



A MITZVA DILEMMA FOR THE SHABBOS TABLE



CAN WE ABANDON THE TORAH?

By Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

There was a shul in southern Eretz Yisrael that was, unfortunately, under frequent rocket attack.

One Shabbos, the shul was filled with mispallelim in the middle of Krias HaTorah. The Sefer Torah lay open on the bimah as the Baal Koreh read from it.

Suddenly, the air-raid siren began to wail.

Everyone immediately scrambled to get to the shelter. There was no time to waste. But the Baal Koreh looked down at the open Sefer Torah and faced a difficult question.

What should they do with the Torah? Should they simply leave the Sefer Torah open on the bimah and run for safety? It felt unthinkable to leave the Torah lying open and unattended while rockets were falling.



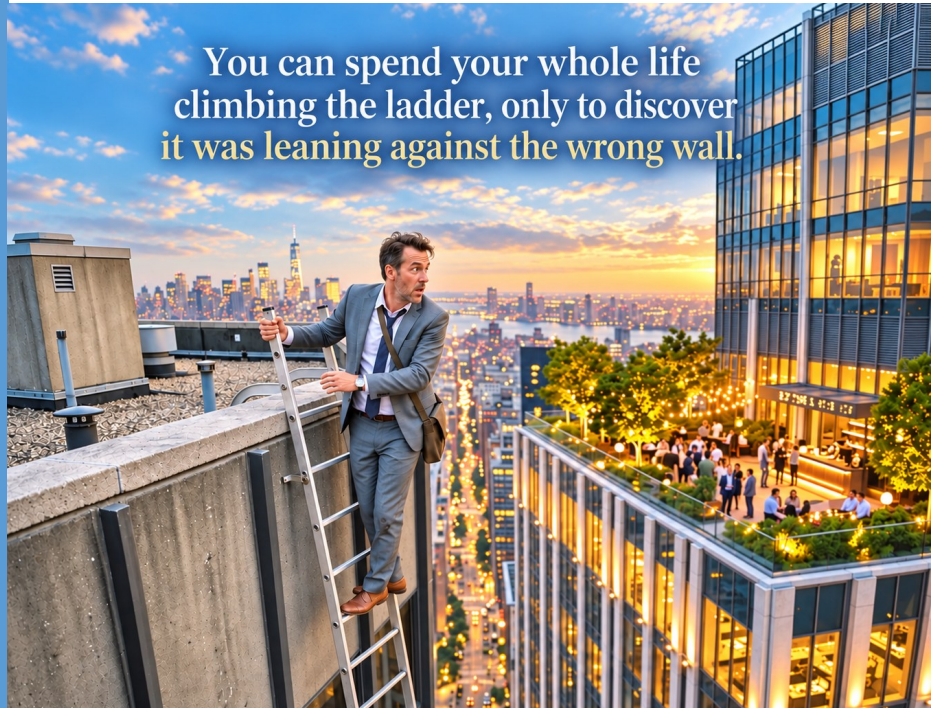
A SUKKAH WAITING TO RISE

The three holidays of Pesach, Shavuus and Succos correspond to the three pivotal moments of our history. Pesach celebrates our exodus from Egypt. Shavuus celebrates HaShem's choice of our people and His giving us His Torah. Succos celebrates the final destiny of our people which has yet to come, the arrival of Moshiach and the heights to which Klal Yisroel will rise. Succos is preceded by Yom Kippur on which HaShem purifies the hearts of His people, just as the Torah states that prior to our final arrival at our destiny HaShem will purify the hearts of His people. It is noteworthy that when the prophet Amos references the Messianic period he writes in the Name of HaShem "On that day I will erect the fallen sukkah of David..." We see the association of Succos to the arrival of Moshiach.

Maharal points out that when the Torah discusses royal dynasties, it uses the metaphor of a 'house' not a 'hut'. We find this when HaShem blessed Yocheved and Miriam in Egypt. The Torah writes "and HaShem made for them (for Yocheved and Miriam) houses". The Sages explain that HaShem gave Yocheved the 'house' of the priesthood and to Miriam He gave the 'house' of monarchy. Why, then, does Amos lower David's dynasty to a hut?

