



A MITZVA DILEMMA FOR THE SHABBOS TABLE



THE CHASSIDISHE BAND

By Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

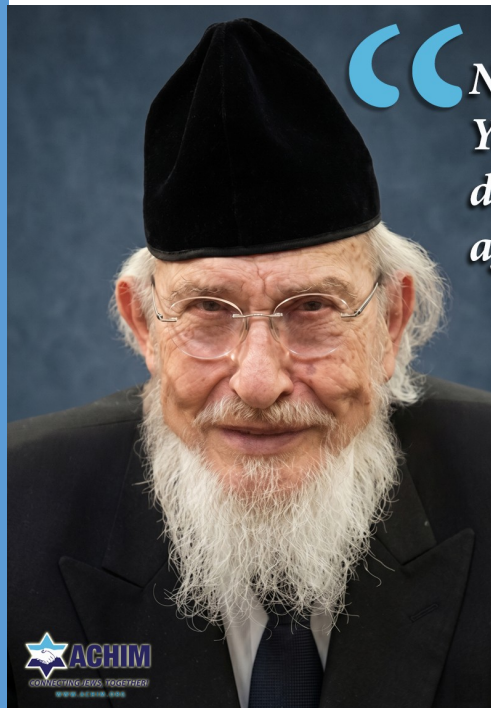


YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND? THAT'S THE LAW!

“And HaShem spoke to Moshe and to Aharon to say to the people. This is the rule of the Torah which HaShem has commanded to say to the people: Speak to the Children of Israel, and they shall take for you a red heifer...” These are the opening verses of the Parsha. They are coupled with redundancies. How are we to read these verses with understanding?

Every mitzvah has a reason. If the Creator instructed us to do something, or to refrain from doing something, there must certainly be a reason, actually a very good reason. Many books have been written explaining the reasons for the mitzvos. However, it must be recognized that no matter how much insight any given reason may provide, there is yet a much more profound reason beyond the one we are able to understand.

Using some form of quantifying levels of intelligence, we identify this great genius at level 2,000, while most folks are between 100 and 150. Our genius composes a magnificent poem. Naturally, every word was carefully chosen with much insight. He chose his words for their meter, for their meaning, for their connotation, and perhaps for reasons that we may not even understand. If our genius perceives nature on a level much higher than we do, we can assume that his poem will reflect that perception. If his level of understanding is so much higher than ours, we will be incapable of understanding the complete reason for his choice of words. In fact, we may not even share his understanding of the words themselves. At the same time, it is possible that we will appreciate much wisdom from his poem, albeit on our level of understanding. If our genius wrote his poem to accommodate simple folks with a lower level of understanding, then we would expect to find beautiful insights in his poem.



“No, you only die once. You live every single day anew, starting again and again!”

-Rav Baruch Mordechai Ezrachi said this emphatically, banging on his shtender, after hearing a boy repeat the popular expression, “You only live once.”

Ohr Hachaim Hakadosh explains how every mitzvah created by HaShem carries tremendous amounts of insight and purpose. Moshe taught the mitzvos to his people with the insight of their reason and purpose. There was, however, one mitzvah, the mitzvah of the Red Heifer, for which HaShem instructed Moshe not to share its reason and purpose with the people. This mitzvah was to remain without understanding. HaShem wanted this mitzvah to remain an anomaly. Even King Solomon, the wisest of all men, failed to fully understand this mitzvah. It is interesting to note that Moshe himself was granted understanding of this mitzvah, but was instructed not to share it.

Why was Moshe instructed not to share this with his people?

HaShem wished to use this mitzvah as the paradigm for all mitzvos of the Torah. HaShem wanted His people to recognize that although Moshe shared tremendous insight into every mitzvah, and inspired his people to appreciate HaShem's

Torah, nevertheless, it was important that the people should understand that the ultimate reason and purpose of the mitzvos are far beyond our understanding. HaShem used this mitzvah as the paradigm for how a Jew should approach his obedience to the Torah and its mitzvos.

Our performance and commitment to the mitzvos should not be inspired by their meaning and purpose. Our performance should be based upon our simple commitment to HaShem, nothing else. Of course, our insight and understanding enhance our performance, but the actual decision to observe the mitzvah should be for no other reason than “HaShem said it shall be done!”

Ohr Hachaim explains the opening verses as follows. HaShem spoke to Moshe and to Aharon to say to the people that the following mitzvah, the red heifer, is to be a paradigm for the entire Torah. Before the actual teaching of the laws of the Red Heifer, Moshe was to introduce the people to the anomaly of this mitzvah, the mitzvah for which there is no understanding. Moshe was to instruct the people that this anomaly is not limited only to this mitzvah. Rather, this is the nature of the entire Torah. There is no mitzvah that we truly have a complete comprehension of. We perform mitzvos only because HaShem commanded us as such.

