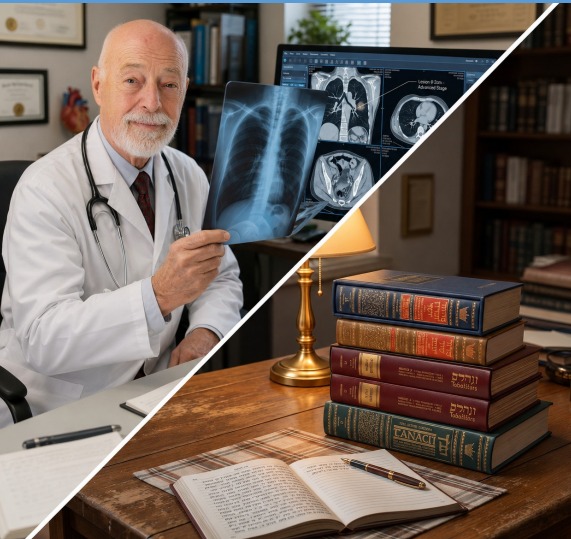


## A MITZVA DILEMMA FOR THE SHABBOS TABLE



### THE OATH

By Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

Deborah, a non-Jewish woman living in the United States was not feeling well. She went to the doctor. After running some tests and scans, the doctor discovered that she had an advanced form of cancer.

He told her, "This is extremely aggressive. As far as we can tell, there is no real hope. You should get your affairs in order and prepare for the worst."

In her desperation, Deborah cried out to Hashem. She said, "G-d, if You cure me of this cancer, which the doctors have given up on, I swear to You that I will become Jewish. I will study, convert, and become part of the Jewish people." That was her plea to Hashem.

And then, incredibly, within a short time, Deborah made a miraculous recovery. It was so remarkable that the doctors themselves said, "This is a medical miracle. We do not understand it. We have never seen anything like this before."

She was completely healed.

Now she had to keep her word.

Deborah reached out to a local rabbi and rebbetzin and told them that she wanted to convert. She was sincere. They began teaching her, arranged chavrusas for her, and helped her begin the process of geirus.

The process of geirus is very demanding. A person who wants to become Jewish has to learn many



### FOR G-D'S SAKE!

At the end of last week's Parsha, there was a festival of idolatry and immorality sponsored by Midyan, at which many members of our people faltered. There was no outcry from our people against this festival, and this angered HaShem. A plague broke out which killed 24,000 people. During this festival, Zimri, the prince of Shimon, perpetrated a terrible crime. When Pinchos witnessed Zimri's crime, he was overwhelmed with vengeance for the honor of HaShem that was being trampled, and he killed Zimri in the act. Immediately after killing Zimri, the plague subsided and nobody else died. In recognition of Pinchos' act of selfless bravery, HaShem gave him the covenant of peace.

When awarding this special covenant to Pinchos, HaShem says, "Pinchos settled My anger against the Jewish people when he avenged My honor among them, and I did not destroy the Jewish people in My anger." This verse is very clear and direct. HaShem expressed His reason for awarding Pinchos with this covenant. However, the words "among them" are awkward. What are they conveying?

The power of a mitzvah is infinite. The reason for this power is because it is a fulfillment of the Will of HaShem. Just as the Will of HaShem brought about the creation of the world, so too, it is the same Will of HaShem that is achieved when we perform a mitzvah. It harnesses that very same Will!

However, the extent of that power is dependent on the purity of the motivation of the performance. There are many aspects of a mitzvah that make it effective. If performed to perfection, the mitzvah carries the one who performed it to the highest levels of spiritual achievement. Rambam writes that most mitzvos that we perform fall short of perfection due to self-serving intentions that motivate our per-



*In our times, as much as we suffer from a deficiency of yedias haTorah, we suffer far more from a deficiency of kavod haTorah!*

*-Rav Yitzchak Hutner*



formance. The primary intent that brings a mitzvah to perfection is the motivation of the person who performs it.

Let us take the one who studies Torah with great intensity and much sacrifice. He refrains from sleeping and eating and maintains his complete focus on his studies. This is truly admirable, and he will certainly succeed in his studies. However, if he is motivated by aspirations of becoming a Torah scholar of great repute, then his mitzvah of Torah study has been tainted with self-serving interests. Compare this with the fellow who, out of his gratitude to HaShem for all that He does for him, commits himself to Torah study. He studies with great diligence equal to the first fellow. He does not even think of becoming a scholar of repute; he is only focused on bringing pleasure to HaShem. We can appreciate how the second fellow has brought HaShem's Will into realization, and his mitzvah has revealed a clear and open revelation of His Will. Such a mitzvah generates the incredible power of a mitzvah. Whereas our first fel-

low, even though he certainly has generated much Torah study and has performed a great mitzvah has, nevertheless, not unleashed the full power of the mitzvah. The same is true with the mitzvah of tzedaka, as well as every other mitzvah.

