own, forming what scientists call a natural nuclear reactor that possibly boiled water. These reactors operated in a self-regulating cycle for thousands of years, and they even produced plutonium-239 long before any human ever dreamed of splitting an atom.

In the modern world, uranium plays roles that go far beyond power plants. Depleted uranium, which is mostly uranium-238 left over after enrichment, is valued for its extreme density. It is used as counterweights in aircraft, as radiation shielding, and in armor-piercing tank munitions (pictured, second from right). Nuclear-powered submarines carry uranium cores that can propel them through the ocean for over 20 years without ever needing to refuel. Canada's CANDU reactors are uniquely designed to run on unenriched natural uranium. Uranium fission also produces molybdenum-99, a medical isotope used in approximately 40 million diagnostic procedures every year around the world. Even deep space exploration depends on uranium, since spacecraft like Voyager and the Perseverance Mars rover are powered by plutonium that was originally bred from uranium in reactors.

Despite all its power, raw uranium ore is surprisingly mild in terms of radiation. It primarily emits alpha particles, which are so weak they cannot penetrate human skin or even a sheet of paper. However, uranium's chemical toxicity as a heavy metal, particularly its harmful effects on the kidneys, is often a greater health concern than its radioactivity. It has no known biological role in any living organism, although certain bacteria called *Shewanella* (pictured, right) have been found to metabolize uranium in a process sometimes described as "breathing" the metal.

Thank you Hashem for your wondrous world!

YOU WON'T BE ABLE TO FUNDRAISE

Rav Shimon Katz, Rosh Yeshivas Keser David in Telz-Stone, told an amazing story of Rav Shlomo Brevda's sensitivity to other people's plights.

Over the years, Rav Katz had been a talmid of Rav Brevda, and had asked his advice on many issues. When Rav Katz's father fell ill, he consulted Rav Brevda on many issues of how best to care for him.

One day, Rav Brevda brought him an envelope containing a large amount of money, as a donation for the yeshivah.

Rav Katz was surprised, since he had not discussed the yeshivah's finances with Rav Brevda, nor asked for his help.

Rav Brevda then explained that he understood that with Rav Katz's responsibilities in caring for his ailing father, he would not be able to make his usual fundraising trip to America.

Rav Brevda did not wait to be asked for help. When he saw a need, he stepped forward.

From Rav Shlomo Leib Brevda, Published By Feldheim



THE ANSWER

Regarding last week's question about the shopping cart, Rav Zilberstein (Chashukei Chemed, Nedarim p. 336) answers as follows: Whenever a sale is completed, there are two parties involved: the seller and the buyer. When a buyer picks up an item in order to purchase it, the halacha is that the buyer can still back out. However, at that point, the seller must be committed to the sale and can no longer back out. In our case, when the messenger picked up all the items and filled the cart, he was picking them up on behalf of the sender, his friend. At that point, even though the buyer does not yet own the items, the seller is already committed to selling them to the sender. Therefore, all the items that were picked up were acquired on behalf of the sender, and the messenger may not use them for himself, because the seller was committed to the sender. Rav Zilberstein writes that there is a consideration that the messenger and the sender might need to split the shopping cart. However, he concludes with "tzaruch iyun" (the matter requires further analysis). Certainly, the messenger cannot keep the entire cart for himself. It most likely all belongs to the sender, though there is a possibility that they would need to split it.

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GIVING

Purim is the time of giving
Purim is the time of achdus
Purim is the time of caring
Purim is the time of sharing

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When you give today
You give every day

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