

## A MITZVA DILEMMA FOR THE SHABBOS TABLE



### IDENTITY CHANGE

By Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

Dr. Frankel, a plastic surgeon living in Eretz Yisroel was approached by a man named Tzvi with the following story. Tzvi was a businessman, and in order to grow his business, he and his partner had taken on a large loan. However, the business failed because of a mistake his partner made. Even though the failure was really due to his partner, the lenders held Tzvi responsible and had been constantly hounding him. They did not physically harm or threaten him, but they pressured him relentlessly for repayment, and he was unable to find any peace.

Tzvi said he felt he had no choice but to change his identity, change his name, and move to a new place. He wanted plastic surgery to alter his appearance.



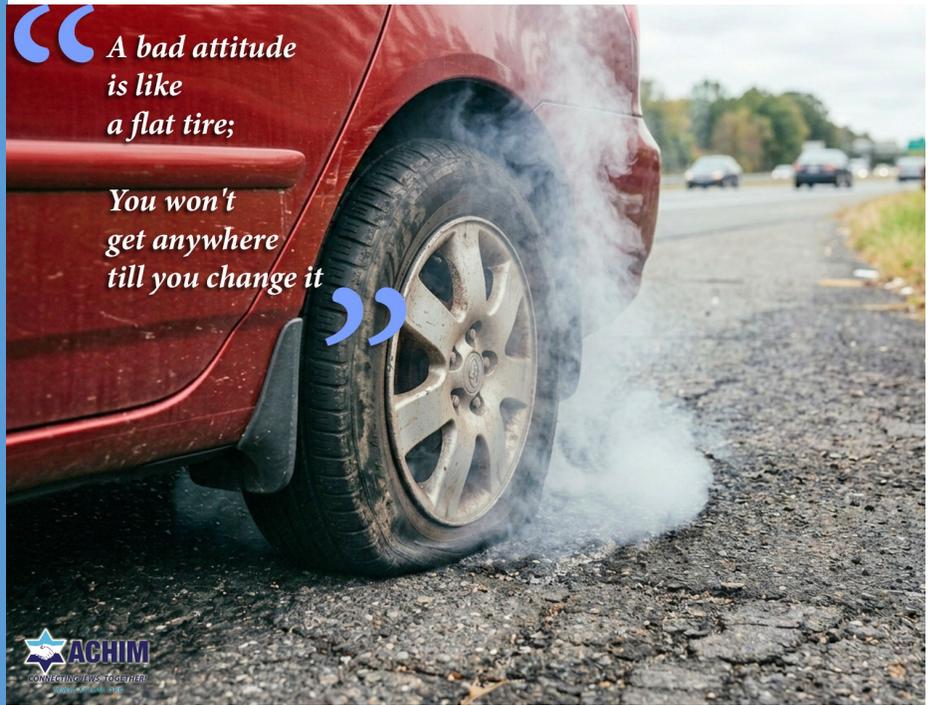
### OUR THREE-DIMENSIONAL COMPASS

In numerous places throughout Tanach, we find references to HaShem “lifting us out from the land of Egypt.” The idea of up and down is used as a metaphor in the context of morality and immorality. Throughout the Torah, Egypt is viewed as the center of decadence and immorality. It is therefore natural to use this expression to describe HaShem’s taking us out of Egypt as raising us up from Egypt. He actually lifted us up.

Let us unfold a deeper meaning of this metaphor. HaShem’s lifting us up opened for us a new dimension that relates directly to our mission.

Man is a creature who is never satisfied staying in one place. He is always searching for new ways, new things, new experiences, never satisfied, always on the move.

Let us imagine the earth as being 2,400 miles in circumference rather than 24,000 miles, with two types of earthlings. There are those who have a two-dimensional compass, which allows them to move forward, to the right, to the left, or backward. That is it. There is no other direction they can move. Of course, they can choose to stay put with no movement at all, but we know that man is not a creature who remains satisfied with where he is. Then there are those who have a three-dimensional compass, which allows them to move up or down in addition to the other directions.