The Gemara in Sanhedrin has the following discussion. One Sage asked 'When will Bar Nafli arrive?' The other Sage responds 'Who is Bar Nafli?' He answered 'Bar Nafli' is a reference to Moshiach because the verse in Amos refers to the arrival of Moshiach as the day when HaShem will erect the fallen sukkah of David. (Nafli derives from 'nofal' which means fallen.) Therefore, the Sages referred to the descendant of David who will be Moshiach as the son of the fallen one."

You can spend your whole life climbing the ladder, only to discover it was leaning against the wrong wall.



While it is true that David's dynasty had fallen to shambles for the duration of the long exile, but why should Amos refer to it as the fallen hut in the very context of its revival! Why not 'the fallen palace of David, or at least the fallen house of David.

Maharal explains that although a house is a more permanent fixture than a succah, there is one quality which a succah has that the house does not. A house that has been completely demolished and all that remains is the pile of bricks, stones and mortar, this house will never be rebuilt. Even if all the stones and bricks are reassembled and rebuilt to the identical shape as the original house, we cannot say that the house has been rebuilt. If the house was badly damaged and one wall fell out it might be considered as rebuilt. However, when there is nothing left; absolutely nothing, there is nothing to be

rebuilt. The new house is a new house that was made from the old house's material, but it is not the original house.

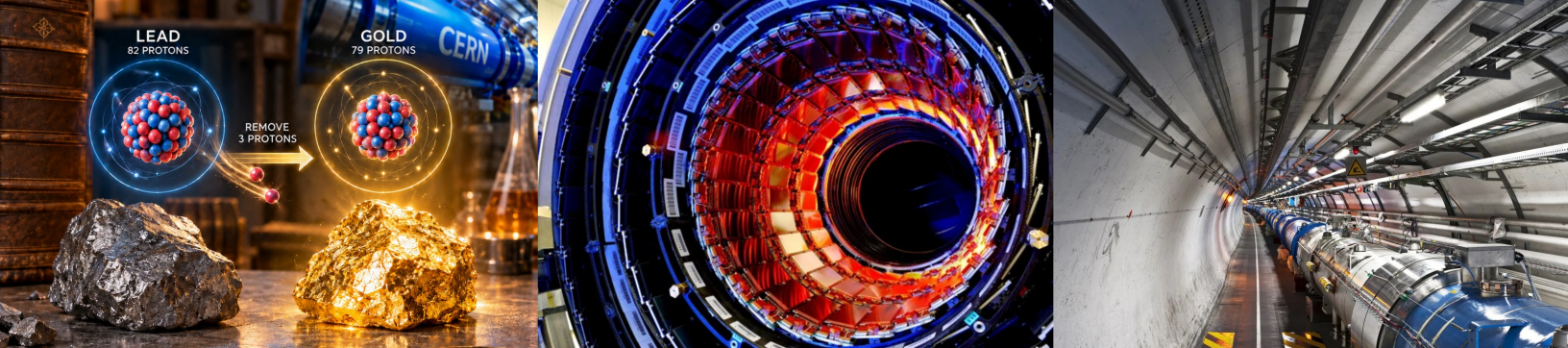
A succah, on the other hand, that has been blown down and the walls and the s'chach are strewn across the field, we do not say that the succah has been demolished; we will say that it has fallen. Once it is set back up we view that succah as the very same original succah.

When Amos refers to David's dynasty as the fallen succah he is revealing to his people that David Melech Yisroel chai v'kayam. Every month the moon appears to be gone with no hope. But a few days later it begins again - the very same moon. So it is with Malchus Bais David. The succah is down but it still awaits its revival.

May we all experience the resurrection of that great Succah soon in our days.

Have a wonderful Shabbos and a beautiful Yom Tov.

Paysach Diskind



SHABBOS: CELEBRATING HASHEM'S CREATION REAL ALCHEMISTS

For centuries, alchemists dreamed of doing something that sounds almost magical: taking an ordinary metal and turning it into gold. Famously, the Chovos HaLevavos, in Shaar HaBitachon, refers to the alchemist as someone with an extraordinary ability to produce wealth. Yet even such a person, Rabbeinu Bachya explains, faces serious problems. His experiments may involve dangerous substances and fumes. He worries about protecting his secret. He may even fear rulers or other people who want his knowledge or his wealth. The Chovos HaLevavos contrasts all of this with the tranquility of a person who puts his trust in Hashem. The Pele Yoetz uses the alchemist in another beautiful way. A person can take ordinary, permitted activities and, by doing them leshem Shamayim, elevate them into avodas Hashem. In a sense, he too becomes an alchemist, turning the “base metal” of ordinary life into spiritual gold.