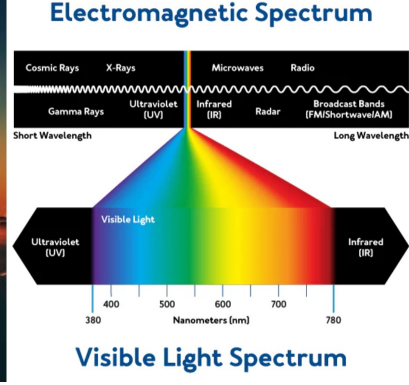
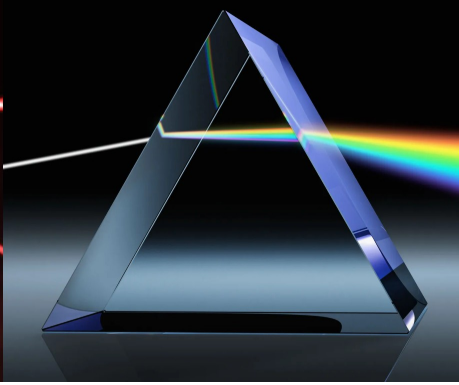
Let us return to Pinchos. When Pinchos sacrificed his life to carry out his vengeance for HaShem, his mitzvah was performed with the greatest dedication. He could have been motivated to carry out this act of bravery to achieve closeness to HaShem. After all, he was the only one among the entire nation who took a stand.

However, the Talmud teaches that when he carried Zimri on his sword, he called to HaShem and cried, "With Zimri killed, why have 24,000 Jewish people died in the plague!?" It was on the merit of Pinchos' cry that HaShem stopped the plague. Pinchos was arguing to HaShem: "Do not judge the people for standing by idly; I have acted on their behalf! This act of great sacrifice I have not done for my own advancement, but rather I represent my entire people. On the merit of this act, done on behalf of every member, please stop the plague."

The Sfás Emes explains our original verse as follows: "Pinchos settled My anger against the Jewish people when he avenged My honor *among them*," i.e., on behalf of the people; therefore, he deserves My covenant.

Have a wonderful Shabbos.

**Paysach Diskind**



# SHABBOS: CELEBRATING HASHEM'S CREATION

## NINE AMAZING FACTS ABOUT LIGHT, AND WHAT THEY CAN TEACH US ABOUT THE GREATNESS OF TORAH

Shlomo HaMelech says, — “כי נר מצוה ותורה אור” — “A mitzvah is a candle, and Torah is light.” The Torah is compared to light. Here are nine amazing facts about light, and what they can teach us about the greatness of Torah.

**Light Is Both a Particle and a Wave.** One of the fascinating discoveries of science is that light behaves in two ways. Sometimes it acts like a tiny particle, called a photon. Other times it behaves like a wave, spreading across space. It propagates forward, diffracts outward, and adds to and interferes with itself through superposition. Torah has a similar dual nature. On one hand, Torah is exact and fixed. The Written Torah, Torah Shebichsav, has specific letters, words, pesukim, and parshiyos. Every letter matters. A Sefer Torah must be written with total precision. On the other hand, Torah also expands like a wave. The Oral Torah, Torah Shebaal Peh, includes Mishnah, Gemara, halachah, midrash, mussar, and the chidushim of every generation. The words of the Written Torah do not change, but their meaning spreads deeper and wider through learning. This is one of the wonders of Torah: it is completely fixed, yet endlessly alive.

**Most Light Is Invisible to Us.** Human eyes can only see a small part of the electromagnetic spectrum. We see visible light, but there are many kinds of light we cannot see, such as infrared, ultraviolet, radio waves, X-rays, and gamma rays. These forms of light are real, even though our eyes cannot detect them. Torah is also much deeper than what we first see. A person may read a pasuk and understand the simple meaning, called pshat. But that same pasuk may also contain hints, deeper lessons, halachic principles, moral teachings, and hidden secrets. Chazal say: שבעים פנים לתורה — “There are seventy faces to the Torah.” This means Torah has many layers. A young student can understand one level and see just one layer of the visible spectrum, while a great talmid chacham may spend years discovering deeper meanings in the very same words.

**White Light Contains Many Colors.** White light looks simple and unified. But when it passes through a prism, it separates into many colors. Torah also begins from one Divine source: Hashem. Yet when Torah enters the world, it appears in many forms. There is halachah, aggadah, mussar, kabbalah, Gemara learning, practical mitzvos, tefillah, and hashkafah. These are not separate truths. They are different “colors” of one Torah. The variety within Torah reveals how rich the unity of the Torah is.

**Light Carries Energy.** Light is not just something we see. It carries energy. Sunlight warms the earth, helps plants grow, and makes life possible. Torah also carries spiritual energy. A person can collect facts and read an encyclopedia and still remain unchanged. But Torah learning is different. Torah is meant to affect the person who learns it. It can soften a hard heart, strengthen a weak person, inspire better choices, and help someone become more honest, disciplined, kind, and connected to Hashem. Torah is not just information. It is transformation. When a person learns Torah properly, the Torah does not stay on the page. It enters the mind, the heart, and eventually the person’s actions.

