

A MITZVA DILEMMA FOR THE SHABBOS TABLE



THE MIRACLE

By Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

This week's Torah portion discusses the sin of the Golden Calf. The Torah writes that the people got up to have fun (letzachek) (Shemos 32,6). Our Sages teach that letzachek alludes to the three cardinal sins; murder, immorality and idolatry. Our Sages teach us that some Jews murdered Chur, the nephew of Moshe and Aron, after he tried stopping the people.

The notion of murder takes us to the following true story.

Eitan lived in Israel. He had a rough childhood and as he grew older he became a proficient car thief. He knew how to break into cars and hotwire them.

One day Eitan saw a beautiful BMW parked on the side of the road. In short order, he was able to get past the security system and hotwired the car.

Off he drove. Ten minutes later he felt an urge to buy a drink and use the restroom. He parked near a convenience store to buy the drink, and got out



DON'T STAND ALONE

Dovid Hamelech (King David) held a census using a headcount to get the tally of the number of people in our nation. Shortly afterwards a plague befell the people in which many died. Our Sages teach us that Dovid Hamelech failed to learn the lesson from this week's Parsha, Ki Sisa, in which the Torah teaches us not to use a headcount to count the people, lest they suffer the consequences. Rather, we must take a coin from each individual and then count the coins, thereby reaching the tally. After these coins were collected they were used for the national cause of building a foundation for the Mishkan.

What is the sin of taking a headcount? And if there is sin, it was Dovid Hamelech's sin, why were the people punished?

The difference between these two methods of census taking is that when doing a headcount each person is identified as a single unit standing alone, independent of the community until the final number has been reached. As opposed to the alternate method, it is the coin that is identified as a single unit and only after the tally is reached do we identify the individual people as members of the larger community. So that in the latter no person ever stands alone. Our Sages teach us that standing alone brings a person's right-to-exist into question. The reason why so many people died in Dovid Hamelech's census was not a punishment to the people, but rather it was a natural consequence because they were standing alone outside of the larger community and were exposed to bringing their right-to-exist into question.

But the question remains; why should standing alone challenge a person's right to exist?

The Zohar teaches us that very few people can claim that they deserve to exist. Most people exist because HaShem grants them life undeservedly. The 'Modeh ani' prayer

of the car.

As he approached the convenience store, to his utter shock, the car he walked out of exploded in a large fireball.

Eitan ran away from the scene as fast as he could.

After hearing news reports it turned out that the owner of the fancy BMW was being targeted by Russian and Georgian organized crime groups. The mafia was intent on killing the owner of the car.

Because Eitan stole the car, he inadvertently saved the owner's life.

After the full import of the story sunk in, and Eitan realized that he was driving a car with a bomb in it, and that his life was saved in the nick of time, he began to think much more deeply about his life and his lifestyle.

He reached out to some religious family members and slowly he did teshuva and began to lead a Torah observant lifestyle.

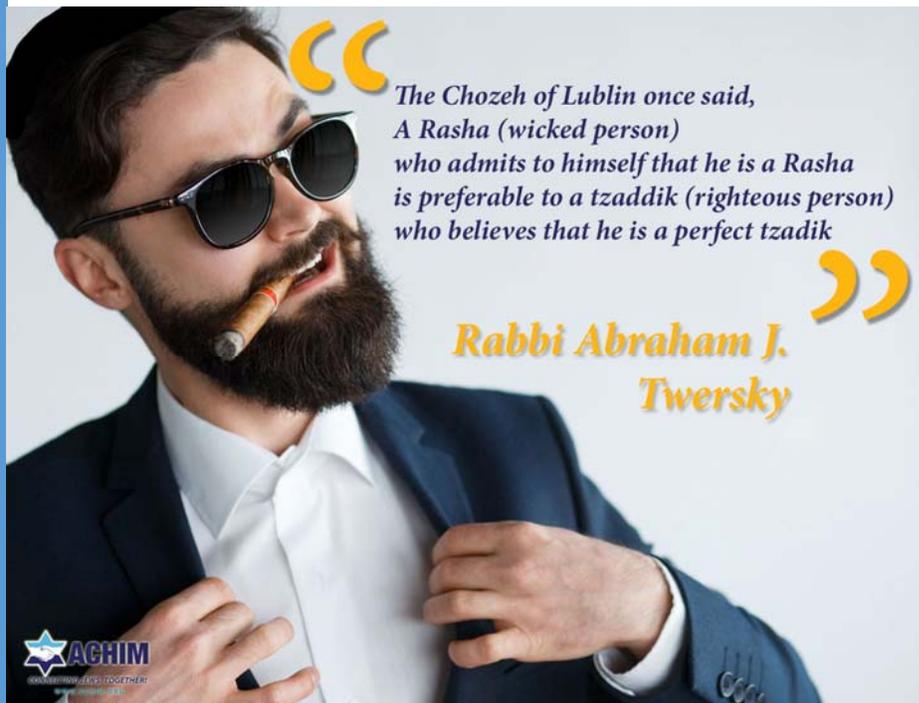
Eventually Eitan told his life story to a Rav that he was close to. When he reached this particular incident, he asked the Rav how he could do teshuva to make up for the car that he stole.