We do not know whether any ancient or medieval alchemist ever truly succeeded in doing what he claimed. But modern science has now demonstrated something remarkable: the basic idea is absolutely possible. One element can actually be changed into another, and scientists have really turned other metals into gold. To understand how, we first have to understand what makes gold gold. Every atom contains a tiny nucleus made of protons and neutrons, surrounded by electrons. The number of protons determines which element the atom is. Hydrogen has one proton. Carbon has six. Iron has 26. Gold has 79 protons. Lead has 82. That means that if you could somehow take a lead nucleus and remove exactly three protons, it would no longer be lead. It would be gold. Of course, reaching into an atomic nucleus and knocking out three protons is slightly more difficult than removing three Lego pieces. The nucleus is incredibly tiny and held together by enormous forces. Changing it requires nuclear reactions involving very high energies, radiation, neutrons, or other subatomic particles. And that brings us to CERN. In 2025, scientists with the ALICE experiment at CERN reported measurements of a remarkable process taking place inside the Large Hadron Collider. CERN accelerates lead nuclei to about 99.999993 percent of the speed of light. At that speed, the nuclei race around the enormous accelerator almost as fast as anything in the universe can travel. Sometimes two lead nuclei smash directly into each other. But something especially fascinating can happen when they miss. As two lead nuclei pass extremely close to one another, their powerful electromagnetic fields interact. Because the nuclei are traveling so incredibly fast, these fields can act like intense pulses of photons. A photon can strike one of the passing nuclei and shake it so violently that particles are knocked out. Remove one proton from lead, and it becomes thallium. Remove two, and it becomes mercury. Remove three, and suddenly the nucleus contains 79 protons. Gold. The nuclei never even have to physically touch. Scientists call these events ultra-peripheral collisions, and CERN has measured enormous numbers of them.

At peak conditions, the Large Hadron Collider can create about 89,000 gold nuclei every second at the ALICE interaction point. During Run 2 of the LHC, from 2015 through 2018, scientists estimate that approximately 86 billion gold nuclei were produced in the four major experiments. Eighty-six billion pieces of gold sounds impressive. Unfortunately, atoms are very, very small. All 86 billion gold nuclei together weighed only about 29 picograms, or 29 trillionths of a gram. Later runs produced even more, but the total remains trillions of times too small to make even a tiny

piece of jewelry. And there is an even bigger problem for anyone hoping to get rich. The newly created gold is traveling at tremendous speed. Once the lead nucleus loses three protons, its electrical charge changes. The magnets guiding the original lead beam therefore no longer bend the new gold nucleus along precisely the correct path. Within a tiny fraction of a second, the gold crashes into the beam pipe or another part of the accelerator and breaks apart. CERN really makes gold. It just cannot put it into a jewelry box.

And CERN was not the first. As early as 1941, scientists bombarded mercury with fast neutrons and produced gold isotopes. Some of this artificial gold was radioactive and eventually changed into other elements again. Then, in 1980, Nobel Prize-winning scientist Glenn Seaborg and his colleagues used a particle accelerator to bombard bismuth nuclei and created thousands of gold atoms. Bismuth has 83 protons, four more than gold. But making ordinary gold-197 requires more than removing four protons. Bismuth-209 also contains eight extra neutrons. The experiment therefore had to knock away precisely the right combination of nuclear particles. It worked. The problem was the price. Producing a meaningful quantity of gold with a particle accelerator would require staggering amounts of equipment, energy, and accelerator time. Estimates have put the cost of producing even an ounce by such methods at astronomical levels, potentially more than a quadrillion dollars. The research collected for this article includes several other possible nuclear routes to gold, using mercury, platinum, reactors, and even proposed future fusion technology. So modern science has given the ancient dream of alchemy a surprising ending. Yes, metal really can become gold. But making gold is only half the problem. You also have to survive the process, keep the gold, and somehow spend less money making it than the gold is worth.

