



A MITZVA DILEMMA FOR THE SHABBOS TABLE



THE SMUGGLED SIDDUR

By Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

There was once a young bride named Esther. She was going to be married soon, and it is customary that the day of the chuppah is a special day of tefillah, of prayer. It is similar to Yom Kippur, and we say Viduy during Mincha. Esther's plan was to daven Mincha with Viduy in a shul with a minyan. She would stand in the ezras nashim and daven together with the minyan.

As the time for her wedding got closer, her grandfather told her that he had a very precious siddur that he had obtained during the Holocaust. He was an inmate in one of the concentration camps, and traded three days of food rations in exchange for this siddur, which had been smuggled in somehow. From that day till the end of the war, in the concentration camps, he would use this siddur to daven Shacharis, Mincha, and Maariv. This siddur drew him so close to Hashem during that horrific time. This siddur represented enormous mesiras nefesh, and devotion to Hashem.



TWO CLOSE FRIENDS

This week's Parsha addresses the unfortunate story of two very close friends separating from one another. It teaches how careful we need to be toward the two parties in understanding their pain of separation.

These two parties come from quite different societies. The mode of conduct of the society of one friend is repulsive to the other. What one enjoys doing is despised by the other. Nevertheless, these two individuals were introduced specifically because of their divergent backgrounds. The achievements this couple accomplishes are astounding. After spending some time together, they begin to appreciate one another, and they become very close to each other. After being together for over 70 years, the two of them are separated, and they no longer have the company of each other. As you can well imagine, each of them mourns the loss of the other. They lived together and accomplished a lifetime of work. Although they originated from two divergent societies, they became like one unit. Now that they no longer have each other, their pain of separation is close to unbearable.

These two parties are the body and the soul. Each one comes from a society that is so foreign to the other that the only accurate comparison would be the difference between heaven and earth. The soul comes from the world of intellect: pure intellect, the intellect of the Maker of the world. It is made of refined sensitivities and feelings for others. The body, on the other hand, is made of the most base material in the world, earth. It is interested only in its own self-enjoyment and has no interest in caring for others.

HaShem, in His infinite Wisdom, merged these two individuals into one unit and gave them a mission through which the world was to become a resting place for



The grandfather said that if the kallah would like, she could come to his house and use the siddur to daven on the day of her chuppah. Sadly, he was unable to let her take it to shul because it was very precious, but she could come and use it in his home.

Esther was very interested. It seemed that this siddur would inspire a great deal of kavanah. She brought the question to Rav Zilberstein: What is better? Is it better for her to daven in the ezras nashim with a minyan using a regular siddur, or would it be better for her to daven in a home using this special Holocaust siddur that would potentially inspire greater kavanah? Which is more important: for a woman to daven with a minyan, or to use a special siddur that would inspire kavanah?

A similar offer was presented to the chassan. The grandfather said that if the chassan would like, he could organize a minyan in his house instead of davening in shul. The chassan could then use this special Holocaust siddur. The question was again: For a chassan, for a man, which would be better? To daven in a shul with a minyan using a regular siddur, or to daven in someone's home with a minyan, with the special Holocaust siddur that would inspire kavanah?

On one hand, you could argue that davening in a beis knesses is more important, but on the other hand, perhaps davening with something that will inspire greater kavanah is more important.

What do you think?

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HaShem's Shechina. After spending a lifetime with each other, the two of them have become very close to each other. Finally, the time comes for them to separate. The pain of their separation is truly unbearable. This week's Parsha teaches what we can do to alleviate this great pain. Actually, this Parsha only addresses the pain of the body.

The Torah teaches regarding a person who received capital punishment for a crime he committed that his body should be hung for a short period of time and must immediately be buried before the end of the day. This is the source from which we learn the mitzvah of burying the dead on the day of passing. Why should it be immediate? Would it not be more respectful to the deceased to wait for the weekend, when the relatives and friends can attend without disrupting their schedules? What is the rush? He lived 90 years. Can it not wait a few days?

In his sefer, Toras Mincha, Rabbi Yaakov ben Chananel, a

talmid of the Rashba, uses the parallel of our two friends who were separated to explain the reason for immediate burial. So let us return to our dilemma of how to alleviate the body's pain of separation.

