

A MITZVA DILEMMA FOR THE SHABBOS TABLE

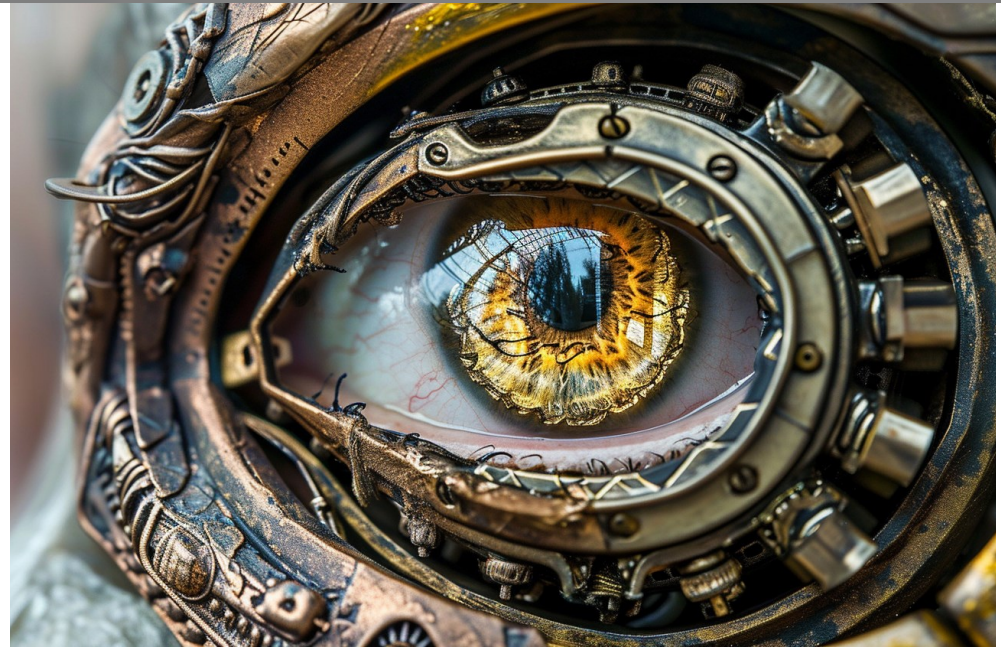


I'M ASHAMED TO GO TO WORK

By Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

Akiva, who had long payos, once went into a barbershop that he had never visited before and waited for his haircut. The barber seemed like a religious man, and he trusted that he would know how to give a haircut to a customer who wore long payos. Akiva sat down on the barber's chair and asked for a regular haircut. The barber gave him a beautiful haircut, cutting the back and the front nice and neat, and then said he was going to even up the payos. All of a sudden, his hand slipped, and to the barber's great chagrin, he cut off one of Akiva's long payos entirely.

Akiva noticed this, looked in the mirror, and freaked out. "What did you do? You cut off my payos!"



A NEW WAY OF LOOKING AT THE WORLD

The opening verse in our Parsha tells us why HaShem subjected the Egyptians to so many wondrous plagues. "In order that you shall tell your children how I played with Mitzrayim... and you shall know that I am HaShem." Throughout the Torah we find many mitzvos that reflect back to our exodus from Egypt.

To appreciate why our exodus plays such a critical role in our peoplehood we must understand how different our worldview is from the worldview of the rest of the world population. If we shared the same worldview with the rest of the world we could never have survived the thousands of years of our exile. Our unique worldview was built up on the experiences we had in that Exodus.

The worldview that people adopt is built on their experiences and their environment. In order to change the nation's worldview HaShem needed to blast an entirely new set of experiences that reflected the new view.

Let us take a person who was born blind and through some miracle is suddenly able to see. His past experience taught him the differences between three dimensional objects and flat objects. However, for our blind friend the idea of being able to perceive a three dimensional object on a flat surface is beyond absurd. In fact, even once he is able to see, if he were shown a geometric picture that depicts a three dimensional box, he would not be able to discern what this picture is. Only folks who know what a box looks like are able to see a three dimensional box on a flat surface. That is because we have seen it before. The vertical lines merging with the diagonal lines will have no meaning to our friend. Similarly, when he sees a very small flying object high up in the sky, he would never guess that it is an extremely large airplane. Another example; we understand that a road is wider by our feet and

MITZVA MEME

The barber felt terrible. "I'll be totally honest with you. It's only recently that I've become religious, and I'm not used to being careful about the laws of payos. It was simply an act of muscle memory. I'm so used to cutting off that area that I just followed my habit. But of course, I won't charge you for the haircut because that's not what you wanted. I won't charge you at all."