Did he have an obligation to pay back the owner for the car that he stole from him? On one hand he stole the car. But on the other hand, the car was going to be blown up shortly after. Perhaps the car had no value because it was about to be destroyed.

Did Eitan have an obligation to reach out to the owner of the car to offer to pay for the whole car?

What do you think?

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which we recite upon waking up each morning reflects our recognition that “You returned my soul to me undeservedly”.

We must ask, according to this Zohar is there no way for me to consider myself worthy of life? Furthermore, if most people are not deserving of life, for what purpose does HaShem grant them life?

There is one cause which HaShem holds very dear - the Jewish people. The Jewish people are actually the very purpose of creation, (The mission of our people has been discussed in earlier issues.) and every member of the Jewish people is an integral part of our people and therefore every person does have a significant purpose. Although as an individual person who stands alone may not deserve life, nevertheless, when he stands as a member of the Jewish nation and an integral part of that nation he does deserve life. And that is the reason why HaShem warns Moshe in this week’s Parsha not to take a headcount, lest the members of our people be reckoned as standing alone outside of the context of the people. Perhaps this is

the reason that the coins collected for the purpose of counting were used for the national cause. Every member was represented by his coin that supported the national cause.

As we find ourselves sandwiched between Purim and Pesach we also find ourselves surrounded by mitzvos that require us to contribute for the national cause of caring for our fellow Jews. On Purim we are instructed to bring joy to those who are needy. Before the Pesach holiday, as well, we are instructed to provide our fellow Jews with their needs for the holiday. The very first laws regarding the preparation of the Pesach holiday relate to everyone’s obligation to contribute to the Maos Chittim campaign which insures that all members of the community have their needs for Yom Tov. Both Purim which celebrates the continuity of our people and Pesach which celebrates the birth our people require every member of our people to contribute to the national cause thereby bringing purpose to each and every member of our people.

Have a wonderful Shabbos.

Paysach Diskind



SHABBOS: CELEBRATING HASHEM'S CREATION

THE PANGOLIN

months.

We recently learned about the platypus, a mammal that has attributes of a lizard, bird and fish. Let's learn about another fascinating mammal that has aspects of a reptile. This mammal has also been discussed in the news lately because of recent dramatic world events.

The Pangolin, also known as a scaly anteater, is a mammal although it looks like a reptile. They range in size from one foot long to more than 3 feet long. They are covered with brown scales and have long, strong tails that can be used as weapons. Some pangolins spend their time up in trees and others sleep in burrows underground. Today, Taiwan has the highest population density of pangolins in the world.

The name pangolin comes from the Malay word pengguling, meaning "one who rolls up". This is because pangolins can curl up into a ball when threatened, with its overlapping scales acting as armor, while it protects its face by tucking it under its tail.. Rolling up creates a hard, spiky, impenetrable ball that can defeat even the jaws of lions, tigers and leopards. However, ironically, it is this same defense mechanism that makes human capturing of the pangolins as easy as picking up a ball.

Pangolins have large, protective scales covering their skin; pangolins are the only mammal in the world to be covered from head to toe in scales. The scales are made of keratin, the same material from which human fingernails and reptile claws are made. The scales are sharp, providing extra defense from predators. These scales account for up to 20% of a pangolin's entire weight. The plate-like scales are soft on newborn pangolins, but harden as the animal matures. The pangolin's scaled body is comparable in appearance to a pine cone.

Pangolins also have another means of defense. They can emit a noxious-smelling chemical from glands in the back, similar to the spray of a skunk.

