



A MITZVA DILEMMA FOR THE SHABBOS TABLE



THE IRON DOME SCIENTIST

By Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

This story takes place in Eretz Yisrael and centers on a Frum scientist working for one of Israel's major defense contractors, Rafael Advanced Defense Systems.

When war broke out recently, the government decreed that defense manufacturing plants had to operate 24/7, seven days a week, in order to produce Iron Dome interceptors and other vital equipment to protect Klal Yisrael. The companies even obtained a halachic ruling (psak) from a prominent posek affirming that employees were required to work on Shabbos under the principle of pikuach nefesh (saving lives).

However, one frum employee, Dovid, was just two or three years away from retirement. He approached his managers and said, "I understand that you need us to work on Shabbos, and I recognize how critical it is. But I have never worked on



NO RETURN POLICY

Gleaned from Rav Aaron Lopiansky's talk to Yeshiva students

Moshe reminds his people how the Land is being given to them because HaShem is keeping His promise to their forefathers, Avraham, Yitzchok and Yaakov, and not because they are worthy on their own merit. To underscore his point Moshe reviews the sin of the Golden Calf.

"When I ascended the mountain to take the Tablets, the tablets of the Covenant which HaShem made with you. For 40 days and 40 nights I neither ate nor drank. HaShem gave me the stone tablets on which He wrote with His finger. And on them were all the words that He spoke with you on the mountain. At the end of those 40 days HaShem gave me the tablets. He then said to me 'immediately go down from here' your nation has corrupted and has quickly turned away from My path... And I came down and saw the calf and grabbed the tablets and broke them."

The question is if the people were no longer worthy of receiving the Tablets, why break them? If the groom sends jewelry to his bride and the messenger sees that the bride's behavior warrants that she no longer deserves to be his bride, does the messenger destroy the jewelry or does he return it to the groom? Moshe should have returned the Tablets to HaShem instead of breaking them.

The Midrash teaches us that as Moshe approached the people when coming down the mountain, he saw the letters of the Tablets lifting off the stone. The Tablets became heavy and he then smashed them in front of the people.



I don't know how someone who carries a phone in his pocket can honestly say the berachah of shelo asani eved.

-Rav Moshe Wolfson once quipped with a smile...



Shabbos in my life, and I am not going to start now. If working on Shabbos is mandatory, I simply cannot do it."

His managers were stunned. "What do you mean? We consulted a Posek and received an explicit psak!"

Dovid remained firm: "I'm sorry, but I cannot bring myself to violate Shabbos."

Seeing no other choice, the company responded, "If you refuse to work, we have to replace you." With that, Dovid was let go.

This brought about a major halachic and financial question regarding his severance pay (pitzuim) and pension. Having served the company faithfully for decades, was he entitled to his full retirement payout?

Dovid argued, "I worked here loyally for years. I was effectively forced out because I couldn't bring myself to work on Shabbos."

The company countered, "You weren't forced out; you were fired for insubordination during a national emergency, when your work was critical for Klal Yisrael."

The dilemma was presented to Rav Yitzchok Zilberstein: How does Halacha view this case? Did Dovid have a legitimate right to conscientiously object to working on Shabbos—meaning he resigned under constructive dismissal and should receive his full pension and pitzuim? Or was he entirely in the wrong for disregarding a valid psak regarding pikuach nefesh—meaning he was rightfully terminated for cause and should forfeit those benefits?

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All matter contains a certain amount of kedusha. Without kedusha nothing could exist. This is because everything HaShem created has an inherent sanctity by virtue of that fact that it is an expression of HaShem's Will. The proximity of something to the primary purpose of serving HaShem's Will will determine the level of kedusha within that article. We, therefore, expect to find more kedusha in a Sefer Torah than in a stone since the Torah is closer to serving HaShem's Will than the stone.

There is another principle found in Maharal and in other sources. Material existence and spiritual existence are inversely proportionate. If the value of any given object is expressed in material terms then its spiritual value will be that much less. To illustrate this, let us compare the value of a rare book and the value of a Sefer Torah. The former is measured by how much money it could be sold for. Its value is measured in material terms. The value of Sefer Torah, on the other hand, is measured by the sanctity of the content which lies within.

The value of the Tablets containing the words HaShem spoke to the people, written with the Finger of HaShem has infinite sanctity. The material stone of the tablets have no value relative to its spiritual value.

When Moshe saw the sanctity of the Tablets, which was represented by the words of HaShem that He spoke to the people, lift off the Tablets, he realized that the Tablets had lost all their worth. When the bride turns sour and the messenger returns the jewelry to the groom, he does so because the jewelry is complete. Whereas the Tablets, once the words left the tablets there was no value. There was nothing to return. The stones are smashed.