Dr. Frankel was unsure how to proceed. First, he knew that one is only allowed to undergo plastic surgery for constructive purposes; otherwise, it may fall under the prohibition of chavalah. Would changing one's identity in order to avoid people pursuing him for money be considered a sufficient constructive purpose to permit plastic surgery? Tzvi believed the creditors were not justified, but was that enough to avoid the prohibition of chavalah?

Second, if there was a possibility that Tzvi actually did owe the money, would the doctor be facilitating Tzvi's avoidance of repayment? Tzvi claimed he was innocent, but could the doctor rely on that claim?

Dr. Frankel was therefore unsure what to do. Was he allowed to believe the man that he was escaping unjust creditors, or was he not permitted to assume that? And even if the creditors were unjust, would that be a sufficient reason to permit plastic surgery, or might it still be prohibited as chavalah?

What do you think, is the doctor allowed to perform this plastic surgery?

See Chashukei Chemed Bava Kama Page 504

The first type of earthlings, who are limited to the four horizontal movements, may choose to move forward because they perceive that direction as progress. If they continue to move forward for 2,400 miles, they will end up in the same place they started, having accomplished nothing, and will be in no better place than they were before. The same will happen to those who decide to move to the right; they too will end up where they started. They will actually end up on the left before returning to their place of origin. This is the nature of the material world. Everything is cyclical and goes round and round, with no ultimate destination.

Let us consider the second type of earthlings, who have the capability of ascending and descending. When they choose to ascend, they can leave the base material world and achieve great heights. Perhaps the reason we use the metaphor of up and down in describing morality and decadence

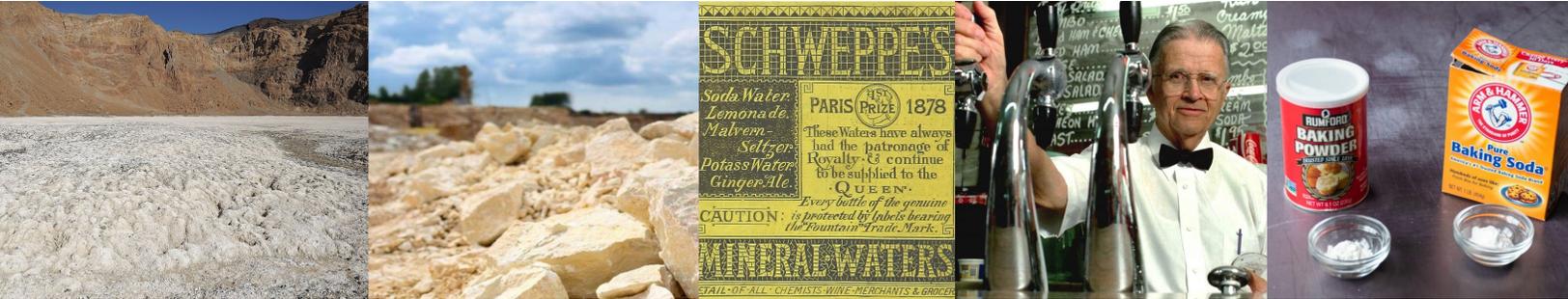
is that when we ascend and detach ourselves from the gravitational pull of the base material world, we can reach the heights of angels. When we lower ourselves to the base material world, we recognize a descent from those spiritual heights.

HaShem created the world with the express desire to elevate it to the heights of spirituality. Those charged with that role are His chosen people. It is for this purpose that HaShem took us out of our Egyptian bondage. While in Egypt, we plunged to the depths of Egyptian decadence. With our exodus, HaShem lifted us up. He blessed us with the ability to elevate our position. Our nation was given the ability to go up, and to take our world with us. As we move continuously along our upward vector, we constantly grow. The more we move along that vector, the higher we rise. Our progress will never return us to our point of origin; the heights of our movement continue to expand.

May this Yom Tov bring our people an elevation that will finally bring us to that destiny.

Have a beautiful Pesach and a wonderful Shabbos.

**Paysach Diskind**



# SHABBOS: CELEBRATING HASHEM'S CREATION

## THE SECRETS OF SODA, BAKING SODA, BAKING POWDER AND SODIUM BICARBONATE

We think of soda as a sweet drink. So how does baking soda relate to the drink? What is the origin of the word “soda,” anyway? And how is baking powder different from baking soda? Let’s explore these fascinating ideas together.

