

A MITZVA DILEMMA FOR THE SHABBOS TABLE



THE MISTAKEN HAGBAH

By Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

On Simchas Torah, Donny was at a shul that auctioned off four kibudim, Hagbah and Gelilah, for both days of Shemini Atzeres and Simchas Torah. Donny won the auction with a \$2,000 bid, which was \$500 for each kibud.

On the first day, when they were giving out Hagbah and Gelilah, the gabbai asked Donny whom he wanted to do Hagbah. Donny pointed to someone, and that person was chosen. Then, when the gabbai asked who should do Gelilah, Donny pointed to someone else, but the gabbai accidentally picked the wrong person.

Well, what can you do? The next day, the gabbai made sure to pick the right people. Donny pointed them out, and they received the kibudim correctly.

After Yom Tov, Donny went to pay his pledge. He gave the treasurer



NOTHING ELSE IN MIND

In Artzos Hashalom, the Malbim's collection of essays, he presents a novel approach to understanding the test of Akeidas Yitzchok. Before explaining his understanding of the Akeida he lays down the following principle. The perfection of any mitzvah lies in the purity of intent. The purity of intent is measured by any other interests that play a role in the performance of the mitzvah. If one student studies Torah 18 hours a day for the sake of the Torah but he also enjoys the prestige of being the greatest masmid in the yeshiva, this secondary enjoyment detracts from the value of his Torah study. This does not invalidate his mitzvah; not at all. However, it does mean that the Torah study of the other student who studies fewer hours a day for the sake of the Torah with no side benefit, has far greater value.

The purity of intent, namely the intent of the one performing the mitzvah has only one intent; exclusively for HaShem - nothing else at all.

Avraham was to be the progenitor of the people of the Torah. It was critical that his performance of mitzvos should be absolutely pure. If their role was to be the Carriage of HaShem, it was of paramount importance that their actions be completely pure with no self-interest whatsoever. The point of the Akeida was to test this very question. Through the Akeida, Avraham demonstrated in the most difficult situation the absolute purity of his intent. There was no self interest whatsoever in his service of HaShem.

The story of the Akeida presented Avraham with two mitzvos. The first mitzvah was very easy to be performed with purity of intent; with no self interest.

\$2,000, but the treasurer said, "Oh, actually, you only owe \$1,500." Donny asked, "What do you mean? I pledged \$2,000." The treasurer explained, "Yes, but the gabbai already paid \$500 because he felt responsible, he accidentally gave the wrong person the honor."

The treasurer continued, "Since the gabbai made the mistake, he didn't want the shul to lose out, so he covered the \$500 himself. Therefore, you only need to pay \$1,500."

Donny was shocked at the gabbai's righteousness and fairness. He went over to him and said, "I didn't mean for you to pay the \$500, you really don't have to do that."

The gabbai replied, "No, it's only fair. You pledged \$2,000, which means \$500 per kibud. Why should you have to pay for the one where you didn't get to honor the person you chose?"

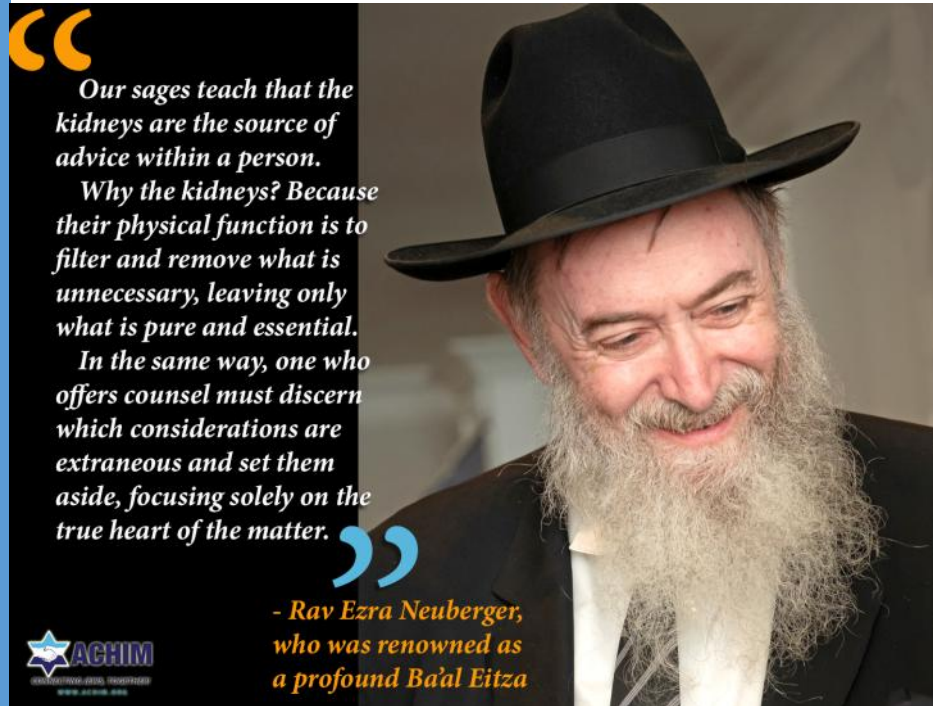
Donny said, "I understand that, but maybe the shul should cover it instead. Why should you have to pay? I didn't get any benefit from that mistake, but I also don't think it's fair for you to lose money over it. I want to reimburse you the extra \$500 you paid."