The modern world in which we live offers the technology to create quality mitzvah articles that previous generations could not imagine. From our tefillin, lulavim and esrogim to the access of beautifully typeset seforim and many other mitzvah items with which we have been blessed. The value of these articles lies exclusively in the spiritual realm which is determined by the enthusiasm and dedication we have when serving HaShem with them. Rav Aaron encouraged his audience to appreciate this value and keep our minds on the performance of the mitzvah to fill these articles with their true value.

Have a wonderful Shabbos.

Paysach Diskind



SHABBOS: CELEBRATING HASHEM'S CREATION

THE SHAPE OF THE EARTH

Long before modern telescopes, satellites, or space travel, the Sages of the Torah described the exact physical shape of our planet. In the Talmud Yerushalmi, compiled around 1,700 years ago, the Sages discuss how certain ancient rulers made statues of themselves holding a ball:

תלמוד ירושלמי (עבודה זרה ג:א): שהוא תופס ככדור... שהעולם עשוי ככדור

"He holds [the globe] like a ball... because the world is made like a ball."

In the Talmud Bavli (Avodah Zarah 41a), the Gemara repeats this exact idea, explaining that statues were made with a globe in their hand because the world is shaped like a ball. (See the Tosfos Yom Tom on the Mishna there.)

The Zohar describes how the Earth rotates on its axis and creates time zones:

זוהר (ויקרא דף י, א): "כל ישובא מתגלגלא בעיגולא ככדור, אלן לתתא ואלן לעילא... כד נהיר לאלן, חשיך לאלן, לאלן יממא ולאלין ליליא"

"The entire inhabited world revolves in a circle like a ball, some down below and some up above... when it is light for these, it is dark for those; for these it is day, and for those it is night."

The Zohar even explains that in certain parts of the world, the sun stays up almost the entire day, while in other places, night lasts for extreme lengths of time a perfect description of the Arctic and Antarctic polar regions.

If the Sages knew the Earth was round, what did the rest of the world think back then? You might have heard that "everyone thought the world was flat until Columbus sailed in 1492 or Magellan sailed around the world in 1519." But that isn't really the full picture. Centuries earlier, ancient Greek mathematicians and astronomers had calculated that the Earth was a sphere using observational science. Pythagoras (c. 500 BCE) was among the first to suggest the Earth was round. Aristotle (384–322 BCE) proved it empirically by showing that the Earth casts a round shadow on the Moon during a lunar eclipse, and that different stars become visible as you travel north or south. Eratosthenes (c. 240 BCE) used simple geometry and shadows in sunlight to calculate the Earth's circumference with impressive accuracy. Ptolemy (c. 150 CE) published maps and astronomical guides based entirely on a spherical globe.

However, when the early Christian world took power across the Roman Empire between 300 and 600 CE, many prominent religious leaders rejected Greek science entirely, branding it as "pagan, heathen nonsense." They claimed that secular math and geometry were dangerous distractions from faith, arguing that a round Earth contradicted literal readings of verses that described the sky as a stretched-out tent. Lactantius (c. 310 CE), a chief advisor to Roman Emperor Constantine, ridiculed Greek scientists as fools. He argued that Greek geometry was heathen nonsense and asked, "Is anyone so

crazy as to believe there are pagan ideas about people walking upside down, or rain and snow falling upward?" The Bishops of Antioch, including leading figures like Diodorus of Tarsus and St. John Chrysostom, attacked Greek astronomy, claiming the universe was flat and shaped like a vaulted barrel over the ground. Cosmas Indicopleustes (c. 550 CE), a monk, wrote an entire book attacking Greek spherical astronomy as deceptive pagan folklore, arguing that the Earth was a flat rectangle shaped like the Mishkan's Table (Shulchan). While a few secular scholars still understood the math, major religious and political leaders across Europe actively fought against it for centuries.

Even when scholars and scientists of the time eventually agreed the world was a globe (between 800 to 1200 CE,) 90% to 95% of the regular population had no idea. Why? Because almost nobody could read. Around the year 300 CE, fewer than 10 out of every 100 people in the Roman Empire knew how to read. Even by the year 1500 CE, European literacy was still hovering around 10%. Every single book had to be handwritten on expensive parchment by a scribe. Books were so expensive that only wealthy nobles, kings, and top scholars in monasteries had access to them. The average peasant worked in the fields, never saw a map, never read a geography book, and assumed the world was as flat as the dirt under their boots.

