

## A MITZVA DILEMMA FOR THE SHABBOS TABLE



### BUT THE DRIVER WILL RETURN HOME

By Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

This week's Torah portion talks about the mitzvah of keeping Shabbos, among many other mitzvos.

This leads us to the following true story.

Binyamin lived in Bnei Brak and had a last minute simcha to attend in Yerushalayim on Shabbos.

Erev Shabbos, he ordered a taxi to take him from Bnei Brak to Yerushalayim. There was only about an hour left before Shabbos and Binyamin knew that he would make it just in the nick of time. After the driv-



### HANGING ON THE 'VAV'

The first letter of our Parsha, Mishpatim, is the letter 'vav' which translates as 'and'. Rashi teaches us that this 'vav' indicates that everything that follows is connected to the previous Parsha. This teaches us that just as in last week's Parsha the Ten Commandments were said at Mount Sinai so too, this Parsha, which deals with the laws governing civil issues of money, was also given at Sinai.

This is very strange! We know that all the mitzvos were given at Sinai, why should these laws be any different?

In this very first verse, we are instructed to bring all our cases requiring judgement to the Jewish Beis Din, court. This includes any matter that comes up between two contestants, they must rest their case in front of a Jewish court and let the court adjudicate it.

The Rambam writes regarding a person who takes his case to a non-Jewish court, "Anyone who brings his case to the non-Jewish courts, even if they judge using Jewish law, such an individual is wicked. It is equivalent to blaspheming and raising his hand in arrogance against the Torah of Moshe." What is unique about this mitzvah that the transgressor has committed such an egregious crime? Why is this transgression any greater blaspheming than other transgressions? Furthermore, if this court uses the Torah's laws what could be wrong?

Every civilized society with any level of sophistication will have a set of laws and a system to adjudicate those laws by which the society operates and by which

er arrived, and they started to drive, Binyamin realized that the driver was a secular Jew based in Bnei Brak. After he dropped Binyamin off in Yerushalayim he would likely continue driving on Shabbos to get back to his “home base”.

Binyamin wanted to know if it was permitted for him to stay in the taxi to continue his trip to Yerushalayim if there was a good chance that the driver would drive on Shabbos afterwards.

On one hand, you can argue that right now it's totally permitted to drive, there should be no problem. In addition, the driver would likely be driving on Shabbos anyway for his next passenger, so maybe it would be permitted.

On the other hand, however, Binyamin was causing the driver to drive on Shabbos because he would be driving him away from the city that he was based in.

What do you think?

See Chashukei Chemed Megilla Page 28



businesses operate. Without such a system there will be no framework to borrow and lend, to buy and sell. It will be a society where there are no responsibilities. For this reason all successfully functioning societies have laws by which everyone knows what to expect and a legal system which everyone can trust. Only then will people extend credit and allow business to flourish.

To accomplish this purpose the laws need not be absolutely just and morally correct to perfection. It is only necessary that everyone knows the laws and can rely upon them. So long as there are no surprises, the society will function perfectly. Since the purpose of these laws are as we stated, there is no interest that they should reflect the absolute morally correct position.

This differs in sharp contrast with our Torah's purpose. The To-

rah's purpose of having a set of laws and a legal system is to adjudicate what is truly morally correct. We just read in last week's Parsha in the Ten Commandments how careful we must be in respecting the property of our neighbor. We are not even allowed to desire what belongs to him. The property of my neighbor should not even enter my mind as something that I would like.

Therefore, when an issue arises between two folks, it is not sufficient for them to go to have the judge settle the issue in an acceptable manner. They must find out to whom the disputed funds belong. Every monetary issue is a moral issue that requires HaShem to decide. In fact, the verse in Devarim (1:17) states "for the Judgement is for HaShem..."

It is no wonder why taking one's case to a non-Jewish court would be a blasphemy against the Torah of Moshe. He is making a statement that he is not interested in the moral concern, all he is interested in is to settle the matter peacefully. It is tantamount to erasing that extra 'vav' at the beginning of our Parsha. It is detaching HaShem's rule of morality from his daily life.

Have a wonderful Shabbos.

**Paysach Diskind**



## SHABBOS: CELEBRATING HASHEM'S CREATION

### THE PUZZLING PLATYPUS

Let's learn about another fascinating Australian mammal, the platypus. The platypus is among the most mysterious creatures in the world. The platypus is the sole living representative of its family and genus. What makes it so unique is that it seems like a hybrid of four different classes of animals: a duck, (a bird), a beaver (a mammal), a lizard (a reptile) and a fish.

The unusual appearance of this egg-laying, duck-billed, beaver-tailed, otter-footed mammal baffled European naturalists when they first encountered it in 1798, and the first scientists to examine a preserved platypus body judged it a fake. It was thought that somebody had sewn a duck's beak onto the body of a beaver-like animal. The British scientist Robert Knox believed it might have been produced by "some Asian taxidermist."

Its weight varies from 1.5 to 5.3 lb with males being larger than females; males average 20 inches in total length, while females average 17 inches. The platypus is usually nocturnal, coming out at night or twilight to feed, sometimes it is also active on overcast days. In captivity, platypuses have survived to 17 years of age. Their natural predators include snakes, water rats, goannas, hawks, owls, and eagles.

Let's explore the four types of animals it is similar to. On the surface it appears to look like a beaver or otter, a mammal. As a mammal it has fur. Its fur is waterproof, and the texture is similar to that of a mole. Like a mammal, newly hatched young are fed by the mother's milk.

