

## A MITZVA DILEMMA FOR THE SHABBOS TABLE



### THE REMODELED KITCHEN

By Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

This week's Parsha tells us the story of how the Malachim (angels) visited Avraham and Sara. The Torah says that the Malachim asked Avraham where Sarah was. Rashi quotes our Sages that they asked this to make Sarah more beloved in Avraham's eyes, by pointing out how righteous Sara was.

The topic of the love between a husband and wife brings us to the following true story.

Akiva and Miriam were about to reach their 30th anniversary. In order to celebrate the wonderful occasion, Akiva wanted to surprise his wife with a gift that he knew she always wanted; a newly remodeled kitchen with new cabinets.

Akiva went to the kitchen design store to choose new cabinets and a new paint job. The owner, Eli, was happy to show Akiva around the showroom. Akiva said that he wanted cabinets that were very strong. The cabinets they currently had, had shelves that began to warp and bend. This time he wanted to make sure that the shelves would be extremely strong.

Eli told Akiva that he had the perfect cabinets for them. Eli then walked over to a cabinet set and stood on top of one of the shelves. Eli even jumped a little. Eli said, "look, as you can see I'm a bit overweight, and even after I stand and jump on these shelves, they don't bend at all".

Akiva looked closely and saw that Eli was right. Clearly, the cabinets were unusually strong.

Akiva was convinced and he ordered those cabinets to remodel his kitchen.



### UNCALIBRATED COMPASSES

In this week's Parsha HaShem brings total devastation to Sedom and its surrounding metropolis. The entire region becomes home to the Dead Sea. What was once a lush land is now totally dead. Even its water source turned into the Dead Sea. The prophet Yechezkel tells us that the sin for which Sedom was destroyed was that "Sedom was satisfied and comfortable and they did not support the hand of the needy." While this attitude of not helping the needy is certainly not a nice attitude, how are we to understand it as the cause of such devastation?

Furthermore, there were many other nations who had done worse deeds in addition to not being nice to the needy and they did not share this destiny?

In addressing this question the Akeida (Akeida is short for Akeidas Yitzchok which is a commentary written by a great sage who lived in Spain at the time of the Inquisition) explains that there are two mindsets when it comes to sinning against HaShem and His Torah. The first is that of the person who would really prefer avoiding the sin but he is overcome by temptation or extenuating circumstances that compel him to do it. This could include social pressure, financial pressure and so on. Similar to the fellow who is committed to keeping to a diet but falls whenever he passes ice cream. Even when he performs the sin he knows that he should not be doing it. The second mindset is that of the person who sees nothing wrong with performing that sin. His intellect is perverted and he has no qualms at all about doing it. He does not even feel the need to justify it because in his mind there is nothing wrong at all.

In the case of the former, there is a good chance that one day he may wake up with the courage to correct his ways. His moral compass works properly and he knows which direction he needs to go. All he is missing is the guts and the strength to do it.

The kitchen remodeling was completed on the day of their anniversary. When Miriam saw the new kitchen she was ecstatic. It was exactly as she always dreamed. She loved the colors and loved the designs. She also really loved the new cabinets.

Akiva was quite proud of himself for making his wife so happy.

"Miriam, let me show you a cool trick", he said. These cabinets are so strong that they can support my full weight.

Then before Miriam could say anything, Akiva stood on one of the shelves. "Look how strong these are. They can hold me up as I stand on them!"

Akiva then proceeded to jump on them like he saw Eli do in the store.

BOOM!

As Akiva jumped, the shelves buckled and a few of the cabinets broke. The whole cabinet structure tipped over, tore out of the wall, and hung towards the floor. Akiva tumbled to the floor. Thankfully, nothing was hurt, except his pride.

Akiva picked himself off the floor and surveyed the damage. The damage to the new kitchen was extreme. It would likely cost at least a thousand dollars to repair. Akiva was furious.

Akiva went back to the kitchen design store. He walked in and approached Eli, the proprietor.

"You told me that the cabinets were strong enough to hold your weight and that you could even jump on it. But I tried it and they were completely destroyed. They broke even though I weigh less than you. I want you to please replace or repair them."

"Wait a second", Eli replied. "I showed you that it was strong enough to hold my weight and that I could jump. But I didn't tell you to try that at home. It's true that these are unusually strong shelves, but it's not normal for an adult to jump on cabinets. I was able to do it because I knew exactly where it was strongest and how to do it in a way that would not break it. I'm sorry, but if you jump on your shelves that is not covered under warranty and I'm not going to be able to replace them for free.