Long ago, people learned by watching the world around them. They noticed how minerals formed in dry places and how certain powders could clean or preserve things. In ancient Egypt, people collected a substance called natron (pictured, left) from dried lake beds. Natron contained sodium bicarbonate, which is what we now call baking soda. To the Egyptians, this material was extremely useful. They used it to clean their teeth, do laundry, shine glass, preserve food, and preserve bodies during mummification. (As a nod to sodium’s early name, natron, Na is the scientific symbol.)

The name “baking soda” has an interesting history. Its scientific name is sodium bicarbonate, though a more accurate term today is sodium hydrogen carbonate. Early scientists believed it had two carbonate parts, so they used the prefix “bi.” Later, they realized that was not quite right, but the name stayed. The word “soda” comes from an Arabic word, saawd, which referred to plants that were burned to produce sodium-rich ashes. There is also a theory that the word “soda” comes from the Hebrew word “sid”, calcium carbonate (limestone), which was a white powder as well. (second from left)

At first, soda had nothing to do with drinks. It was known as a cleaning and chemical substance. So how did it become the name of a sweet beverage?

The answer begins with natural mineral springs. These springs produced water that bubbled up from the ground, already filled with carbon dioxide gas. People believed this sparkling water had healing powers. Across Europe, people traveled long distances to drink and bathe in these waters. The taste was often bitter or salty because of the minerals dissolved in it, and people believed that meant it was strong and beneficial.

In 1783, a man named Jacob Schweppe found a way to make this kind of water on a large scale. He created carbonated water and added sodium bicarbonate to imitate natural mineral springs. (Third from left) One famous spring was in Selters (literally salt water), Germany, which is where the word “seltzer” comes from.

When carbonated water reached America, it was first sold as medicine. In the early 1800s, pharmacies began offering soda water to customers. Pharmacists would mix it with flavored syrups like lemon, ginger, or vanilla to make the medicine taste better. Over time, people started enjoying the taste, not just the supposed health benefits. (Fourth from left)

This led to the creation of soda fountains. These were places inside pharmacies where people could gather, drink soda, and socialize. They became popular spots in towns and cities. By the late 1800s, new drinks began to appear. Root beer was introduced in 1876. Dr Pepper followed in 1885. Coca-Cola came soon after, mixed with cocaine, originally marketed as a “brain tonic.”

At the same time, there was a movement against alcohol called the Temperance Movement. Soda became a popular alternative because it did not cause intoxication. Companies added more sugar to make drinks taste better, and the term “soft drink” was used to separate these beverages from alcoholic ones, the “hard drinks.”

One important invention helped soda spread even further. In 1892, the Crown Cork bottle cap was created. This cap could seal carbonation inside a bottle, allowing soda to be stored and transported easily. Before that, soda had to be made fresh each time.

Even though modern sodas do not contain much baking soda, the name “soda” remained. It connects the drink back to its roots as a beverage that once contained sodium bicarbonate. This is why many soda waters and seltzers say “no sodium” on them, to distinguish them from their historical origins of having added sodium.

While soda drinks were becoming popular, baking soda itself was changing how people cooked. Before baking soda, yeast was the main way to make bread rise. Yeast is a living organism that produces gas slowly as it feeds on sugar. This process takes time and can be unpredictable.

Baking soda offered a faster solution. When it mixes with an acid, such as vinegar or lemon juice, it creates carbon dioxide gas right away. This gas forms bubbles that make dough rise. Heat can also cause baking soda to release gas. This made it possible to create “quick breads” like muffins, pancakes, and biscuits without waiting hours for yeast. Baking soda was a great, quick alternative to yeast.

However, baking soda has some challenges. It works quickly, so food must be baked right away. If too much is used, it can leave a bitter taste. It also needs an acid to react.

To solve these problems, baking powder (Right) was invented. In 1843, a chemist named Alfred Bird created it for his wife, who could not eat yeast. Baking powder contains both baking soda and a dry acid. When moisture is added, it starts reacting. When heat is added, it reacts again. This makes baking easier and more reliable.

