



A MITZVA DILEMMA FOR THE SHABBOS TABLE



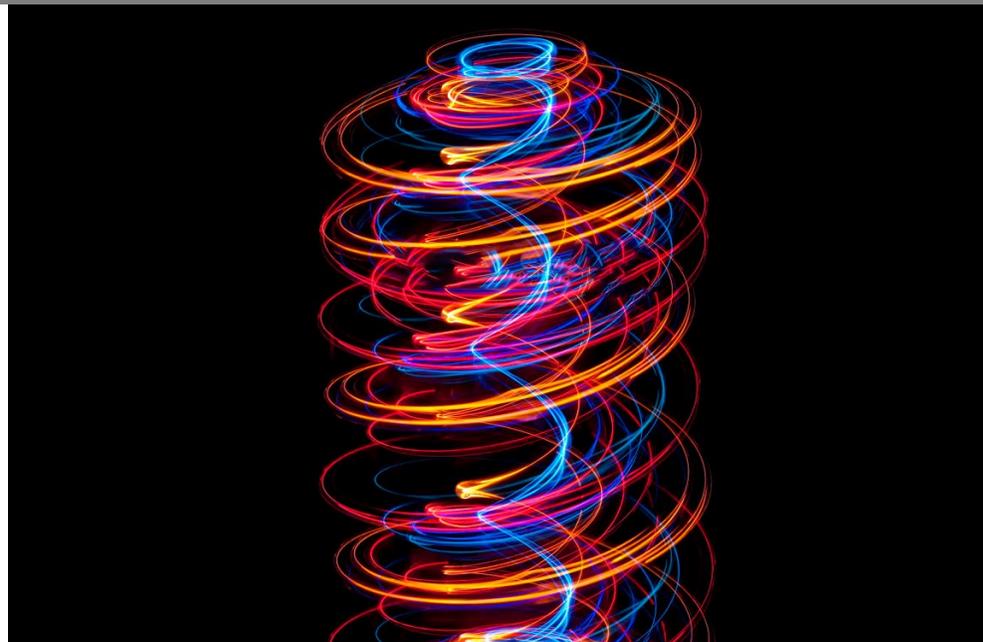
LUMBER & THE WINDSHIELD

By Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

This week, over Sukkos, someone shared with me a true story that recently occurred. He thought it would be a good table talk question, and I agree with him. Here it is, and I hope that you enjoy it.

A young man named Nachum, who lived in the New York area, needed to purchase some lumber for his succah. His car was not large enough, so he asked his in-laws if he could borrow their SUV to transport the wooden beams. Nachum went to a local frum-owned lumber store. He entered the store, chose the boards and beams and paid.

Because the lumber was heavy, Nachum asked the proprietor of the store if someone could help him load the lumber. The owner of the store of course agreed and asked one of his non-Jewish workers, a strong fellow named Dave, to load the



CYCLES

Cycles by their definition repeat themselves whether it is a cycle of time or cycle in space. The beauty of this repetition is that the end of the previous cycle precedes the beginning of the next cycle. This allows the end of the cycle to introduce the beginning of the next cycle. (See the meme)

This Shabbos we begin the next cycle of reading the Torah with Parshas Breishis. We are able to use Parshas Zos Habracha, the end of our previous cycle, to introduce the beginning of Breishis. There are two verses in Zos Habracha that are adjacent to each other which seem to have no connection with each other. The first verse states "Torah was commanded to us by Moshe; it is an eternal heritage of the congregation of Yaakov." It is followed by "When the elders of the nation gather in consensus there will be a king in Israel."

The first verse teaches us that Torah was given to us by Moshe and it has become an eternal national heritage. The second verse teaches us that a Jewish king must be appointed with the consensus of the elders of the nation. In what way do these verses relate to each other?

The Ohr Hachaim Hakadosh points out that the use of "tzav" which means 'to command' is also the verb used to appoint an individual to a position of governor. This verb is used by the prophet Shmuel in describing how HaShem appointed Dovid on the people to be their king. We also find 'tzav' used in the Book of Shmos when HaShem appoints Moshe to rule over Pharoah and

beams into the car.

Dave proceeded to carry the wood out of the store. He carefully placed each beam into the SUV and closed the back door. Nachum thanked him profusely and drove away.