But Akiva said, "Not charge me? Do you think that's enough? I'm embarrassed to show my face. I'm not going to be able to go to work for two weeks. I won't be able to show my face in shul. I want you to compensate me for all the lost work and all the mitzvos that I'm going to miss. You're responsible for compensating for that and my embarrassment."

The barber said, "Well, I'm happy to give you the haircut for free, but as far as I see it, I'm not obligated to pay for your loss of work. You could still go to work it's your choice."

They agreed to bring this question to a rabbi.

What do you think? Does the barber have to pay for the loss of all the work and all the mitzvos, or does he not have to pay?

See Upiryu Matok Vayikra Page 233



it becomes significantly narrower as we look down the block. This is because our view of the world is built upon our experience.

As our people developed into a nation in the environment of Egypt we adopted their worldview. That was a view which included a belief of astrological powers and idolatry and so on. Before creating us into His chosen people HaShem needed to give us a blast of experiences from which we could develop our new worldview, a worldview that reflected the reality of HaShem's Sovereignty and Management of the world.

We, the people who were destined to travel through the desert of history in the lands of many adversarial nations, could never survive without the trust that we have in HaShem. That trust is the heart of our people. That trust shapes our entire worldview. We know to whom to turn in times of peril. We know He will save us. We know He longs for us to come back. We know that He will bring us back. We live our lives and build our families

and create our communities based on this knowledge.

Before the birth of our people, while we were still in the womb of Egypt, HaShem gave us a year of experiences that would shape our worldview. Those experiences opened our senses to the absolute Greatness of HaShem. We experienced His intervention in our lives and His protection of us from our foes and in every aspect of our lives we recognized that He was there for us.

It is no wonder why our lives are replete with mitzvos and traditions that reflect back to our exodus. It provides us with the frame of reference through which we must see the world.

As the situation in the Middle East becomes more and more complex we must keep the lessons we learnt from our exodus in the front of our consciousness and remember how we have nobody to rely on other than HaShem Alone, and with Him Alone we will vanquish every one of our enemies.

Have a wonderful Shabbos.

Paysach Diskind



SHABBOS: CELEBRATING HASHEM'S CREATION

THE AGAVE

The agave plant, a succulent native to the Americas, has carved a niche in various cultures, industries, and environments. Predominantly found in Mexico and the southwestern United States, agave, the source of tequila and a sugar substitute, is not only an ecological marvel but also a cultural and economic cornerstone. There are more than 200 species of agave all around the world, and 70 percent of endemic species are in Mexico.

Agave's roots in history and culture run deep, particularly in Mexico where it has been an integral part of life for centuries. Agave shares a distant relation with the lily family, contrary to the common misconception of its association with cacti. Its succulent nature is characterized by fleshy leaves, which store water. This enables the plant to withstand prolonged droughts. From rocky terrains to sandy deserts, agave thrives in diverse soil types, making it a resilient plant in harsh environments.

Agave plants exhibit a unique flowering process. They bloom only once in their lifetime, a phenomenon known as 'death blooms'. This rare event occurs after years of growth, ranging from 10 to 30 years depending on the species. The flower, towering up to 20 feet, is a majestic sight, bearing white or pale yellow blooms that attract pollinators like bats. The relationship between agave and its pollinators, particularly bats like the Mexican long-nosed bat, is a fascinating aspect of its ecology. These nocturnal creatures play a pivotal role in the pollination of agave, ensuring the continuation of this species. The Mexican long-nosed bat is the agave plant's biggest pollinator. The bats use their long muzzles to feed on the agave's nectar like a hummingbird does with smaller flowers. When they flit between plants, they transfer pollen that collects on their fur as they feed.

One of the most fascinating aspects of the agave plant is its size and lifespan. Some species can grow to an impressive 30 feet tall and 12 feet wide, making them a dominant presence in their natural habitat. Their longevity is equally remarkable, with some agave plants living for several decades.

The plant's leaves, often adorned with sharp spines for protection, are not only a defense mechanism but also a resource. In Central America, these leaves are cooked and consumed as greens. Moreover, the heart of the agave, which can weigh around 100 pounds, is a crucial component in the production of spirits like tequila and mezcal.