The gabbai answered, "I'll only accept it if that's what halachah requires."

So they brought the question to a Rav.

Who do you think is responsible in this case? When the gabbai mistakenly gave the wrong person the honor, who should bear the cost? Should Donny pay the full amount? Should the gabbai be responsible for the \$500? Or should the shul absorb the loss so Donny only has to pay \$1,500?

What do you think?



The second was extremely difficult to be done with absolute purity.

For the first mitzvah Avraham was commanded to offer his only son, the entire hope for his future, as an offering which meant that he was to sacrifice everything he and Sarah lived for. Granted, the performance of this mitzvah has perhaps no parallel, however, in terms of the purity of intent it is extremely easy. There was no benefit whatsoever to be had in slaughtering his son. Naturally, it was done purely for sake of HaShem.

For the second mitzvah Avraham was commanded to cease the offering. After Avraham had already tied up Yitzchok and prepared him to be slaughtered the angel commanded him to cease - stop and do not even touch the knife to Yitzchok. Avraham obeyed the second mitzvah as well with the same purity of intent as the first mitzvah.

Let us contemplate the difficulty of performing the second mitzvah with no other intent other than the fulfillment of HaShem's command. A moment ago, he was about to end his entire dream and purpose that he and Sarah lived for. He was willing to forgo it all, because HaShem wanted him to. Suddenly, there is a change and HaShem tells him to keep Yitzchok, to go ahead with his dream and purpose. The fulfillment of the second mitzvah ought to have been filled with such joy and pleasure that his dream continues. But no! That notion of joy and happiness played no role in the fulfillment of the second mitzvah. Avraham stopped the offering only because HaShem ordered him to stop with no other self interest!

What incredible loyalty Avraham Avinu implanted in the Jewish soul!

Have a wonderful Shabbos.

Paysach Diskind



SHABBOS: CELEBRATING HASHEM'S CREATION

MOUNT EREBUS: THE MOUNTAIN THAT SPITS OUT GOLD

Last week we spoke about a geological riddle. Here is another one. Where is there a mountain that literally spits out gold? Far to the south, beyond the reach of trees or tundra, beyond even the icy embrace of the Antarctic Circle, there rises a mountain that shouldn't exist, at least, not in a place like this. It's a land of eternal cold, where the wind can howl like a living creature and the sun vanishes for months at a time. And yet, right in the middle of all of that ice, something burns.

That something is Mount Erebus, the southernmost active volcano on Earth. It towers nearly 12,500 feet above Ross Island, its summit often crowned with clouds of steam and smoke that twist into the icy sky. Erebus is a living paradox, a fiery giant standing in a kingdom of ice. It is a place where opposites collide, where the frozen world of Antarctica meets the molten heart of the Earth, and together they create one of the most extraordinary natural wonders our planet has to offer.

Mount Erebus was first seen in 1841 by the British explorer Sir James Clark Ross. As his ships, the HMS Erebus and Terror, pushed through the icy Ross Sea, the sailors beheld something astonishing, a column of smoke rising from a mountain. Ross named it after his ship. In the midst of Antarctica's endless white, Erebus stands as a shadowed reminder of Earth's fiery depths.

Today, scientists know Erebus as a stratovolcano, a mountain built from layers of hardened lava and volcanic ash, shaped over countless eruptions. But unlike most volcanoes, Erebus never truly sleeps. Inside its summit crater, there lies a lava lake, a rare, roiling pool of molten rock that glows a fierce orange against the cold blue of the Antarctic ice. This fiery pool has been active since at least 1972, making it one of the few persistent lava lakes on Earth.

That means Erebus doesn't just erupt now and then. It breathes. Constantly.

Every so often, it lets out a booming cough, a Strombolian eruption, volcanologists call it, sending blobs of glowing lava and ash into the sky. These bursts aren't large enough to destroy the mountain, but they're enough to remind anyone nearby that this volcano is very much alive.