The Torah understands the body's pain and therefore instructed that she be returned immediately to her original source, from where she came. Although the body's relationship with the soul was exhilarating, and she certainly misses her soulmate, nevertheless, when she returns to her natural environment, she will be able to rest peacefully.

It has become popular in the outside world to cremate the deceased. It is actually common for people to request that their body be cremated. This verse from our Parsha is the source forbidding cremation. The prohibition of cremation is not an imposition of the Torah on the deceased; it is an act of extreme compassion that the Torah has for the body of the deceased. The body cannot rest in peace until it returns to its natural environment: earth. Until that time, it is trying in futility to reconnect with her soul. The only true resting in peace can be when she is allowed to return to the earth from where she came.

Have a wonderful Shabbos.

Paysach Diskind



SHABBOS: CELEBRATING HASHEM'S CREATION

THE CRUEL OSTRICH

A few weeks ago, we learned about the cruelty of the raven. The Baal HaTurim in Eicha compares the raven to the ostrich, which is also described there as a cruel bird: "The daughter of my people has become cruel, like ostriches in the wilderness." (Eicha 4:3)

What is so cruel about the ostrich?

Rashi points us to Lyov 39, where the ostrich's unusual behavior is described:

The wing of the ostrich beats joyously; are its pinions and plumage like the stork's? It leaves its eggs on the ground, letting them warm in the dirt. Forgetting they may be crushed underfoot, or trampled by a wild beast. Its young are cruelly abandoned as if they were not its own; its labor is in vain for lack of concern.

The pesukim portray the ostrich as cruel because it leaves its eggs exposed on the ground rather than protecting them in a sheltered nest. It seems indifferent to the possibility that they may be crushed or eaten by predators. It is similarly described as treating its young "as if they were not its own."

Modern observations of ostrich behavior closely resemble this description.

Ostriches do not build elevated or concealed nests. Instead, the male scrapes a shallow depression into the earth or sand, creating a communal nest. Several females may lay their eggs in the same nest. A typical group includes a territorial male, a dominant female, often called the major hen, and several subordinate females. This communal nest can contain far more eggs than the adults can incubate. Once the females have laid their eggs, the major hen rearranges the clutch, moving her own eggs toward the protected center while pushing many of the other females' eggs toward the perimeter. Ostriches are apparently able to recognize their own eggs through differences in their surface characteristics.

The result is striking. The outer eggs are more exposed to predators such as jackals, hyenas, and vultures. A predator approaching the nest may consume these easier-to-reach eggs first, while the eggs in the center remain protected. In effect, the perimeter eggs form a sacrificial buffer around the central clutch. The ostrich purposely puts its young to the outer perimeter so that a predator will eat those instead of the ones in the center.

The nest itself can also appear strangely neglected. During the hottest parts of the day, particularly in arid environments, the adults may stand away from the eggs while the heat of the sun and sand helps maintain their temperature. To an observer, it can look exactly as Lyov describes: the ostrich has left its eggs in the dirt, apparently unconcerned that they are exposed to danger.

Lyov continues: "She treats her young harshly, as if they were not hers; her labor is in vain, without fear."

Here too, the ostrich's behavior can seem startling. Unlike birds that keep their chicks sheltered in a nest, ostrich chicks quickly live in the open. When danger threatens, the adults may flee at tremendous speed, leaving the chicks to crouch low and rely on camouflage.

Ostriches do not bury their heads in the sand. Doing so would cause them to suffocate. The popular myth comes from actual behaviors that appear misleading from a distance.

When an ostrich senses danger far away and cannot outrun it, or when

it wants to protect its nest, it may sit on the ground and lay its long neck and head flat against the dirt. From a distance, its round body looks like a rock or mound of earth, and its light-colored neck blends into the sand, making the head appear to disappear.

Because ostriches lay their eggs in shallow dirt scrapes, parents must regularly bend down, reaching their beaks into the hole several times an hour to rotate the eggs and check on the clutch.

Like many birds, ostriches lack teeth and cannot chew food. To break down tough plants, seeds, and roots, they swallow small stones and pebbles, called gastroliths, which remain in their gizzard to grind food. Watching an ostrich peck at the ground with its head down led observers to believe it was burying its entire head in the sand.