**Different Materials Respond to Light Differently.** When light hits different materials, different things can happen. A mirror reflects light. A dark surface absorbs it. A clear window lets it pass through. A prism bends it and reveals colors. A wall blocks it. The Torah also impacts different people in different ways. One person may hear Torah and only repeat the words without changing. Another person absorbs the message and be-

comes better because of it. Another person may be incapable of absorbing Torah because of certain character defects. The Torah is always shining. The question is whether we are open enough to receive it. A person’s heart is like a vessel, a kli. The more refined the kli is, the more Torah light it can absorb.

**Focused Light Is Much Stronger.** A regular lightbulb spreads light in many directions. It brightens a room, but the light is diffuse — scattered. A laser is different. Its light is focused and organized. Because the light waves move together in one direction, a laser can have tremendous power. Torah learning works in a similar way. Random moments of inspiration are valuable, but they usually do not last. Real growth comes from focused and consistent learning: having a seder, learning with a chavrusa, reviewing, asking questions, listening to a rebbi, and continuing even when learning feels difficult. When Torah is organized and steady, it becomes powerful. It can cut like a laser through confusion, bad habits, and outside influences. Scattered inspiration gives warmth. Focused Torah learning creates real change.

**Light Can Travel Through Empty Space.** Sound needs a medium, such as air or water, in order to travel. In outer space, where there is no air, sound cannot travel. Light is different. Light can travel through the vacuum of space. The sun’s light crosses millions of miles and reaches earth. Torah has also traveled throughout time in an almost impossible way. Klal Yisrael has carried Torah through deserts, exiles, poverty, danger, persecution, and constant change. Many nations lost their identity when they lost their land, language, or power. But the Jewish people remained connected to Torah wherever they went. The Torah can survive in a vacuum. Torah does not depend on comfort, wealth, or popularity. It comes from Hashem, so it can continue shining even in the darkest times.

**Light Reveals Hidden Color.** In complete darkness, colors disappear. A red apple, a blue coat, and a green leaf all look black. Light does not create their colors; it reveals what was already there. Torah does something similar for each person. Torah does not erase individuality. It reveals the unique beauty of each neshamah. One person may shine through deep yyun. Another through tefillah. Another through working on their midos. The same Torah can bring out different strengths in different people. A Torah life is not supposed to make everyone identical. It helps every person become the best version of who Hashem created them to be.

**Light Spreads Beyond Its Source.** A glowing object cannot keep its light to itself. A candle naturally lights up the space around it. A person filled with Torah also affects the world around him. When someone truly learns and lives Torah, it changes the way he speaks, acts, thinks, and treats others. His home becomes calmer. His friends feel encouraged. His family sees an example. His community becomes stronger. The whole world actually gets brighter. Torah is not meant to remain locked inside a sefer or inside a person’s mind. It is meant to radiate outward into real life. A true ben Torah or bas Torah becomes a source of light for others. Thank you, Hashem, for Your wondrous world, and for sharing Your Light with us.

(Inspired by a talk given by my dear friend, Dr. Berel Epstein.)

# THE GREATEST PLEASURE

Rav Moshe Wolfson, would often teach that one can get tremendous pleasure from Tefilla. He illustrated this with the following story.

A chassid once came to R' Aharon Karliner, the Beis Aharon and told him that the local poritz (gentile landowner) had been gripped by a desire to go sledding. The problem was that this happened in July, when there was no snow on the ground.

No matter. The poritz's servants knew that "what the poritz wants, the poritz gets," or else they would suffer the consequences. But the only substitute for snow that they could find was sugar, which was so prohibitively expensive at the time that most people could not afford to put a spoonful in their tea.

The poritz's men purchased hundreds of sacks of sugar and spread the precious grains out across a large area. They then hitched a sled to his two white stallions, and the poritz went sledding on that sugar.

"Isn't it something?" the chassid asked the Beis Aharon. "The poritz can get whatever earthly pleasure he desires."

But the Beis Aharon was not impressed. "You call that pleasure? I assure you that whatever pleasure the poritz had from his sledding does not in any way compare to the pleasure I derive from saying Nishmas on Shabbos morning!"

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## THE ANSWER

Regarding last week's question about the wedding band, Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein (Chashukei Chemed, Nedarim, page 520) writes that the band leader is not allowed to ask for additional payment for the wedding for two reasons. First, he was already miya'yesh about getting paid. Second, he had already been paid by having the mechitza put up, causing a tremendous Kiddush Hashem.

This week's TableTalk is dedicated in memory of  
ר' משה אריה בן ר' אברהם שרגא פייוויש הלוי ז"ל  
מרת חנה בת הרב אברהם פסח ז"ל  
By Yaakov Hillel and Judy Gross



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