Agave's most renowned contribution is undoubtedly in the production of tequila and mezcal. Agave has been used for centuries to make tequila. The blue agave, or *Agave tequilana* Weber, is the only species used in making tequila. This meticu-

lous selection underscores the plant's specific qualities that are essential for the spirit's unique flavor profile.

The process of making these spirits begins with the jimador, a skilled worker who harvests the agave by hand. The heart, or pica, is extracted and cooked, transforming the plant's natural sugars. This is where mezcal gets its name, which translates to "cooked agave." The heart is then fermented and distilled, culminating in the creation of these celebrated beverages. A jimador can process up to 100 pinns a day.

Agave nectar, another popular product, is prized as a natural sweetener. With a sweetness that is about 1.5 times greater than sugar, it's a preferred choice for those seeking an alternative to conventional sweeteners. Its low glycemic index and organic nature add to its appeal, making it a staple in health-conscious diets.

The agave plant's utility extends beyond the culinary realm. Historically, it has been used for medicinal purposes, particularly in treating wounds and digestive issues. The plant's sap, known for its healing properties, contains compounds that have been utilized in traditional medicine for centuries.

In addition to its medicinal uses, agave plays a significant role in practical applications. The strong fibers extracted from the plant are used in making ropes, clothing, and even building materials. This versatility demonstrates agave's importance as a sustainable resource, capable of meeting a variety of human needs.

Agave plants are beautiful, hardy succulents that have been used for centuries in their native Mexico for everything from building materials to food and drink. But did you know that agave is poisonous? The sap of the agave plant contains a compound called saponin, which is toxic to humans and animals. If ingested, saponin can cause vomiting, diarrhea, and even death. The good news is that saponin is not easily absorbed by the body, so it's unlikely that you will be poisoned by eating agave nectar or tequila made from agave. However, if you have cuts or open wounds on your skin, Sapindus Mukorossi Extract can be dangerous because it can enter your bloodstream through the open wound.

The plant's significance extends globally, with its presence in countries like South Africa, Spain, and Australia, symbolizing its adaptability and global appeal. Agave's influence transcends borders, making it a plant of international importance.

Thank you Hashem for your wondrous world.

WE CANNOT GIVE IT UP JUST FOR SPACE AND CONVENIENCE

The chessed started even before they opened the door to others. For many years, Rav Dovid Feinstein and his wife lived in a two-bedroom apartment, with the Feinstein daughters sleeping on the couches each night. At one point, a three-bedroom apartment became available on a different floor in the same building; it seemed to be the perfect opportunity.

Reb Dovid shared his dilemma regarding the idea with the Rebbetzin. Mrs. Kassner was an elderly widow with whom they were very close. When the Rebbetzin had been a young mother with several children, Mrs. Kassner had been there to give her a hand, and now the Feinsteins tried to honor and assist her in her old age.

"If we move to a different floor," Reb Dovid said, "then we will have forfeited the zechus of being there for Mrs. Kassner. We cannot give it up just for space and convenience."

The Rebbetzin immediately agreed, and they remained in that apartment until their neighbor passed away.

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At a chasunah at which he was to be mesader kiddushin, Reb Dovid looked over the kesubah and saw that the chassan's name had been filled in without mention of the fact that he was a Kohen. Reb Dovid took a new kesubah and filled it in again, this time adding the term "HaKohen" after the chassan's name.

Later on, a talmid wondered about this. "Is the inclusion of the fact that the chassan is a Kohen me'akev in the kesubah? Was it necessary to write a new one?" he asked the Rosh Yeshivah.

"No," Reb Dovid said, "it is not me'akev, the kesubah is kosher without it. But I considered what would happen if the one reading the kesubah under the chuppah realized that it did not mention that the chassan was a Kohen. Perhaps he would have thought that it was me'akev, and made a commotion about it, leading to embarrassment for everyone. So I thought it better to add it in now, and avoid that situation."

(From Reb Dovid, By R' Yisrael Besser, Published By Artscroll Mesorah and Reprinted With Their Permission)



THE ANSWER

Regarding last week's question about the iPhones that were sold instead of burnt, Rabbi Zilberstein (Upiryo Matok, Vayikra, Page 208) wrote that the young man would have to give the money to each of the previous owners and he would have no right to take a cut in the sale. This is because, had they wanted to sell it instead of burning it, they could have sold it themselves. Clearly, their intent was to specifically burn it and not to sell it.

This week's TableTalk is dedicated in loving memory of
Oleg Kachuriner

by Olga Rubin and Boris Vaynshteyn.



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