As Nachum drove away, he immediately noticed a crack in the rear windshield of the SUV. The crack extended from a spot where it impacted one of the beams. It was clear that Dave, in his hurry to load up the car with the boards and beams, had somehow managed to crack the glass windshield.

Nachum was not sure what to do. Should he go back to the store and ask the owner to cover the damage? It was his worker who caused it.

On the other hand, maybe the worker was responsible. Should he ask Dave to pay for it?

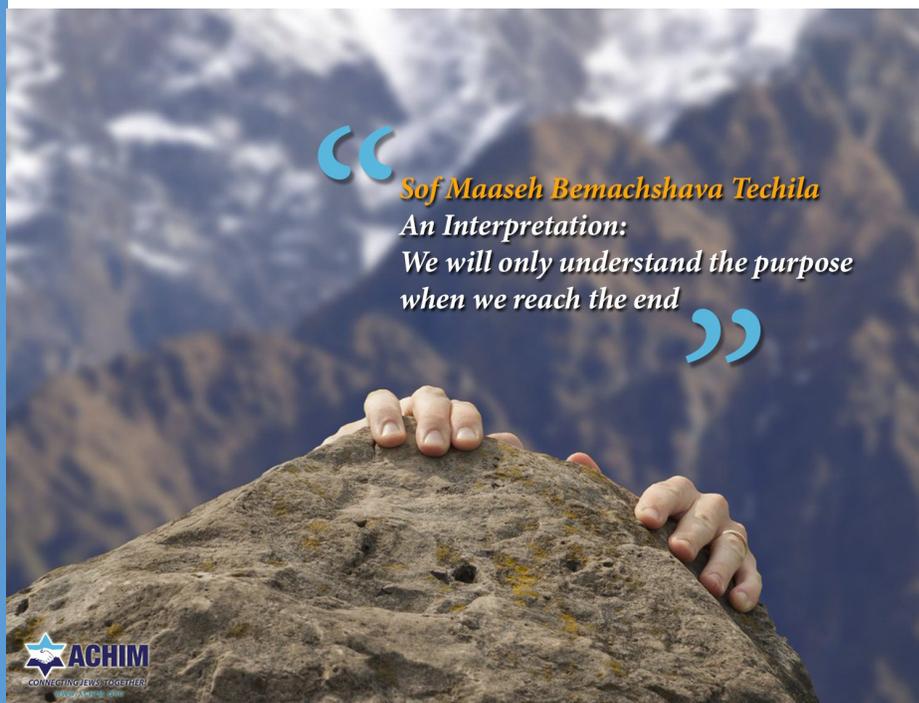
Furthermore, the car did not belong to Nachum. Assuming that no one was willing to pay, was it now Nachum's responsibility to pay his in-laws for the damage?

Who is liable to pay for the windshield replacement, Nachum, the owner of the store, Dave, or no one?

What do you think?

This question was brought to Rav Tzvi Berkowitz.

MITZVA MEME



“*Sof Maaseh Bemachshava Techila*
An Interpretation:
We will only understand the purpose
when we reach the end”

the Jewish people. The Ohr Hachaim, therefore, suggests that our first verse should be understood as follows. “The Torah was appointed to a position of leadership over us (the people of Israel) by Moshe; this is the eternal heritage of the Congregation of Yaakov.” The Torah was appointed to be the Monarch of her people.

With the Ohr Hachaim's insight the second verse is teaching us that even though the Torah is the eternal King over the Congregation of Yaakov, nevertheless, there will still be human kings when there will be a consensus from the elders of the nation.

The role of the king is to give direction to the nation and to assist every member of the nation to achieve their potential. The king must recognize the strengths and weaknesses of every member of his people and to guide each one in as-

sisting them to realize their potential. The king is responsible to protect his people and to provide an environment in which every member can thrive and flourish. While this cannot be anticipated from a mortal king, given his human limitations, this can be anticipated from an eternal King, such as the Torah which is an extension of HaShem.

Hence, the Torah is not merely the Book of Laws that HaShem gave us. It is not merely the Book containing the secrets of Creation which is filled with all the wisdom that Man can ever know. It transcends all that. It is the living Monarch of our people. It is the Book that directs her people as a nation. It is the Book that gives every individual direction. It is the Book that provides protection to her people. The Torah provides the environment in which every person has their unique role and is taken care of.

So as we begin the new cycle of Torah reading we can appreciate that She is alive and cares for all who cherish her.