This is where Jewish history stands completely apart from the rest of the world. Around the year 64 CE, more than two hundred years before the Yerushalmi was even written down, the Kohen Gadol Yehoshua ben Gamla made a historic decree (Bava Basra 21a). He ordered that every Jewish town and city must set up a free public school system for young boys. In the non-Jewish world, reading was an elite skill for royal scribes. But in Hashem's nation, reading was a religious duty for every single person. Because of this, while 90% of the non-Jewish world was illiterate, male literacy in Jewish communities was widespread for reading Hebrew texts. When the Yerushalmi, the Midrash, or the Zohar discussed the Earth being a rotating sphere, these were not secret formulas locked in an imperial palace. They were studied, taught, and discussed openly by regular people in synagogues and batei midrash (study halls) across the world.

Ferdinand Magellan's famous ship voyage in 1519 proved that a boat could sail around South America and cross the Pacific, but it didn't teach the illiterate public anything. A farmer who couldn't read still had no idea how the solar system worked. What finally changed the world perception of the world being round, was not a ship—it was the rise of mass printing and public schools in the 1800s. When regular people finally learned how to read geography books in the 19th century, global knowledge caught up to what our Sages had been teaching all along. Centuries before mass literacy brought this fact to the rest of the world, and while non-Jewish leaders fought against Greek science as pagan nonsense, the Sages of the Talmud and Zohar clearly understood the wonders of Hashem's world, all thanks to the Torah and Chazal who made learning and reading priorities for everyone.

HERSHEL RAUCHT? HITLER RAUCHT!

My great-uncle was the Bobover Rebbe, Reb Shloime, zecher tzaddik livracha, . His last words were, "Ohev shalom v'rodef shalom, ohev es habrios umkarvan l'Torah." Those were his final words. After the war, Galicia was completely decimated, just a few she'eris happleita (survivors). We are talking about a situation where you could probably count the remaining Yidden on your hands: 10, 20 Yidden. Those Yidden had gone through six years of shiva madregos gehennom (seven degrees of purgatory). They despaired, they were miyash, and they had lost their entire families. He was the one who was strengthened them. Take a look at Bobov nowadays, tens of thousands of Yidden who are the direct descendants of those original survivors.

The Bobover Rebbe had one son who survived the war alongside him, Naftul'che, Reb Naftali. Naftul'che related that there was a Yid living in Bobov who had gone through the war and subsequently abandoned his Yiddishkeit. Once a year, he would return to Bobov to observe a yahrtzeit, both of his parents who had been killed on the same day. On his yahrtzeit, he would arrive, and the moment he walked into the Beis Medrash, the Bobover Rebbe would run to greet him and embrace him warmly. The Bobover Rebbe even permitted him to daven for the amud (lead the prayers).

Naftul'che later asked his father, "Tatte, der Yid is a mechallel Shabbos (does not observe Shabbos), a mechallel Shabbos b'farhesia. How can you allow him to daven for the amud?" The Rebbe replied, "Ah, nisht emes. nisht emes" (Ah, not true, not true).

Year after year, this interaction repeated itself until Naftul'che eventually insisted, "Tatte, a Yid in our Beis Medrash who is a mechallel Shabbos b'farhesia is a rasha! How can you let him daven before the congregation?"

"Ah, nisht emes."

One Shabbos, while Naftul'che was walking down the street in Crown Heights, he spotted this Yid sitting on a bench, smoking a cigarette. Now his father could no longer say "nisht emes", it had been witnessed firsthand!

He returned home and said, "Tatte, I walked down the street and saw so-and-so smoking a cigarette on Shabbos!" This Yid's name was Hershel. The Bobover Rebbe looked at Naftul'che and exclaimed, "Hershel raucht? Hershel raucht? Hitler raucht? Hershel is smoking?! Hitler is smoking!" Hershel came in and davened for the amud.

Naftul'che noted that today, Hershel's grandchildren are full Bobover Chassidim, wearing shtrimeles and kapotes, fully observant. That transformation happened because Reb Shloime only saw the neshama.

Told at a Shevatim Mekarvim conference by Rav Ephraim Twersky of Chicago,



THE ANSWER

Regarding last week's question about the money set aside for a Sefer Torah, Rabbi Yitzchak Zilberstein wrote that the money may indeed be used for the caravan shul, as long as part of the money is used to buy Sefarim as well as the parchments for a Sefer Torah. He gives three reasons for this psak, which is beyond the scope of this space, and it can be found in Chashukei Chemed, Nedarim 587 for more details.

This week's TableTalk is dedicated in memory of
Boris ben Klementiy

May the merit of the kavod Shabbos generated by this printing be a zechus for the aliya of his neshama

By Boris and Elana Malchevsky



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

