

A MITZVA DILEMMA FOR THE SHABBOS TABLE



THE MOBSTER LOAN SHARK

By Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

This week's Torah portion teaches us about the importance of pursuing peace. Our Sages teach us that we should be like Aaron Hakohen, who loved peace and ran after peace and brought people closer to Torah. This leads us to the following story.

Eli, who lived in Israel, was struggling financially. He was in dire need of money to cover his rent payments for the past few months and didn't have anything to do.

In desperation he went to an unofficial lender who was known as a loan shark. Eli asked to borrow \$2000 and promised to pay it back within a month. The loan shark said, "Do you have anything that is valuable, like a car, to be used as collateral?"

Eli said that he didn't have a car but he had a small scooter-motorcycle.

The man agreed that it could be a collateral, but he explained to Eli that as long as he got paid back on



IT'S ALL GOOD!

The trials we went through along our journey from Egypt to the Land of Israel were indications of the shortcomings of our people. We fell short of the expectations Ha-Shem set for us. This was to be expected; after all, we were just born from the womb of Egypt. Perfection is only achieved over time and struggle. It would therefore seem to suggest that as we continued along our path of history we would become stronger on the weak points that we had in our infancy.

In this week's Parsha, Korach, we find Korach, driven by envy, instigated a rebellion against Moshe's authority. The envy was based on Moshe's appointing Elitzafon, Korach's younger cousin, to be the prince for the tribe of Levi. Korach who was older, wealthier and certainly had greater leadership skills felt that he should have been chosen to be prince of Levi. This incident is recorded in the Torah after the incident of the spies. The question is why Korach waited to stage his rebellion until after the spies. The appointment of Elitzafon occurred much earlier.

The answer is given that, in fact, Korach's envy was already fired up much before the spies. However, he knew that Moshe's popularity ratings were very high. Considering that the people would be entering the Land imminently and there was Manna and water and cloud protection, they were happy with Moshe's leadership. Korach understood that he would not garner any public support in that environment. However, with the sending of the spies and the people's rejection of the Land and their subsequent punishment to die in the desert, Korach saw the opportunity to ferment the public against Moshe. It is sad to say that his calculation was very clever and suc-

time everything would be fine. However if he did not have the money on time he would take the motorcycle and burn it. If he still did not pay him back he would start with more serious things.

Eli knew that he should get away from these under-handed people but he felt like he had no other choice. With confidence that he would have money to pay back, he borrowed the money.

Lo and behold the deadline arrived and sadly Eli did not have the money. He knew that the loan sharks would come after his motorcycle. Eli had an idea. Instead of parking it outside where it was normally kept, he hid it inside his apartment building in a small closet underneath the steps.

The closet was certainly not the place for motorcycles and he figured that the thugs would not be able to find it.

Sadly though in the middle of the night he woke up with the sound of alarms and a strong smell of smoke. He ran out of his apartment and there was a fire burning in the stairwell. The fire department was there putting it out. It turned out that indeed when the gangsters did not find his motorcycle parked outside, they found it inside and they burned it while it was inside the closet. The fire caused an enormous damage, with repair costs close to \$100,000.

When the neighbors heard what caused the fire they demanded that Eli pay for the huge cost of the damage. They felt that he had no business getting involved with gangsters and even after he did, he had no business putting his motorcycle in the closet. Eli agreed that he should not have gotten involved, but still, he didn't cause the fire; it was the thugs.

What do you think?

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cessful.

Regarding Korach himself, he fell short in his envy for power and office. The people, on the other hand, had no part in the envy. Their shortfall was that they lost their confidence in Moshe as a result of the punishment HaShem meted out for them.

Yesterday I attended the yartzeit siyum made in memory of my dear brother in law, Nossie Munk z'l. We remembered how all through his life he always said "It's all good!" Even throughout the years of his sickness that finally led to his passing, it was always on his lips. He truly accepted everything HaShem sent him with open arms. Nossie definitely learnt this lesson from my father in law z'l, who passed away two weeks ago. After Nossi's passing I asked my father in law how he was able to remain so strong so soon after his son's death. He told me "If crying and

despair would bring Nossie back, I would not stop crying. But given that it does not bring him back I must accept what HaShem delivers."

With much pride in the greatness of our people, I can say that I have seen other such heroes who accept what HaShem metes out to them with equanimity. Watching and learning from Nossie, my father in law and those other heroes I believe that we are overcoming the gripe we may have had when receiving difficult packages from HaShem.

As we travel through our current Covid challenges and learn to accept HaShem's justice, perhaps HaShem will look down in pride and decide the time has come to bring us home.

