



A MITZVA DILEMMA FOR THE SHABBOS TABLE



COFFEE & A PASTRY

By Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

There was a certain shul in a small city in Eretz Yisroel. During the coronavirus pandemic, because the authorities forbade indoor gatherings, the shul began davening outside.

Moshe was a member of this shul. The shul happened to be right next to a nice kosher café. Moshe went to the café owner and said, "Let's make a deal. I want to run a promotion: anyone who joins the minyan, even just to say Shema, put on tefillin, or participate for a little while, can get a free coffee and pastry."

The café owner readily agreed. They put up a big sign near the outdoor minyan announcing the promotion: Shacharis, Mincha, Maariv, anyone who joins the minyan, even briefly, will receive a free



BLESSING

The Malbim introduces a remarkable concept in the beginning of Lech L'cha. HaShem tells Avraham that he will be the source of blessing for the world. In explaining this verse Malbim writes that if there is no person on Earth that is deserving of HaShem's hashagcha pratis (special Providential guidance) then the world would receive no hashacha whatsoever. The world would run by Nature itself with no attention at all from HaShem. Therefore, HaShem tells Avraham that through you the world will be blessed. In other words, because Avraham himself warrants hashagcha pratis the world will be filled with blessing because now HaShem will give His attention to the world. And once HaShem is paying attention to His world blessing will flow from Him to the world.

Using this principle Malbim explains the reason for HaShem telling Avraham about His plans of destroying Sodom. HaShem says, being that Avraham will be the father of a great nation that will follow in the ways of HaShem he must be told about Sodom. Malbim explains that it is specifically because Avraham and his progeny are worthy of hashagcha pratis that Sodom will be punished. That is because the world will have a nation who draws HaShem's attention to the world. And therefore, once HaShem is paying attention to His world Sodom must receive its due punishment. However, if the world has neither an Avraham nor a Jewish nation Sodom would not have been punished because HaShem would have left the world to nature with no Providential guidance.

coffee and pastry.

It was in Eretz Yisroel, the weather was pleasant, and the idea turned into a great success. Many new people, some of them secular, straight off the street, came and joined, then enjoyed their fresh coffee and pastry. The minyanim were full of energy and joy, and the initiative worked beautifully.

Eventually, though, the pandemic ended. Once restrictions were lifted, some members of the shul were eager to return to davening inside. But Moshe felt the outdoor setup had been so successful that they should continue. He argued, "If we move back inside, fewer people will join from the street. Let's keep the minyanim outside."

Others disagreed. They felt it was better to daven inside a proper shul, a makom tefillah with fewer distractions. Moshe maintained that engaging more people was more important, and since there weren't enough participants for both an indoor and outdoor minyan, they had to choose one.

So the question became: What's more important, davening inside a shul, in a makom tefillah, in a focused environment, or staying outside to reach and inspire more people, especially those who might not otherwise come to shul?

What do you think?

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MITZVA MEME



To sharpen this idea, we can draw upon Malbim 's understanding of the relationship of HaShem and Nature. He compares this relationship to that of Man and his body. The body of Man is nothing but an animal. Before the neshama is placed in the body, even if there would be an animal soul it would not be Man. It would be an animal. Only once his neshama enters the body does he become Man. The neshama of Man which is a spark of HaShem has the free will to control the body in all of its actions. He can make the body do deeds that by its own nature it would not have done. As an animal, before he has a neshama, Man would not care to help another person. He certainly would not give his own money to a stranger. However, the neshama can direct the animal to do just that.

The Name Elokim, is the Name of HaShem that fills Nature with His presence in the same manner that the neshama fills the body. When Man places his neshama in control of his body then HaShem responds in kind and places Elokim in control of Nature. This is when we see hashagcha pratis. However, if there is no person in the world who controls his body, then HaShem responds in kind and He does not control Nature. Nature takes its own course with no providential guidance.

Blessing only occurs when HaShem is controlling Nature.

Perhaps this is why we are taught in this week's Parsha that Avraham was blessed with everything. Any blessing there is to be had was Avraham Avinu's accomplishment.

Have a wonderful Shabbos.

Paysach Diskind



SHABBOS: CELEBRATING HASHEM'S CREATION

THE DESERT ROSE: AN INCREDIBLE FLOWER MADE OF CRYSTALS

If you walk deep enough into the Sahara you might come across something extraordinary. At first glance, it looks like a flower, pale petals unfurling in the sand. But lean closer, brush away the dust, and you'll find that this "flower" is made of stone. It is a Desert Rose, one of nature's most surprising creations, and its story is written in sand, wind, and time.

The name "Desert Rose" can fool the eye and the imagination. Despite its perfect rosette shape, this wonder isn't a plant at all. It's a mineral formation, a crystal sculpture made not by roots and sunlight, but by water and evaporation. The "petals" are thin, bladed crystals of gypsum or barite, layered together so precisely that they look like a bouquet frozen in stone.