They have short legs with sharp claws which they use for burrowing into ant and termite mounds and for climbing. Pangolins are also good swimmers. Cute pangolin pups hitch a ride on their mother's tails for three

Pangolins are an important regulator of termite populations in their natural habitats. Pangolins eat enormous amounts of insects - 70 million annually. A pangolin can consume 140 to 200 g (4.9 to 7.1 oz) of insects per day. In order to eat the insects, HaShem made the tongues of pangolins extremely long. Their long sticky tongues grow from deep inside their chest cavity and can extend to 16 inches with a diameter of 0.2 inches. In some cases, their tongue can be longer than their entire body! Their saliva is sticky, causing ants and termites to stick to their long tongues when they are hunting through insect tunnels. They don't have teeth and so pangolins lack the ability to chew. However, while foraging, they ingest small stones (gastroliths) which accumulate in their stomachs to help to grind up ants. This part of their stomach is called the gizzard. Interestingly, the inside of their stomach, like their back, is also covered in keratinous spines. These spines further aid in the grinding up and digestion of the pangolin's prey.

Pangolins are threatened by poaching (for their meat and scales, which are used in Chinese traditional medicine) and heavy deforestation of their natural habitats. They are the most trafficked mammals in the world. They also suffer from illegal trafficking due to beliefs in East Asia that their ground-up scales can stimulate lactation or cure cancer or asthma.

The fact that they are so heavily poached in China has led to a dangerous consequence. In February 2020, university researchers in China employing genomic sequencing found a 99% match between coronavirus found in pangolins and SARS-CoV-2, the virus responsible for the 2019–20 coronavirus outbreak. Many experts believe that the coronavirus may have transferred from animals to humans by means of the heavily hunted and threatened pangolin.

HE MADE UP FOR IT

With Matanos l'evyonim behind us and Maos Chittim ahead of us please appreciate these two beautiful short anecdotes about tzedakah.

Rav Aharon Kotler, the Rosh Yeshiva of Lakewood Yeshiva once visited Eretz Yisroel. He was walking on the street when suddenly he went out of his way to find a specific poor man and gave him what seemed to be twice the amount of his normal gift. When asked, the Rosh Yeshiva explained that a few years earlier, on a previous trip, he had seen that poor man and wanted to give him a donation, but was out of money. Before leaving him, Rav Aharon took a long look at him so that if he would see him again, he would make up for it.

Rebbetzin Batsheva Kanievsky was told the following story about her mother, Rebbetzin Elyashiv, and her grandmother, Rebbetzin Levin, the wife of Reb Aryeh Levin.

When Batsheva Kanievsky's mother, Shaina Chaya Elyashiv, was a young girl, her mother, Tziporah Chana Levin, headed out to the makolet one cold wintry day and left 1-year-old Shaina Chaya in the care of her older brothers. Right in front of her house, an unfamiliar man — obviously poor — approached Rebbetzin Tziporah Chana Levin and asked for a drink. She asked if he could wait a few minutes while she picked up a few items from the makolet — but if he was very thirsty, she would bring him a drink immediately.

The poor man replied, "Please, I really need it now." Rebbetzin Levin hurried back upstairs to get him a drink. While she was there, she checked on her children. The boys, who were supposed to be watching Shaina Chaya, were caught up in a game and were totally neglecting their babysitting duties. Meanwhile, the 1-year-old had fallen facedown into a bathtub full of water! Rebbetzin Levin quickly plucked Shaina Chaya out of the water and calmed the choking child. She then went to thank the poor man and bring him his drink— but he had disappeared! There was only one conclusion for Rebbetzin Tziporah Chana to draw: her chessed helped save her baby's life.

When R' Aryeh Levin's brother-in-law, R' Tzvi Pesach Frank, heard about the miraculous way Shaina Chaya had been saved from drowning, he said that since such a miracle occurred, he believed the girl, the future Rebbetzin Elyashiv, was destined for greatness.

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THE ANSWERS

Regarding the question about the fundraiser who wanted the commission for the lifetime of the donation, Rav Zilberstein answered that it seems that they would have to continue giving it to him even after he left.

Regarding the question about the man who gave a Boston cream pie to someone who is diabetic, Rav Zilberstein answered that it is a safek if is good. This is because some say that the purpose of mishloach manos is to have food for the seuda and this person cannot eat it.

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