According to the Torah, who do you think is correct? Does Eli the kitchen remodeler have to pay for the new shelves? On one hand, he made it clear that these shelves were strong enough to hold his weight.

But on the other hand, Akiva was never expected to stand and jump on them, that is not its normal use. What do you think?

See Upiryo Matok Shemos page 400



*“Most of your happiness will come from your relationships. Handle them with care.”*

In other words, he is really a good guy but he is struggling. While every sin has its negative consequence, nevertheless, the consequence to such a sin will only serve as a prodding to help redirect him. The resultant punishment will serve to correct the problem.

In the case of the latter, no prodding will be able to redirect him because in his mind he has done no wrong. Any punitive consequence will not have the positive effect in correcting his wrong.

When the society at large adopts a perverted way of life there are also two mindsets. The first is driven by desires and circumstances and the second is driven by perverted intellect. When HaShem wants to correct the behavior of the former He only needs to shake them up like the story of the city of Ninve and they will correct their ways. However regarding the latter nothing can be done to correct this behavior because they will never concede that anything wrong was done.

The Akeida explains that the moral depravity practiced in Sedom was not State sanctioned. It was not State policy. On the other hand, the laws prohibiting supporting guests and needy folks were strictly enforced laws. In the minds of Sedom society, one must not allow others to benefit from his property even if it does not cost him anything. To allow a neighbor to cut through your driveway to shorten his walk home was a crime. While this does not sound so terrible in its own right, it is reprehensible for it to be accepted as a correct way of life. This is a direct product of a perverted intellect. There is no way to correct this society and hence they were wiped out.

By extension, the Akeida says that this applies to all State sanctioned intellectual perversion especially when it sanctions moral perversion.

May HaShem bring the day when world society will embrace the Torah's ways and Man's moral compass will finally be properly calibrated.

Have a very wonderful Shabbos.

**Paysach Diskind**



## SHABBOS: CELEBRATING HASHEM'S CREATION

### CHARDAL, MUSTARD

This week's Parsha discusses the meal that Avraham served the angels. Our Sages teach us (Rashi Bereishis 18, 7) that he served three cow tongues in mustard. The Maharal explains that Avraham served this dish because (as we will learn) that was a delicacy fit for kings. The Sefer Imrei Shefer writes that Avraham served mustard because eating mustard helped to cool down hot travelers.

We often associate mustard with ketchup, hot dogs, and barbecues, and it seems very modern. But the truth is that mustard is one of the oldest condiments known to humanity. In addition, mustard, more than mayonnaise or ketchup, is one of the most popular and widely used spices and condiments in the world.

Ketchup was invented in 1812. Mayonnaise was invented in 1756. But mustard was used in the time of Avraham and the ancient Egyptians, since at least 2000 BCE. According to Encyclopedia Britannica, mustard was grown by the Indus Civilization of 2500–1700 BCE. According to the Saskatchewan Mustard Development Commission, "Some of the earliest known documentation of mustard's use dates back to Sumerian and Sanskrit texts from 3000 BCE". Egyptian pharaohs stocked their tombs with mustard seeds to accompany them into the afterlife. Pythagoras, (renowned for the Pythagorean theorem  $a^2 + b^2 = c^2$  that solves the length of a hypotenuse), was also known for endorsing a poultice of mustard seeds as a cure for scorpion stings. The ancient Greeks used its paste to cure toothache, boost appetite, and improve blood circulation.

The spice was popular in Europe before the time of the Asian spice trade. It was popular long before pepper. When the Romans conquered the Gauls, they brought mustard seeds with them, and these seeds took root in the fertile soil of France's Burgundy region. By the thirteenth century, Dijon, France had emerged as a hub of mustard production, which laid the foundation for the invention of the region's signature "Dijon mustard". Dijon became a recognized center for mustard making by the 13th century. Mustard was very popular in France. At a gala held by the Duke of Burgundy in 1336, records stated that guests ate 84 gallons of mustard creme in a single sitting!

Mustard was the food of kings. King Louis XI, of the 15th century, known by historians as one of the first modern kings of France who helped take it out of the Middle Ages, didn't travel without mustard. He considered the condiment so essential to his culinary experiences that he kept a pot with him at all times, so as not to be disappointed if he were to be served a meal in a household that wasn't fully stocked.

Mustard comes from mustard seed which comes from the mustard plant. The mustard plant is part of the Brassicaceae family of plants. This means that mustard plants are in fact close relatives to broccoli, cauliflower,

turnips, and cabbage!