Have a very wonderful Shabbos.

Paysach Diskind



Pictured, Right To Left: The Ziggurat of Ur, originally built around the time of Avraham, and rebuilt by the father of Belshazzar, treasures buried in Ur from the time of Avraham, the Euphrates River today

SHABBOS: CELEBRATING HASHEM'S CREATION

THE EUPHRATES AND THE INFLUENCE OF EDEN

This week's Parsha mentions the four rivers that extended out of Eden, two of them are Pras and Chidekel, also known as the Euphrates and Tigris rivers. The Ramban (Bereishis 3,22) writes that it is from these rivers that the four main kingdoms of earth "draw their power". Let's take a deeper look at the significance and spiritual influence of these two rivers.

The Euphrates, at 1740 miles long, is the longest river in Western Asia and one of the most historically important rivers of the world. Together with the Tigris, it defines Mesopotamia. Mesopotamia literally means the "Land Between the Rivers". "Meso" means land and Potamia means "rivers". It is similar to the Torah's term Aram Naharaim, "Aram of the two rivers". Originating in Turkey in the north, the Euphrates flows through Syria and Iraq and empties into the Persian Gulf in the south.

The area between the Euphrates and the Tigris is also known as the Fertile Crescent. It was named this because of its rich soils and a supply of water for irrigation. In Arabic this area is known as Al Jazira, meaning "The Island". This is because this area was seen as an island of fertility in an area that was otherwise barren and desert-like.

Like the Garden of Eden, this area is also called "The Cradle of Civilization". Why is this the birthplace of civilization? The world's first cities, first writing, and first technologies originated in Mesopotamia. Because of this region's relatively abundant access to water and fertile soil, the earliest civilizations like the Sumerians (Shinar) were established in the Fertile Crescent. The presence of those rivers later had a lot to do with how Mesopotamia developed complex societies and innovations such as writing, elaborate architecture and government bureaucracies. The regular flooding along the Tigris and the Euphrates made the land around them especially fertile and ideal for growing crops for food. That made it a prime spot for the Neolithic Revolution, also called the Agricultural Revolution. Irrigation and agriculture developed there. With people cultivating plants and domesticating animals, they were able to stay in one place and form permanent villages. As they figured out how to reroute some of the water through canals, they were able to irrigate fields farther away. With a food supply capable of sustaining large numbers of people, cities began to develop. Small settlements grew into early cities, where a lot of the characteristics of civilization, such as concentrations of population, monumental architecture, communication, division of labor, and different social and economic classes developed.

Mesopotamia gave birth to the first cities in history which were largely built of sun-dried brick. The reason why they were such great city builders was actually a result of their lack of certain resources which spurred innovation. As the Torah describes, unlike Egypt, Mesopotamia especially in the south was barren of stone that could be quarried for construction. The land was equally devoid of trees for timber, so the people turned instead to other natural resources that lay abundantly at hand - the muddy clay of its riverbanks and the rushes and reeds that grew in their marshes. With them, the Mesopotamians created the world's first columns, arches, and roofed structures.

Access to water helped with farming and trade routes. Soon, its natural riches brought travelers in and out of the Fertile Crescent. This led to an exchange of culture and ideas, and advancements in the region like writing (cuneiform) and math soon developed there.

The Sumerians developed the earliest system of writing as well as sophisticated art, architecture, and complex government bureaucracies to super-

vide agriculture, commerce and religious activity. Sumer also became a hotbed of innovation, as the Sumerians took inventions that other ancient peoples developed, from pottery to textile weaving, and figured out how to do them on an industrial scale.

Population growth and a surplus of food led to specialization of labor and the leisure time necessary for civilization. When not everyone needed to farm art, music and craftsmanship began to develop. The products created by these specialists led to trade and a merchant class. A religious class of priests also developed. The flowering of civilization had begun. They also developed the domestication of animals, common tools, sophisticated weaponry and warfare, the chariot, wine, beer, demarcation of time into hours, minutes, and seconds, the sail (sailboats), urbanization, the wheel, writing, astronomy, mathematics, wind power, animal husbandry and legal codes.

Mesopotamia was known in antiquity as a seat of learning. Intellectual pursuits were highly valued across Mesopotamia, and the schools (devoted primarily to the priestly class) taught reading, writing, religion, law, medicine, and astrology.