Have a wonderful Shabbos.

Paysach Diskind



SHABBOS: CELEBRATING HASHEM'S CREATION

THE SECRETS OF FLUORIDE

Recently, we had the pleasure of having a Shabbos guest who worked for the Baltimore water plant. During the meal, he shared something fascinating. He explained that when the city prepares our drinking water, they add three important things.

First, they add chlorine to clean the water and kill harmful germs.

Second, they add calcium to help protect the pipes.

Third, they add fluoride to help protect our teeth.

That caught my attention. We turn on the faucet, fill a cup, and drink without thinking much about it. But behind that simple cup of water is a whole world of chemistry, engineering, and health. So let's learn more about fluoride. Where does it come from? What does it do? Why is it added to water? And why has it become the topic of discussion in so many places? Fluoride is not an artificial invention. It occurs naturally in rocks, soil, clay, coal, water, plants, and animals. Long before anyone put fluoride into toothpaste or drinking water, it was already hidden throughout creation.

The main mined source of fluoride is a mineral called fluorite, also known as fluorspar. Fluorite is calcium fluoride, and its chemical formula is CaF_2 . It can form beautiful colorful crystals. (Pictured second from right) Some are purple, green, blue, yellow, clear, or mixed with several shades.

Fluorite can be found in rock veins, cavities, sedimentary rocks, pegmatites, and even near hot springs. The fluorite ore is taken from the earth, milled, and processed into commercial fluorspar. (Pictured second from left) The processing removes impurities so it can meet the standards needed for different uses.

Fluoride is not only for toothpaste. Fluorspar is used in steelmaking, where it acts as a flux. A flux helps materials flow and separate during melting. Fluorine compounds are also used in aluminum production. Aluminum fluoride and cryolite are important in aluminum smelting. Fluorspar is used to make hydrogen fluoride and hydrofluoric acid. Fluorine chemistry is also used in insulating foams, refrigerants, gasoline production, steel, aluminum, and even uranium fuel processing. Some of these chemicals are very powerful. Hydrogen fluoride is commercially important, but it is also dangerous and corrosive. It can even etch glass.

Now let's talk about teeth. Cavities begin with bacteria in plaque. These bacteria eat sugar and starch. After they eat, they produce acid. That acid attacks the tooth enamel.

Tooth enamel is the hard outer layer of the tooth. It is calcium-based and is mostly made of a mineral called hydroxyapatite, which contains calcium and phosphate. You can imagine enamel like a strong brick wall. The calcium and phosphate are like the bricks.

When acid attacks enamel, it pulls calcium and phosphate out of the tooth surface. This process is called demineralization. If this keeps happening, the enamel becomes weaker. Eventually, a hole can form. That hole is what we call a cavity.

But here is the wonder. Early tooth decay can sometimes be stopped, and in some cases even reversed, before a true hole forms.

How? Hashem gave the mouth its own repair system. Saliva naturally contains calcium and phosphate. These minerals can return to weakened enamel and help rebuild it. This repair process is called remineralization. Fluoride helps this process. It helps calcium and phosphate return to the weakened enamel. It helps guide those minerals back into the tooth surface. It helps them re-crystallize in the tiny weakened areas left behind by acid. Then the repaired enamel becomes harder for acid to dissolve the next time.

Fluoride does not replace calcium. It does not "open the tooth" and push

calcium inside. Rather, it helps the tooth use the minerals already present in saliva. Going back to our brick wall example, acid removes some of the bricks, and fluoride helps the new bricks fit tightly back into place. Then the repaired wall is stronger than before.

Fluoride also reduces the ability of cavity-causing bacteria to make acid. It does not sterilize the mouth, but it helps reduce the damage those bacteria can cause.

This is why fluoride toothpaste is so helpful. Toothpaste is not mainly a lubricant. A major purpose of toothpaste is to deliver fluoride directly onto the teeth, exactly where acid attacks happen. A toothbrush with water can mechanically remove some plaque. But fluoride toothpaste adds cavity-prevention power. That is why dentists often recommend spitting out the toothpaste, but not rinsing aggressively with lots of water. Leaving a little fluoride on the teeth helps it keep working.

So why add fluoride to water?

Fluoride from toothpaste is direct and topical. Fluoride from water is low-level and continuous. It keeps small amounts of fluoride in saliva throughout the day. That gives teeth repeated little repair opportunities.