And that makes the description of the Chovos HaLevavos particularly striking. Alchemy historically involved furnaces, mercury, arsenic, antimony, lead compounds, and other dangerous substances. Some experimenters were poisoned, and there are documented cases of people becoming seriously ill or dying after alchemical experiments. The political danger was real as well. In England, King Henry IV's Act Against Multipliers of 1404 prohibited attempts to manufacture gold and silver. The government feared, among other things, counterfeit precious metal and damage to the currency. Later English kings actually issued special licenses allowing selected alchemists to try, showing how seriously rulers considered the possibility. Other supposed gold-makers found themselves detained by rulers who desperately wanted their secrets. Some were imprisoned, and some who promised kings gold and failed to deliver were even executed. We cannot know exactly what techniques or discoveries the alchemists of centuries ago possessed. But modern physics has revealed something extraordinary: the central dream itself was not nonsense. Matter really can be transformed. Lead really can become gold. And remarkably, the dangers surrounding such a power, dangerous materials, enormous expense, secrecy, and the attention of rulers, sound strikingly similar to the problems described by the Chovos HaLevavos centuries ago. The deeper we look into the tiny nucleus of an atom, the more astonishing Hashem's world becomes.

Thank you Hashem for Your wondrous world!

A CHAT GPT KIDDUSH HASHEM

Baruch Cohen, a Los Angeles trial attorney, was conducting discovery when he received a daunting 40-page Excel spreadsheet with numerous tabs. A forensic accountant estimated that analyzing it would cost approximately \$25,000. Instead, Baruch uploaded the spreadsheet to ChatGPT and Claude, using carefully developed prompts. Within seventeen seconds, he received a detailed analysis with the answers he needed.

The legal issue was resolved—but another question remained: How should he bill the client?

Baruch consulted several lawyers. They explained that “value billing” would be legitimate. Since the client had received the benefit of approximately \$25,000 worth of professional analysis, they argued, charging based on that value would be reasonable.

But Baruch was uneasy.

“That’s not the way a Ben Torah operates,” he felt.

Instead, he calculated the actual time spent. He billed for ten minutes developing prompts, a half-hour reviewing and verifying the results, and the seventeen seconds of AI processing. He also clearly stated on the invoice that he had used AI and saved the client an estimated \$25,000 in forensic-accounting expenses. Several days later, the client called. He said that in all his years working with lawyers, he had never seen such billing. Many attorneys, he noted, might have found a way to charge substantially more because of the value they had provided.

For Baruch, the invoice represented more than a financial decision. Every day he walks into court wearing a yarmulke, he knows he becomes an ambassador for something larger than himself. Clients, judges, opposing counsel, and experts may never open a sefer or attend a shiur, but they see how he behaves. They read his invoices.

Every honest invoice can remind the world that Torah is not confined to shul. It accompanies us into our offices, trust accounts, billing systems, and the choices we make when no one is watching.

This idea connects to the Yud Gimmel Middos, the Thirteen Attributes of Divine Mercy, which we recite repeatedly during Selichos and Yom Kippur. Rav Chaim Friedlander explains that their power lies not only in saying the words, but in committing ourselves to live by them.

The Sefer HaChinuch teaches that one who attaches himself to Hashem’s mid-dah of emes, truth, connects to Hashem, the source of goodness and berachah. The same applies to all of Hashem’s middos: chessed, compassion, patience, and truthfulness.

By emulating Hashem’s middos, we strengthen our connection to Him and draw berachah and simchah into our lives. When we distance ourselves from those middos, we invite the opposite—worry, conflict, and pain.

From Rabbi Shraga Freedman



THE ANSWER

Regarding last week’s question about the thief who became a hero, Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein (Chashukei Chemed Nedarim page 821) answered that we find a similar idea with Og. Even though Og had bad intentions and hoped that Avraham would be killed, nevertheless, because his actions ultimately helped bring about Lot’s rescue, he was rewarded. Although his intention was improper, in practice his actions brought benefit to others. Similarly, even though the thief’s original intentions were bad, since his actions ultimately benefited and

This week’s TableTalk is dedicated in honor of our wonderful grandchildren:

Ze’ev Shmuel, Aryeh Yehoshua and Ayala Sara

By Saba and Savti



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