As if a volcano blazing in Antarctica weren't strange enough, Mount Erebus hides another surprise, one that sounds like it belongs in a fairy tale. Erebus spews gold. Yes, real gold.

Every day, the plumes of gas and steam that pour from the volcano carry with them tiny, glittering flecks of metallic gold, each one smaller than a grain of dust. Scientists estimate that Erebus sends around 80 grams of gold into the atmosphere every day. That's worth about six thousand dollars' worth of treasure, simply drifting away on the polar winds!

But no one's going to be panning for gold up there. The particles are so small, no larger than twenty micrometers across, that they float invisibly in the air. They've been detected hundreds of miles away, carried by the Antarctic breeze like a golden mist.

How does Erebus manage such a magical feat? Deep inside the earth, its magma is rich with volatile elements, gases and minerals that include trace amounts of gold. When that magma rises toward the surface, it carries those trace metals with it. The intense heat and pressure

turns the gold into vapor, which escapes with the volcanic gases. Then, when that hot gas hits the frigid Antarctic air, sometimes colder than fifty degrees below zero, the gold crystallizes into microscopic flecks of metal. In that moment, the mountain literally breathes gold dust into the sky.

It's one of the rarest natural phenomena on Earth, and it's been happening for thousands of years, right there at the bottom of the world.

At the summit, the lava lake boils at over a thousand degrees Celsius. Rivers of molten rock surge and swirl, occasionally tossing fiery bubbles skyward in glowing arcs. Down the slopes, though, the temperature can plummet to minus fifty degrees. The ground is buried under glaciers, and snowstorms can cloak the mountain in whiteout conditions for weeks on end.

But Erebus is not defeated by the cold. Its volcanic heat creates tiny oases amid the frost, strange pockets where warmth and ice meet. Steam vents, called fumaroles, release jets of hot gas that melt the snow and ice around them. Then, as the escaping vapor hits the freezing air, it refreezes in a breathtaking display, forming delicate towers and spires of ice. Some of these ice fumaroles rise as tall as trees, sculpted by the wind into twisted shapes that look like something from another world. (Pictured, Right)

Beneath the surface, the heat of Erebus melts channels through the ice, forming secret caves warmed by volcanic steam. Inside, the walls glitter with frost, and the air is thick with moisture, a tiny pocket of warmth hidden beneath the frozen skin of Antarctica. Scientists exploring these ice caves have found something truly astonishing: life.

Tiny microbes, extremophiles, thrive in this unlikely environment, feeding on minerals and surviving without sunlight in temperatures that swing wildly between freezing and boiling. These organisms are among the toughest on Earth. Some scientists think that if life can survive in the caves of Erebus, it might also survive on other icy worlds, like Mars or Jupiter's moon Europa.

Because it's so active, and yet so accessible to scientific study, Mount Erebus has become one of the most closely monitored volcanoes on the planet. Every year, researchers trek across the Ross Ice Shelf to reach the mountain's slopes, setting up instruments to measure gas emissions, seismic activity, and even the shape of the lava lake itself. It's no easy task. The air is thin and bitterly cold, and the nearest permanent base, McMurdo Station, lies over twenty miles away. Reaching the summit can take days, and the weather can turn in minutes from calm to blinding storm. But for those who make the journey, the rewards are immense. Erebus offers a window into the workings of our planet, a glimpse into the processes that shape continents, build mountains, and fuel the engine of the Earth.

On clear nights, when the winds calm and the sky over Antarctica opens wide, the summit of Mount Erebus can be seen glowing faintly against the dark, a red spark on the horizon, pulsing like the heartbeat of the world. For the few who have witnessed it, the sight is unforgettable. In a land where nothing should burn, the Earth itself burns still.

Fire and ice. Gold and ash. Darkness and light.

Thank you Hashem for your wondrous world!

DO YOU TELL HER STORIES?

Rav Shlomo Freifeld would encourage balance whenever he had the chance. A talmid chacham from the neighborhood once came to speak with Reb Shlomo. He was having some difficulties with his young daughter and was seeking guidance.

"Do you tell her stories?" asked Reb Shlomo.