Have a wonderful Shabbos.

Paysach Diskind



SHABBOS: CELEBRATING HASHEM'S CREATION THE BAOBAB TREE, THE TREE OF LIFE

In past weeks we learned about the largest flowers. Let's now learn about one of the largest, and most unusual trees.

The Baobab tree is a strange looking tree that grows in low-lying areas in Africa, Australia, Madagascar, India, Ceylon and Zimbabwe. Baobabs thrive in hot, sandy plains.

They can grow to enormous sizes, with heights ranging from 16 to 98 ft and trunk diameters of 23 to 36 ft. Carbon dating indicates that they may live to be 3,000-5,000 years old. One ancient hollow Baobab tree in Zimbabwe is so large that up to 40 people can shelter inside its trunk. Mature trees are usually hollow, providing living space for many animals and humans. Trees are even used as bars, storage barns, wine and beer shops.

The tree is very different from any other. The trunk is smooth and shiny colored in pinkish grey and sometimes copper. For most of the year, the tree is leafless, and the bare branches make it look very much like it has its roots sticking up in the air. It is often called the Upside Down Tree because of this strange appearance. It is also called the Tree of Life, for a few reasons.

One reason is that it is very hard to kill a Baobab Tree. When burnt, they will regrow. Also, when they do die, they simply rot from the inside and suddenly collapse, leaving a heap of fibers, which makes many people think that they don't die at all, but simply disappear. Another reason it is called the Tree of Life is because its trunk can hold up to 120,000 liters of water. This helps because of the harsh drought conditions of its environment. The tree may be tapped in dry periods.

Baobabs are one of the largest and most important trees in the areas where they grow, because they provide shelter and wood. Fresh baobab

leaves are edible, and are similar to spinach. They are used to treat kidney and bladder disease, asthma, insect bites, and several other maladies. They are also used for making soup and condiments. While most trees die if the bark is stripped off of the lower part of the tree, baobabs just grow new bark. The bark and huge stem are fire resistant and are used for making cloth and rope. The cork-like bark can be pounded and the fiber from the bark is then used to make rope, baskets, cloth, musical instrument strings, and waterproof hats. The fruit and seeds of several species are very nutritious, and taste great too. The fruit, called "monkey bread", is edible, and full of vitamin C. It is about the size of a coconut and can weigh over three pounds with a velvety shell. The flavor is somewhere between grapefruit, pear, and vanilla. The fruit can be sucked or soaked in water to make a refreshing drink. It can also be roasted and ground up to make a coffee-like drink.

Its large whitish flowers open at night. Pollen from the African and Australian baobabs is mixed with water to make glue.

An old Baobab tree can create its own ecosystem. It supports the life of many creatures, from large mammals to the thousands of tiny creatures scurrying in and out of its crevices. Birds nest in its branches; baboons eat the fruit; bush babies and fruit bats drink the nectar and pollinate the flowers, and elephants have been known to chop down and consume an entire tree. A baby Baobab tree looks very different from its adult form and this is why the Bushmen believe that it doesn't grow like other trees, but suddenly crashes to the ground with a thump, fully grown, and then one day simply disappears. It is no wonder that they are thought of as magic trees.

PLEASE USE THIS TO HELP THESE JEWISH IMMIGRANTS

Mrs. Surtie Barkin said about her brother Rav Yisrael Belsky: "From my grandfather, Reb Binyamin Wilhelm, as well as from my parents, my brother learned to live with a sense of achrayus for others."

To illustrate this; Before and after the fall of the Soviet Union, many Russian Jews came penniless to the United States. Rav Belsky walked into an Agudath Israel meeting where the topic of discussion was helping the recent immigrants. Rav Belsky announced that he was donating \$3,000 for this cause.

Some of the attendees at the meeting who knew Rav Belsky were incredulous. They knew that he had recently sold his car to use the proceeds to help these Jews. That itself was incredibly generous. Where did he get this additional \$3000?

Rav Belsky told them that that morning, he and his wife decided that they had to do more for their Jewish brethren. His wife removed her diamond ring from her finger. "Please use this to help these Jewish immigrants", she said.

Rav Belsky took it to a jewelry store, where he received \$3,000. That was the money he was donating.

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THE ANSWER

Regarding last week's question about whether the young man should stay home with his smoker father, or go to hear Parshas Zachor, Rav Zilberstein answered that he should stay home with his father to ensure that he does not smoke.

This week's issue of TableTalk is dedicated in loving memory and lilui nishmas
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