Baking soda is not just useful in the kitchen. As the Egyptians discovered, it is also a powerful cleaner. It can remove dirt and odors without damaging surfaces. For example, it was used to clean the Statue of Liberty in 1986. It removed years of pollution without harming the metal underneath. Inside the human body, baking soda plays an important role as well. Bicarbonate helps maintain the balance of acids in the blood. It is also found in saliva, where it protects teeth. Some athletes even use baking soda to reduce muscle fatigue during intense exercise.

A simple pinch can soothe insect bites, help draw out splinters, or calm heartburn, all by working with the chemistry of acids and bases. Baking soda can even be used to kill cockroaches by producing gas they cannot expel.

Baking soda can make eggs fluffier, tenderize meat, and remove odors. It can clean hands, freshen books, and even help put out small fires by releasing carbon dioxide. It is also a favorite in science experiments, like the classic baking soda and vinegar volcano.

So the next time you hear the word “soda,” think beyond the drink. Think about a simple powder with a long history, one that connects ancient Egypt, Hebrew, rising bread, early medicine, modern kitchens, and even the human body.

Thank you Hashem for your wondrous world!

## MY PURPOSE IN PERFORMING THIS MITZVAH IS ALSO FOR CHINUCH, TO EDUCATE OUR CHILDREN

Rabbi Naftali and Rebbetzin Pessia Carlebach lived without material wealth. As a Rav In Berlin, Torah study consumed Rabbi Naftali's days (Pictured), while Pessia worked as a bookbinder to help support their family. Money was always scarce, yet their home remained open to visiting Torah scholars, and tzedaka was an unbreakable household rule.

In post-World War I Berlin, where the Carlebachs resided, every visiting rosh yeshiva and charity collector knew to seek out their modest dwelling. There, generous hospitality awaited, along with wise counsel when needed.

The economic recession that devastated Eastern Europe in the late 1920s brought catastrophic consequences. The prestigious Ponevezh yeshiva in Lithuania faced starvation. Rabbi Yosef Kahaneman, then rosh yeshiva of Ponevezh, embarked on a desperate fundraising tour, traveling from city to city, approaching potential benefactors. But the recession had spread like a plague. Eastern European Jews weren't suffering alone—communities everywhere felt the economic stranglehold. Charity requests multiplied while resources evaporated. For every penny available, a dozen hands reached out in desperation.

The situation worsened as Western businessmen also succumbed to financial ruin. Stock markets crashed, trade collapsed, and yesterday's wealthy became today's impoverished. The Ponevezher Rabbi trudged onward, but donations barely covered his travel expenses. Finally arriving in Berlin, he went directly to the Carlebach home, hoping for guidance in reaching potential donors. Rabbi Naftali immediately invited him for a meal and rest after his arduous journey.

During their conversation, Rabbi Kahaneman described Lithuania's dire circumstances and lamented the inability of German and neighboring communities to help. A Polish-Jewish magnate had sent only token donations with letters describing his own troubles. Another philanthropist, who previously covered one-third of the yeshiva's expenses, could barely sustain himself. Rabbi Kahaneman spoke until his voice failed.

In the kitchen preparing their guest's meal, Rebbetzin Pessia heard every word. Her heart broke. "Stay with us," she insisted. "Tomorrow, with God's help, there may be a solution."