Mustard plants have flowers and reach their full height of up to 6.5 feet. When their flowers fade numerous green seed pods appear on their branches. The pods of brown mustard contain up to 20 seeds each, white mustard contain up to 8 seeds and black mustard contain 4 seeds.

The Ramban, Nachmanides, on the first pasuk in Bereishis writes that when Hashem created the universe, it was a tiny seed of potential energy that was the size of a mustard seed. That tiny seed had all the matter of the entire universe. It then expanded from the time of its creation. It is interesting that Nobel Prize-winning Cosmologist James Peebles (Scientific American 1994) described that the universe began with a compact ball of energy the size of a dime. Others describe it as the size of a grain of sand.

How big is a mustard seed exactly? Mustard seeds are small round seeds about 1 to 2 millimeters (0.039 to 0.079 in) in diameter.

How do we get the mustard sauce? Grinding and mixing the seeds with water, vinegar, or other liquids creates the yellow condiment known as prepared mustard. The seeds can also be pressed to make mustard oil, and the edible leaves can be eaten as mustard greens.

Its name comes from the Latin words Must and Ard, which means hot must or hot grape juice. This is because mustard was originally prepared by making the ground seeds into a paste mixed with must or young wine.

In addition to being food, mustard plants also have interesting industrial uses. There are varieties of mustards with high oil content for use in the production of biodiesel, a renewable liquid fuel similar to diesel fuel. Imagine powering your car with mustard instead of gas! The leftover powder after pressing out the oil has also been found to be an effective pesticide.

Scientists have also discovered that mustard plants can clean up contaminated soil faster than any industrial method, for only a fraction of the cost. The mustard plant has the ability to leach toxic heavy metals like lead and cadmium out of the soil. It then stores the metals inside its own cells. They've also discovered that as a side benefit, the plants also help bind the soil together, preventing erosion and further helping preserve the environment.

Our northern neighbor Canada is the world's largest producer of pure mustard seed, accounting for an average 28% of the world crop.

# THE COLD COFFEE

One of the students at Beth Medrash Govoha in Lakewood had the special privilege of serving the Rosh Yeshiva, Rav Aharon Kotler, his daily cup of coffee during the days he spent in Lakewood. One day, after placing the coffee on his rebbe's desk, the student passed the office and noticed that the cup was untouched. He slipped in, removed the cold cup of coffee and replaced it with a piping hot replacement, assuming that the Rosh Yeshiva, had simply forgotten his coffee because he was so engrossed in his studies.

Several minutes later, he passed by the office, noticing that again the new coffee remained untouched. At this point, the student realized that it was not merely a matter of concentration; there must have been a distinct reason why Rav Aharon wasn't drinking the hot coffee.

"I'll share my thoughts with you," Rav Aaron explained. "A certain family with whom I'm friendly is taking an interest in a former student of the yeshivah regarding a marriage prospect. It is very likely that they will call me to inquire about him. I am very conflicted. There are certain things about him that I think may be problematic. Praising him with attributes he does not possess is a Torah prohibition on two counts, midvar sheker tirschak — 'distance yourself from words of falsehood' — as well as lo saamod al dam reiacho— 'do not be oblivious to the spilling of another person's blood,' for if unknown negative traits ultimately lead to discord or divorce, it is directly attributable to the fact that honest information was withheld. However, on the other hand, I don't feel comfortable divulging my true feelings, since there is always the possibility that, once married, the couple will be happy with one another. My remarks might very well cause the needless disintegration of a shidduch. It is an awesome responsibility that I'm facing. For this reason I have designated this day as a day of fasting and prayer to Hashem that He grant me kindness and spare me from this call."

This anecdote was later related to the late Rosh Yeshiva of Manchester, Harav Yehuda Zev Segal, while he was visiting the United States. He was so inspired by Rav Aaron's meticulousness in guarding each word he uttered, that he remarked, "Had I come to America just to hear this beautiful story, it would have sufficed."

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## THE ANSWER

Regarding last week's question about the sneaker, Rav Chaim Kanievsky answered as follows. Normally the teacher has a responsibility of "lehafrisho missur" to pull the child away from doing the wrong thing. But in this case, since there is no concern that this will teach the child to steal, the teacher does not have to be "mafrish" him from this conduct.

The printing of this week's TableTalk is dedicated in memory of Reb Pinchas Marder z'l

פנחס בן יצחק

May the merit of this TableTalk bring an Aliyah to his neshama

By his children Reuven and Rachel Yablonovsky

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