

A MITZVA DILEMMA FOR THE SHABBOS TABLE



THE EMPTY VORT

By Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

Yaakov was walking through Yerushalayim one evening when a stranger approached him and said, "Could you please help me? There is a vort in this building, and it is mamash a nebach. Hardly anyone came. Both families are poor, and it would be a tremendous chesed if you could come in and help be mesameach the chas-san and kallah."

Yaakov hesitated. "I don't know them. I was just walking down the street." The man urged him, "It doesn't make a difference. You're a ben Torah. Just come in. They'll feel so good." Yaakov agreed, thinking, "Let's do a mitzvah."

Inside, the room was nearly empty and very quiet. The man told Yaakov, "Nu, start a niggun!" Yaakov began singing

NO SELF INTEREST

The tribes of Reuven and Gad approached Moshe requesting that they receive their portion of Eretz Yisrael in Transjordan, the area that is modern-day Jordan. Their request intimated that they would not be crossing into the Land with the rest of the people. Moshe rejected their request on the grounds that it would demoralize the rest of the nation if they would not fight alongside their brothers. Reuven and Gad responded, "We will go ahead of the nation and lead in their campaign to conquer the Land, and we will not return to our portion until the rest of the nation has been settled," indicating that they would remain in Eretz Yisrael proper with the rest of the nation until everybody was settled. In response to their answer, Moshe says, "If you will go armed before HaShem with all your troops until the conquest of the Land, then you may return, and the land in Transjordan will be yours." Moshe then informed Elazar HaKohen and Yehoshua, who would be responsible to divide the Land, to be aware of this deal. If Reuven and Gad kept their end of the deal, Transjordan would be given to them. Reuven and Gad then spoke up and said, "We will go armed before HaShem to the Land, and our portion should be ours." After that statement, Moshe gave their portion to them.

Malbim notes that the original plan was that they would receive their portion only after the conquest. This is why Elazar and Yehoshua were informed of the deal. However, following Reuven and Gad's final statement, Moshe gave them their land immediately. What changed? Malbim also notes that initially, Reuven and Gad offered to go fight before *the people*. Moshe responded that they

MITZVA MEME

“Life begins
at the end of
your comfort zone”

-Neale Donald Walsch



“Od Yishama,” and slowly the room came alive. Then the man urged him to sing another song, and the simchah grew warmer. Then the man said, “Nu, say a few words about the chassan.” Yaakov whispered, “I don’t know him at all.” But the man pushed him, “Just look at him. He looks like a nice ben Torah. You’ll do great.”

Finally, Yaakov got up and praised the chassan’s ehrlichkeit, menschlichkeit, hasmadah, and yiras Shamayim. In truth, he was making it up. He reasoned that since Chazal teach us to praise a kallah, perhaps it was permitted here too, in order to bring simchah. The kallah’s father was deeply moved by the speech, and when the vort ended, he gave Yaakov an envelope with 1,000 shekels inside.

About a year later, Yaakov heard that the couple had gotten divorced. It turned out that the chassan was the opposite of everything Yaakov had said. He lacked yiras Shamayim, had poor middos, and was not honest. Yaakov felt terrible. Had he been allowed to praise the chassan when he did not know if his words were true? And since the kallah’s father had given him the money because of that speech, did Yaakov have to return the 1,000 shekels?

That was the question he brought to Rav Zilberstein. What do you think?

See Chashukei Chemed, Nedarim, page 554.

should go before *HaShem*. What is the difference? What is the implication of these two expressions?

Malbim explains that to go armed before the people suggests that the war will be fought through natural means, one nation against another. To go armed before HaShem implies that the war will be fought through miraculous means. It is a war that HaShem is fighting, not the people. When Moshe rejected their request, they responded that they would fight with the rest of the people in a natural war. Moshe accepted their offer, but added that the military campaign was HaShem’s war and would be fought on those grounds, not through natural means. Moshe wanted Reuven and Gad to approach their participation in the campaign with the proper intention. They were to fight the war with pure intentions of serving HaShem. Only with pure intentions could they hope to succeed. After Reuven and Gad saw that Moshe instructed

Elazar and Yehoshua to give them their request only after they fulfilled their duty of joining in the war, they turned to Moshe with a new request. They wanted the land to be given before they crossed into the Land. They wanted their request fulfilled immediately. They were concerned that if they would only receive their land after they fulfilled their duty, then their intent to serve in the war would be lacking purity. They would be motivated to fight the war for the immediate gain of receiving their land. In order for them to maintain purity of intent for HaShem, with no selfish interests, it was critical that they receive their portion now, before the war. They wanted their portion to be given with no conditions. Only then would their intent be pure, and only then could they fight with the purest intentions.