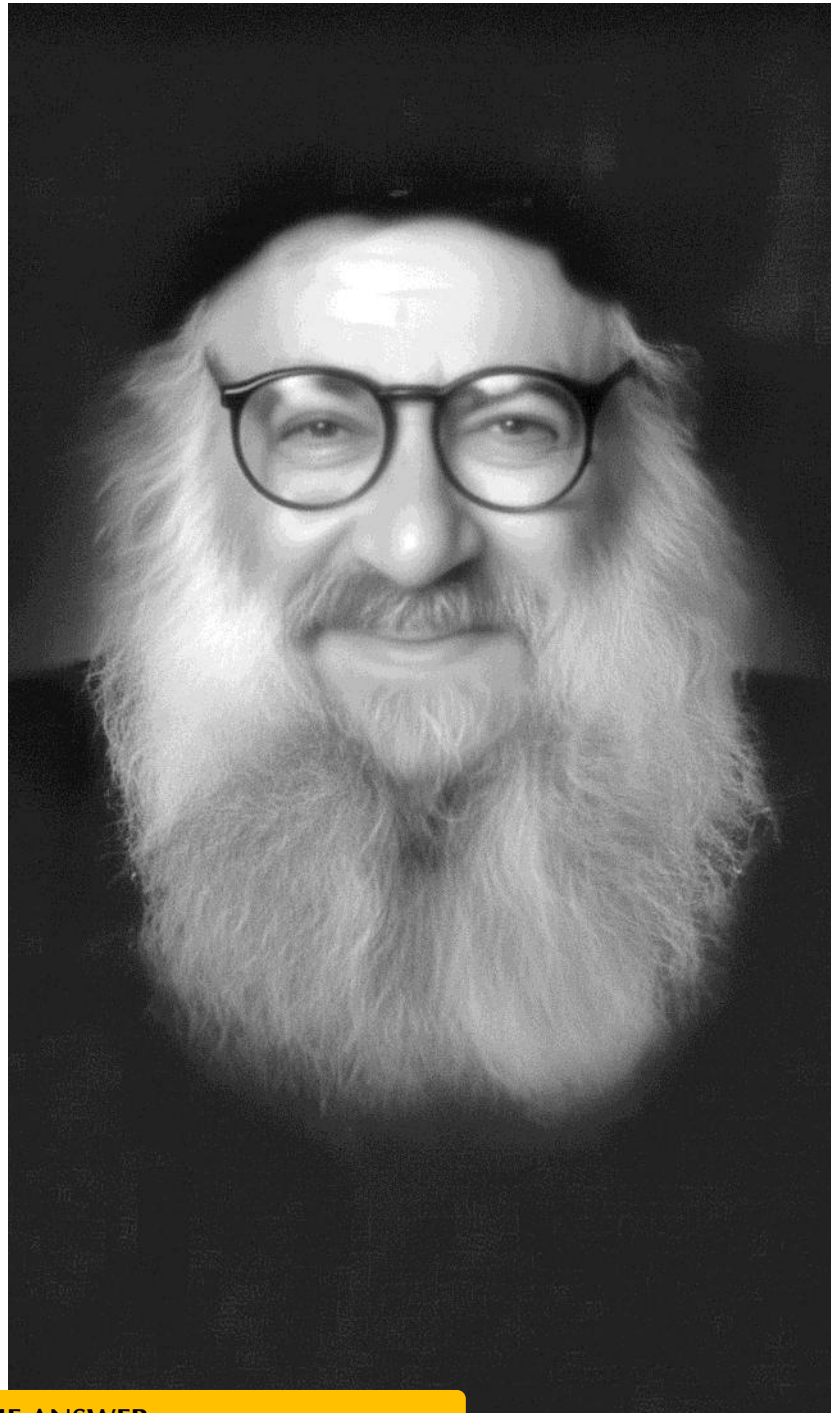
"Of course I do," replied the fellow.

"What kind of stories?"

"Oh, I tell her about the Berditchever, the Chafetz Chaim, and other tzaddikim."

Reb Shlomo looked at him and said, "She's a little girl. She can't be like them yet, so you're just making her feel like she can't measure up. Don't do that. Tell her stories about Jesse James and Little Red Riding Hood, and make her normal."

(From Reb Shlomo, By Rabbi Yisroel Besser)



THE ANSWER

Regarding last week's question about reimbursement for the failed airplane screens: Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein (Veharev Na Hebrew, Volume 4 Page 356) explained that the price of a ticket already covers several items, including the cost of gasoline, snacks, and the rights to show the videos. The company pays licensing fees to the owners of the videos, and that cost is built into the ticket price. Since this passenger was not able to use or benefit from the video, there is no reason to charge him for it. Therefore, he is entitled to a reimbursement.

This week's TableTalk is dedicated to the memory of Reb Pinchos Marder

פנחס בן יצחק ז"ל

By Tamar Marder
Reuven and Rachel Yablonovsky



Brad E. Kauffman Esquire and Kauffman and Forman P.A.
specializing in corporate and construction law,
estates, wills and trusts and business litigation.