Like a mammal, a platypus is born with teeth, but these drop out at a very early age, leaving the horny plates it uses to grind food. The platypus picks up gravel from the riverbed. It packs the whole lot into pouches in his cheek to carry it up to the surface where he munches away, using the bits of gravel as makeshift teeth to break up some of the tougher food.

Like similar mammals, platypuses have been heard to emit a low growl when disturbed and a range of other vocalizations that have been reported in captive specimens.

Like otters, they dig burrows with their claws. These burrows are tunnels that have rooms or chambers. Platypuses also live under rock ledges, roots or debris.

When a female platypus is ready to have her young, she will burrow down inside the ground on the riverbank and seal herself into one of her tunnel rooms. Then, she will lay one or two eggs and place them between her rump and her tail to keep them warm. After about 10 days, the eggs hatch and the little, bean-sized babies will nurse for three to four months. Around the time of

weaning, baby platypuses can swim on their own.

You are probably asking, eggs? Can a beaver lay eggs? Nope. But like a bird, the platypus lays eggs. Not only does it lay eggs like a bird, it has webbed feet that resemble a duck and it has a beak that makes it look like a duck. Like a duck, it is an excellent swimmer, however, it cannot fly.

The truth is that the eggs of a platypus look more similar to the eggs of a reptile. They are small, leathery eggs about half an inch in diameter and slightly rounder than bird eggs.

It also has a reptilian, crocodile-like gait, with its legs on the sides of its body, rather than underneath. Platypus' skeletons resemble those of reptiles. They both have pectoral girdles and splayed legs.

And like a reptile, it is venomous! The male platypus has a sharp spur on the hind foot that delivers a venom capable of causing severe pain to humans. The pain is so excruciating that the victim may be incapacitated. It is powerful enough to kill smaller animals such as dogs.

Finally it also has some similarities to a fish or marine mammal like a dolphin. The platypus is an excellent swimmer and spends much of its time in the water foraging for food. The platypus is a carnivore. It feeds on annelid worms, insect larvae, freshwater shrimp, and freshwater yabby (crayfish) that it digs out of the riverbed with its snout or catches while swimming. It uses cheek-pouches to carry prey to the surface, where it is eaten.

A platypus's bill is comprised of thousands of cells that give it a sort of sixth sense in dark murky waters, allowing it to detect the electric fields generated by all living things. It's so sensitive that the platypus can hunt with its eyes, ears, and nose all closed, relying entirely on the bill's electrolocation. While foraging, it uses a side-to-side motion of its head while hunting, seen also in the Hammerhead Shark.

It propels itself when swimming by an alternate rowing motion of the front feet; the hind feet are used for steering in combination with the tail. When it swims it looks like a fish swimming. The front feet have extra skin that acts like a paddle when the animals are swimming. When platypuses are on land, their webbing retracts to expose sharp claws.

Though platypuses are made for the water, they can't stay completely submerged. They can only stay underwater for 30 to 140 seconds. But nonetheless platypuses are much better suited for scooting around in water than they are on land. On land, the platypus's short limbs mean it has to exert 30 percent more energy than a similarly sized land-based mammal just to move around.

## “DO YOU KNOW WHY THERE'S FISH TONIGHT? BECAUSE I TAUGHT HER.”

Following, are two beautiful anecdotes about Shabbos food.

As in most kehillas of the time, there was a central communal oven in Kerestir, Hungary, where local women would place their cholent pots erev Shabbos. On Shabbos day, before the meal, each household dispatched someone to pick up the hot dish.

Reb Shaya Kerestir's Rebbetzin knew which pot belonged to which family. Somehow she managed to find a few moments before Shabbos after the pots were all placed in the oven to go over to the communal kitchen. There, without anyone knowing, the Rebbetzin would add potatoes and meat to the cholent of those families who could afford only beans. This way she helped ensure that cholent, the Shabbos staple, would be nourishing and delicious for each and every family in town.

Let's jump to contemporary times, to the Shabbos table to the fabled Machlis family.

At the Machlis table, the first course on Shabbos was always gefilte fish with an array of salads. At one Friday night seudah, a Sephardic Jew who, as Rabbi Machlis describes, "had never experienced the Ashkenazic cuisine of gefilte fish," got up and demanded in Hebrew, "Who made this? Henny replied simply, "I made this fish." "This is not fish!", the man exclaimed derisively. "This is not the way to make fish. With sugar? With matzah meal? You don't know how to make fish." By that time, Henny had been cooking for a couple of decades and had served thousands of guests. Nevertheless, she replied humbly, "That's true. I don't know how to make fish. Would you like to teach me?" "Yes," the disgruntled guest agreed. "I'll teach you." "When are you going to teach me?" "Thursday morning." The man showed up the following Thursday morning. As he taught her how to make "Moroccan fish", Henny was the perfect student, humbly asking at every step, "What do I do now?" That Shabbos night, the Machlises served both gefilte fish and Moroccan fish. During the first course, the man got up and announced to the guests, "Do you know why there's fish tonight? Because I taught her."

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### THE ANSWER

Regarding the question over whether a bechor has a right to demand the opportunity to donate his kidney, Rav Elyashiv zt'l answered that a bechor does not have the right to take a mitzvah away from his sibling. Rather the brothers should do a goral, a lottery to decide who should get the mitzvah.

This week's issue of TableTalk is dedicated in honor of  
Nachman & Sara Schachter and Moshe & Davida Tropper

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