Malbim repeats this theme throughout the Torah in many different applications: the only way to properly serve HaShem is when it is done with no self-interest. This applies to Torah study as well as contributing to tzedakah. The further we remove ourselves from any personal gain, the greater and more effective the mitzvah will be.

Have a wonderful Shabbos.

Paysach Diskind.



SHABBOS: CELEBRATING HASHEM'S CREATION HASHEM'S TINY TAILOR BIRD

Imagine walking through a garden and noticing something strange. Two fresh green leaves are joined together. Not glued. Not folded by a child. Sewn. Along the edges are tiny holes, and through those holes are thin threads of fiber, almost like stitches. Hidden inside is a soft little nest, holding tiny eggs.

Who made it?

Not a person. Not a machine. A bird.

Meet the tailorbird, one of the most amazing little builders in Hashem's world. The Common Tailorbird is tiny, only about 10 to 14 centimeters long. It weighs just 6 to 10 grams, about as much as a couple of sugar packets. At first glance, it does not look especially powerful. It has green or olive feathers on top, creamy feathers underneath, and often a rusty-colored patch on its head. It hops through bushes, flicks its tail upward, and hides in shrubs. Many people hear its loud call long before they ever see it.

But this tiny bird can do something that seems almost impossible. It can sew a nest.

The tailorbird begins by finding the right leaf. Not any leaf will do. A dead leaf would crumble. A weak leaf would tear. A small leaf might not be big enough. The female looks for a living leaf that is broad, strong, and flexible. Sometimes she uses one large leaf, pulling the edges together. Sometimes she uses two or more smaller leaves and joins them into a pouch.

Before beginning, she may even wrap the leaf around herself, as if measuring whether it is the right size. Then the work begins. Using her sharp, slender beak like a needle, she pokes tiny holes along the edge of the leaf. Amazingly, these holes are so small that the living leaf often does not turn brown. It remains green, fresh, and attached to the plant. That means the nest stays camouflaged, hidden among all the other leaves.

Now comes the "thread." The tailorbird gathers spider silk, plant fibers, silk from caterpillar cocoons, cotton, wool, or even animal hair. In areas near people, tailorbirds may use bits of human-made fiber, like cotton thread or carpet fibers. With her beak, she pulls the thread through the tiny holes. Her feet help hold the leaf edges together while she works. She is balancing, pulling, puncturing, threading, and keeping the leaves under tension all at once.

Some nests can have 150 to 200 stitches.

But the tailorbird does not always tie knots like a person. Often, the fiber works more like a tiny rivet. The end of the fiber may fray or puff out on the outside of the leaf, so it cannot slip back through the hole. Scientists describe the nest-building as sewing, riveting, lacing, or matting. Whatever word we use, the result is astonishing.

Once the outer leaf cradle is ready, the tailorbird builds the inside. She lines it with soft grass, plant down, lint, animal hair, and other comfortable materials. The outside is hidden and strong. The inside is soft and warm. It is like a little nursery, tucked away inside a living green envelope.

The design is not only beautiful. It is practical. The leaf pouch hides the eggs and chicks from predators like crows, snakes, lizards, rodents, and

cats. The upper leaves can act like a roof, protecting the nest from monsoon rain and harsh sunlight. The living leaves stay green, helping the nest disappear into the plant.

Tailorbirds live across tropical Asia. They do not migrate long distances. They are resident birds, staying in their territory year-round. They can live in forests, mangroves, gardens, parks, farmland, city greenery, and near apartment balconies, as long as there are enough bushes and leaves.

They are mostly insect eaters. Their menu includes beetles, bugs, caterpillars, flies, spiders, and other small insects. This makes them helpful to gardens and farms, because they naturally reduce pests. They often move quickly through thick vegetation instead of flying across open spaces. Their wings are short and rounded, made for quick dashes through bushes. Some have even been observed hanging upside down to pick insects from the undersides of leaves.

They also visit flowers. Sometimes they come for insects around blossoms, and sometimes they sip nectar. Around mango blossoms or silk-cotton flowers, a tailorbird may get dusted with pollen and look golden-headed. Imagine that tiny green bird wearing a powdery yellow crown!

During breeding season, the male may grow longer central tail feathers, and he can be quite territorial. He may sing loudly, puff himself up, and chase away rival males. Tailorbirds are often seen alone or in pairs. In some descriptions, the male helps by bringing fibers and food, while the female does the careful sewing and construction.