The myth of the ostrich burying its head dates back to ancient times.

The Roman writer Pliny the Elder recorded a similar misconception in his first-century CE encyclopedia *Naturalis Historia*, writing that ostriches imagine their entire body is hidden when they thrust their head and neck into a bush. The idea persisted for centuries and evolved into a metaphor for ignoring unpleasant realities.

Other amazing facts about ostriches include the fact that a single kick can kill a lion, with an estimated 2,000 psi of force. That kick comes with a built-in weapon: a 4-inch dagger-like claw on the inner toe.

Ostriches can sprint up to 43–45 mph, making them the fastest animals on two legs on Earth. An ostrich egg is the largest single biological cell in the entire animal kingdom, and its eye is physically larger than its own brain.

The Ostrich eggshell is strong enough for an adult human to stand on without cracking it. Males make a deep booming call that can be mistaken for a lion roaring in the distance. When defending their young or territory, ostriches will charge and fight off predators.

Ostriches carry more than 2 pounds of rocks in their stomachs to grind up food. Their intestines are about 45 feet long.

They are the only bird species on Earth with just two toes per foot. Their eyelashes can grow up to 4 inches long, and they have three eyelids per eye, including a clear protective membrane. Their vision is nearly 360 degrees.

Ostriches are the largest living birds, reaching up to 9 feet tall and weighing more than 300 pounds. They lay the largest eggs of any living bird, with eggs weighing more than 3 pounds, equal to about two dozen chicken eggs.

A single running stride can be 10–16 feet long, and ostriches can maintain a 30 mph pace for more than 30 minutes. It takes about 40 minutes to hard-boil one ostrich egg, and chicks can grow a full foot in height per month.

Although they are flightless, their wings still function as brakes, rudders, and balance aids while running. Their wingspan can reach 6.5 feet. Ostriches will eat lizards and even small turtles, not just plants. They can go days without drinking water.

Humans can ride ostriches, and ostrich racing is a real sport. Ostriches can live 30–45 years in the wild and up to 70 years in captivity.

Thank you Hashem for your wondrous world!

A BRACHA FOR HATZLACHAH

R' Yonason Schwartz is in the toy business; in 2013, he was traveling overseas for a major toy show. He hoped to sign a contract for what could have developed into a lucrative partnership with a particular company whose CEO would be attending that show. After many tries, he succeeded in getting an appointment with the CEO.

As he always did, before leaving Brooklyn he asked the Mashgiach of Torah Vada'as, Rav Moshe Wolfson (Pictured) for a bracha. The Mashgiach told him, "You should have shemiras einayim (guard your eyes from inappropriate sights)."

R' Yonason wanted a bracha that the trip should be successful financially. So he said to the Mashgiach, "I would like to have a bracha for hatzlachah," to which the Mashgiach replied, "Shemiras einayim is hatzlacha."

R' Yonason arrived at his destination and made his way to the appointment. As soon as he was buzzed in to the CEO's office he realized that to remain there for even a short while would be compromising his shemiras einayim. He immediately turned around and left, closing the door behind him.

Moments later, the CEO called to ask why he had left. R' Yonason responded that surely the man must know that religious Jews are not comfortable being in such an environment. The man apologized and said that he would send him a contract right away.

As a result of this contract, R' Yonason turned a handsome profit a few years later. He then understood the Mashgiach's cryptic words: "Shemiras einayim is hatzlacha."

From Rav Moshe Wolfson By Rabbi Shimon Finkelman



THE ANSWER

Regarding last week's question about the shidduch for a boy who was "sitting and learning," Rav Yitzchok Zilberstein (Chashukei Chemed, Nedarim, page 680) initially wanted to answer that the shadchan should not be paid anything because he actually offered the opposite of what she wanted. However, Rav Zilberstein asked this question to his brother-in-law, Rav Chaim Kanievsky, and Rav Chaim said that the shadchan should be paid because anyone can do teshuvah at any moment, even in a single moment, and become someone who is sitting and learning.

This week's TableTalk is dedicated in memory of
Leah Yuchtman and Alexander Katz
By their children Leonid and Leah Turovskiy



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