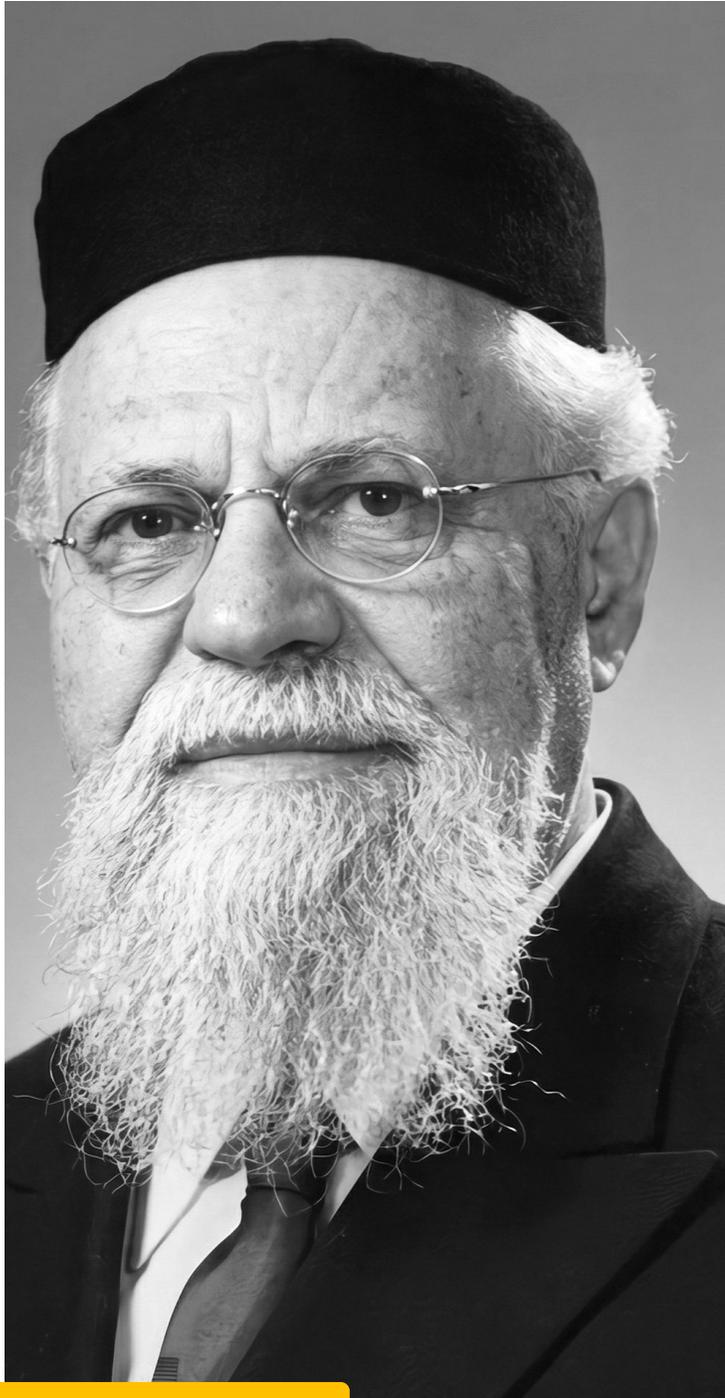
Before dawn, while everyone slept, she rose quietly. Gathering all her jewelry and treasured possessions, she slipped from the house and went to the pawnbroker, negotiating a loan. Returning home, she joyfully presented the rosh yeshiva with a substantial check.

Rabbi Kahaneman stared at the check in silence. Though it could revitalize his yeshiva and save his students, he understood how she'd obtained it. He couldn't accept this "poor man's lamb" knowing it endangered her family's stability.

"This is truly a holy home," the rosh yeshiva said, "and your benevolence knows no bounds. But accepting this violates the Sages' teaching that one should give at least a tenth but no more than a fifth of one's means to charity. Tzedaka must not create beggars. This sum could destroy your household's finances."

"True," Rebbetzin Carlebach replied, "no more than a fifth of one's assets should go to tzedaka. But my purpose in performing this mitzvah is also for chinuch, to educate our children. And our Sages teach that for chinuch, any financial sacrifice is permitted."

From Tales of Holy Women by Rabbi Yitzchok Buksbaum



### THE ANSWER

Regarding last week's question about the friend who was stuck in the room, Rav Zilberstein answered (Chashukei Chemed, Bava Kama, page 460) that in that specific case there was a heter to do what he did, and he did not have to pay any compensation.

It goes without saying that one should be extremely careful not to extrapolate from this case to any other situation, and one must, of course, consult a highly competent Rav before engaging in similar Shailos.

This week's TableTalk is dedicated to the memory of Reb Moshe Davids  
**Moshe Yerachmiel ben Yosef Davids z'l**  
whose yartzeit is 24 Nissan  
By his loving wife Shula and his children and grandchildren

This week's TableTalk is dedicated in memory of  
Mrs. Rosalie Kallner  
**Shaina Rochel bas Ephraim Fishel a'h**  
whose Yartzeit is Shivi Shel Pesach.  
by Yossie & Hinda Davis and Family



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