A clutch is often around three eggs, though some nests may have more. They can be pale blue, sea-green, pinkish, or greenish-blue with reddish-brown speckles. The female incubates them for about 12 days. After hatching, the chicks grow quickly and may leave the nest in about two weeks. Both parents may help feed the young.

Of course, life is dangerous for such tiny birds. Their nests can be attacked by predators. Some cuckoos may even lay their own eggs in a tailorbird's nest, tricking the small tailorbirds into raising a cuckoo chick. Yet Hashem gave the tailorbird exactly the tools it needs: a needle-like beak, clever feet, strong instincts, a loud voice, quick movements, and the wisdom to hide its nest in living leaves.

And that is the great wonder. The tailorbird never went to sewing class. It never watched a tailor make a suit. It never studied engineering, knots, camouflage, or roofing. Yet it knows how to choose the right leaf, gather the right fiber, make tiny holes, fasten the edges, line the inside, and protect its babies.

A person can look at this little bird and say, "It is only a bird." But if we open our eyes, we see something much greater. We see the chochmah of Hashem placed inside one of His smallest creatures.

A bird weighing less than a pencil can sew a living green cradle for its babies.

Mah rabu ma'asecha Hashem.

Thank you Hashem for Your wondrous world!

THE \$30,000 KIDDUSH HASHEM

Rav Shragie Freedman once told the following story: Over the past few years, Jackson, New Jersey, has seen many frum families looking for affordable homes near Lakewood. Like in many nearby towns, the sudden growth brought tension between some longtime residents and the new Jewish families moving in. Chezky was one of those new arrivals. He had been searching for a home for his family in a quiet, pleasant neighborhood, and when a house went up for sale on a beautiful block, he grabbed the opportunity. Before long, the deal was closed, and his family excitedly prepared to move in. But Chezky knew that not everyone in Jackson was happy about the changes taking place. He did not want to begin with suspicion or distance. He wanted to make a kiddush Hashem from the very first day. So on moving day, while boxes were still being carried inside, Chezky took several small platters of chocolates and began knocking on his neighbors' doors. "Hi, I'm Chezky," he said warmly. "We just moved in, and I wanted to introduce myself. I know you have lived here for many years, and we have no intention of disturbing your quality of life. If there is ever anything we do that bothers you, please let us know." The neighbors were surprised. Some had expected friction. Instead, a new neighbor was standing there with chocolates, respect, and a genuine smile.

Chezky did not stop there. From time to time, he brought over another small treat. He exchanged greetings, asked how they were doing, and made friendly conversation. His wife did the same. Slowly, the walls came down. What could have been cold suspicion became warmth. Over time, Chezky and his wife developed real relationships of friendship and mutual respect with the families around them.

About a year later, Chezky heard that one of his neighbors, a man named John, was planning to sell his home. It was a large, attractive house in a prime location. Chezky immediately thought of his cousin Berel,* who wanted to move to the neighborhood. Chezky knocked on John's door. "I heard you may be selling your house," he said. "I have a cousin who would love to live here. It would be so nice for our families to be near each other. Would you keep him in mind?" John smiled. "Of course. When we're ready, I'll let you know." A month later, John called. "Because we like you so much," he said, "I want to give your cousin the first chance to see the house before it goes on the market." Berel came the next day. He loved the house and offered the full asking price. But almost right away, another offer came in, \$30,000 higher. Berel assumed it was over. Who gives up \$30,000? He was shocked when John's agent called and told him that John had accepted his offer.

Later, Chezky met John and could not hold back his question. "That was very kind of you," Chezky said. "But why did you do it? You gave up a huge amount of money." John shrugged peacefully. "I appreciate having you as a neighbor," he said. "I wanted you to be comfortable and have your family nearby. Life is not all about money." John was right. Life is not all about money. For a Jew, life is about something much greater. It is about living in a way that brings honor to Hashem. A platter of chocolates, a warm greeting, a little thoughtfulness, and a sincere desire to respect another person can change a whole neighborhood.



THE ANSWER

Regarding last week's question about the woman who wanted to convert, Rabbi Chaim Kanievsky answered (Chashukei Chemed Nedarim page 539) that they should encourage her to continue to convert because even a non-Jew has an obligation not to break her oath.

This week's TableTalk is dedicated in honor of the 500th issue of TableTalk from your loving and admiring family.

Totty, we wish you much hatzlacha in your harbatzos hatorah.



Brad E. Kauffman Esquire and Kauffman and Forman P.A.
specializing in corporate and construction law,
estates, wills and trusts and business litigation.