Water fluoridation is common in the United States, Australia, New Zealand, Ireland, Singapore, Brazil, and parts of Canada, the United Kingdom, Spain, and Chile. But most countries do not add fluoride to drinking water. Some places have naturally fluoridated water. Other countries rely on fluoride toothpaste, fluoridated salt, fluoride tablets, dental treatments, or school programs.

In the United States, water fluoridation is much more widespread than in most countries. CDC data from 2022 said that 62.8 percent of the total U.S. population received fluoridated water, and among people on community water systems, 72.3 percent received fluoridated water.

Israel gives us an interesting case to think about. Israel started water fluoridation in 1981. It stopped broad water fluoridation in 2014. Later efforts to restart it did not fully happen. Israel's drinking water is currently not fluoridated, although some water sources may contain natural fluoride.

What happened after Israel stopped adding fluoride to the water?

Some studies found that children had more cavities afterward. One study found that children needed about twice as many dental treatments after fluoride was removed from the water.

Another study looked at 12-year-old children. It found that children in cities with fluoride in the water had healthier teeth than children in cities without fluoride. More children in the fluoridated cities had no cavities at all.

Of course, cavities are caused by many things. Sugar, brushing, toothpaste, dental visits, and family income all make a difference. So we cannot say fluoride was the only reason. But the studies do suggest that when fluoride was removed from the water, children's teeth were not as well protected. In the US, in many states, there is a real discussion about whether fluoride still needs to be added to water today, now that fluoride toothpaste is widely available. Most mainstream public-health experts still say that at recommended levels, fluoridated water helps reduce cavities and that the benefits outweigh the risks.

The next time we drink a cup of water, we can pause for a moment. Inside that clear cup is a whole world of thought, cleaning, protection, minerals, pipes, chemistry, and care. And inside our mouths, even while we are not paying attention, Hashem built a tiny repair system, with saliva, calcium, phosphate, and fluoride all working together.

Thank you Hashem for Your wondrous world!

THE OLOMEINU SUBSCRIPTION

One summer day, Rav Binyamin Kamenetzky, founder of Yeshivah of South Shore, Yeshivas Toras Chaim, and Torah pioneer of the Five Towns in New York, encountered a Jewish father and his young son at a local post office. The fellow had just moved to the neighborhood, and Rav Binyamin asked the man where his son went to school. "Well, he hasn't started school yet, but next year I'll be enrolling him in public school," said the man. "Public school?" asked Rav Binyamin. "Why don't you send him to our yeshivah? This way, he will receive a quality Jewish education." The man responded that he wasn't religious and was not interested in having his child receive a religious education. Rav Binyamin described how much the young boy would benefit from attending Yeshivah of South Shore, but his pleas fell on deaf ears. Seeing that he was getting nowhere, Rav Binyamin asked the man for his address and then wished him a good day.

Years later, the man met Rav Binyamin. He had become shomer Shabbos, primarily because of his son, whom he had indeed enrolled in a local day school. Rav Binyamin had lost touch with him, but the fellow embraced him and thanked him for being the reason that he had decided to send his son to a Jewish day school. At the shivah for Rav Binyamin, he told the family the secret: "Not long after my encounter with Rabbi Kamenetzky at the post office, a publication called Olomeinu began arriving at our home each month. I looked through it and was impressed by the ethics and morals conveyed on each page, beautiful Jewish ideals being taught to Jewish children. I realized that these were principles that I wanted my son to learn, and the only way he'd learn them is if he attended a yeshivah. Your father did not give up on us! He bought our family a subscription to this great magazine, and today, my entire family is shomer Shabbos."

Rav Binyamin had seemingly been unsuccessful in his overtures at the post office, but he cared too much to just let it go. The least he could do was get the man's address, so that he could pay for a subscription to Olomeinu, hoping it would expose the family to Torah values. It was that gesture that ultimately succeeded in influencing the family to provide their children with the Jewish education they deserved. And today, decades later, their grandchildren are proud talmidim of Yeshivah of South Shore.

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THE ANSWER

Regarding last week's question about playing soccer on Shabbos, Rabbi Zilberstein (Veharev Na Volume Two, Shelach) answered that since a talis katan is not an obligation, but a mitzvah kiyumis (Since we do not normally wear four-cornered garments, we are not technically obligated to wear a talis katan.), he should not wear his talis katan in this case as it will cause a zilzul of Shabbos, a disrespect for Shabbos, giving the impression that this is a permissible activity on Shabbos.

This week's TableTalk is dedicated in honor of the birthday of
Jerry Schwartz

A man whose love of his children, grandchildren and great grandchildren and extended family, along with his Torah studies knows no bounds.

By Leah



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