Mesopotamia eventually saw the rise of empires such as Akkad, Assyria, Persia, and Babylonia, whose capital city of Babylon became one of the largest and most advanced in the ancient world.

The Mesopotamians influenced the cultures of Egypt and Greece through long-distance trade and cultural diffusion. Through these cultures, they impacted the culture of Rome which set the standard for the development and spread of Western Civilization. Mesopotamia generally, and Sumer specifically, gave the world some of its most enduring cultural aspects. Many great ancient cities, such as Nippur, Eridu, Uruk and Ur, some of whose ruins remain, lined the Euphrates' banks. Ur, known in the Torah as Ur Kasdim, was one of the oldest cities in the world. Avraham, the initiator of one of history's greatest cultural revolutions, lived in Ur Kasdim when it was under the control of Nimrod-Amraphel. Some authorities identify Nimrod-Amraphel as Hammurabi who also controlled the city of Ur.

The discovery of the Royal Tombs in Ur confirmed Ur's splendor. These tombs, which date to approximately 2500 BCE contained an immense treasure of luxury items and jewelry made of precious metals and semi-precious stones imported from long distances. This wealth, unparalleled up to then, is a testimony of Ur's economic importance during the Early Bronze Age.

Ur was a major port on the Persian Gulf, and the city controlled much of the trade into Mesopotamia. Imports to Ur came from many parts of the world included precious metals such as gold and silver, and semi-precious stones, such as lapis lazuli and carnelian.

Ur had a complex and developed economic and legal systems. Tens of thousands of cuneiform texts have been recovered from temples, the palace, and individual houses, that recorded contracts, inventories, and court documents.

In the 6th century BCE there was new construction in Ur under the rule of Nebuchadnezzar II of Babylon. The Ziggurat of Ur, rebuilt by Nebuchadnezzar, was uncovered by archaeologists. It has an arch that has a prayer for Nebuchadnezzar's son Belshazzar, who is discussed in Sefer Daniel.

THE SOUP OF GAN EDEN

Toward the end of his life, Rabbi Elimelech of Lizhensk, the Noam Elimelech ate very little, and even the entreaties of his friends and relatives had little effect. One time, when his son, Rabbi Elazar, pleaded with him to eat enough to sustain life, Rabbi Elimelech said, "I really wish I could eat, but my body rejects all things physical. But Ah! One time, during my years of wandering in exile, I lodged at an inn near a certain village, and there I ate a delicious soup. If that were available, I could eat it. But that is so far away!"

Many years later, Rabbi Elazar happened to be in that village and sought out the inn to which his father had referred. He asked the hostess whether he might have some of her special soup, and she said, "How I wish I could serve you the food that is appropriate for a great tzaddik like yourself. But we are very poor. Very few travelers pass this way, and we just have enough flour and beans to eat for our meals. I will be glad to make bean soup for you." When Rabbi Elazar tasted the soup, he experienced a spiritual delight, as though he were eating of the offerings of the Altar in the Temple in Jerusalem.

He asked the hostess, "Please tell me, what ingredients do you use for this soup?"

The woman began crying. "I am so sorry that it is so meager. I do not have any spices to put in. All I did was cook the beans with water, and then I prayed to G-d: 'Master of the Universe! You have provided me with the mitzvah of preparing a meal for a great tzaddik. If only I had meat, vegetables, and spices, I would prepare a meal for him that would befit him, but I have nothing. But You, Master of the Universe, have everything. You have Gan Eden (Paradise), where there are all the finest scents and flavors. Please put some of these in the soup, so that my holy guest can enjoy his food.'"

Rabbi Elazar said, "Now I know why my father longed for this soup. This pious woman's sincere prayers were answered, and the soup did indeed have the taste of Gan Eden."

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THE ANSWER

Regarding last week's question about the ham in the succah, Rav Zilberstein writes that the halacha is that one is not allowed to have a bathroom in a succah. The gemarah says that a pig has the status of a graf shel rei, a chamber pot. In addition, the mishna berura writes that one should not bring "forbidden things" into a succah. Therefore the man should not bring the ham into the succah.

The Shabbos Table is a gift given to us by HaShem to share true Jewish values with our families and friends. TableTalk is designed to enhance that opportunity.

It means so much to Reb Yitzi Weiner and myself that so many of you are enjoying it.

It is to you that we dedicate this week's TableTalk.

We thank you

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