Every Desert Rose begins as a quiet chemistry experiment beneath the sand. Far below the sun-scorched surface, groundwater moves slowly through layers of rock and sediment, carrying dissolved minerals with it. When that water begins to evaporate, the minerals start to crystallize. If the water contains calcium sulfate, gypsum forms; if it's rich in barium sulfate, barite takes its place. Over years, sometimes centuries, those crystals grow outward in radiating clusters, trapping sand grains inside as they expand. The sand gives each rose its color and texture, painting them in shades of amber, tan, rose-red, or ghostly white. The result is a flower that will never wilt.

To understand how these "petals" form, you have to imagine crystals growing like frost on a windowpane, but beneath the sand. Each flat, bladed crystal grows along invisible lines within its molecular structure, stacking and spreading outward. Sand grains become part of the sculpture, trapped inside the crystal lattice, shaping every curve and edge. Wind and pressure nudge the developing form, guiding the angles in which the crystals spread. No two roses ever grow the same way. Some are small enough to fit in a child's hand, while others can weigh more than sixty pounds and stretch wider than a dinner table.

A Desert Rose's birthplace is not a gentle one. It forms in some of the harshest environments on Earth, in salt flats, arid basins, and ancient lakebeds that now lie cracked and bare. These are places where water once lingered but has long since vanished, leaving behind concentrated salts and minerals. In the Sahara, particularly across Algeria, Tunisia, and Chad, the sand hides huge fields of these crystal flowers just beneath its surface.

When storms sweep across the desert, the wind sometimes exposes them. After a sandstorm, nomads may find new clusters glittering faintly in the sunlight, freshly revealed after centuries underground. In Tunisia's vast Chott el Djerid salt pan, such discoveries happen regularly.

Inside these formations lies an intricate record of the desert's changing moods. The mineral layers, sometimes visible in cross-section, reveal patterns of wet and dry cycles that geologists can read like a diary. When scientists study these roses, they uncover clues about how climate patterns shifted long ago.

Despite their stony appearance, Desert Roses are surprisingly

delicate. Gypsum, the softer of the two common types, ranks only a 2 on the Mohs hardness scale. That means you can scratch it with your fingernail. Barite roses are sturdier, but still brittle. Both dissolve slowly in water, which makes it dangerous to wash or store them in humid conditions. In museums, they are often kept in dry, climate-controlled cases to prevent crumbling or pitting.

Collectors who try to excavate them from the sand must work with patience and care. A misplaced shovel strike can shatter a cluster that took centuries to form. Those who succeed often describe the process as uncovering a secret garden, each "flower" sleeping in its cradle of sand. Some specimens are small enough to hold in your palm, glowing with a soft, silky sheen. Others emerge as entire bouquets, massive clusters of interlocking petals that seem to have grown together in harmony.

Because of their fragility, Desert Roses rarely become gemstones or jewelry. They're too soft to cut or polish easily. Yet they are prized in another way, as works of art. Mineral collectors treasure their variety, while scientists admire their precision and insight into Earth's natural chemistry.

The process that builds it is simple: mineral-rich water rises, evaporates, and leaves crystals behind. Yet the details depend on countless subtle factors: the mineral content of the groundwater, the shape of the pore spaces in the sand, the temperature of the air, even the rhythm of the wind. Each crystal's direction, each petal's size, is shaped by these invisible forces. Over time, the desert acts as Hashem's sculptor, shaping geometry into grace.

In many specimens, iron oxide dust gives the petals a warm blush, like the color of dried roses. Others, formed from nearly pure gypsum, are pale and translucent, catching light like frosted glass. Under ultraviolet light, some gypsum roses even give off a faint glow, a hidden luminescence that reveals their crystalline layers. When sliced open, they show delicate concentric rings, a frozen record of each stage of growth.

Though the Sahara may be their most famous home, Desert Roses appear wherever conditions are right. They've been found in Mexico's Chihuahuan Desert, the salt flats of Australia, the plains of Spain, and even America in the Southwest. In Oklahoma, a special kind of red barite Desert Rose has become a state symbol. Known locally as the "Rose Rock," these crimson clusters are found in abundance near Norman and Noble Oklahoma. These Oklahoma Roses are heavier and more durable than their Saharan cousins. Their reddish color comes from iron-rich clay rather than sand.

Geologists may study them for their clues about ancient climates. Collectors may prize them for their beauty. But perhaps their greatest gift is the reminder they carry: that Hashem is the greatest artist of all.

Thank you Hashem for your wondrous world!

HE CAME INTO MY ROOM EVERY HALF HOUR TO MAKE SURE THE BLANKET WAS COVERING ME PROPERLY

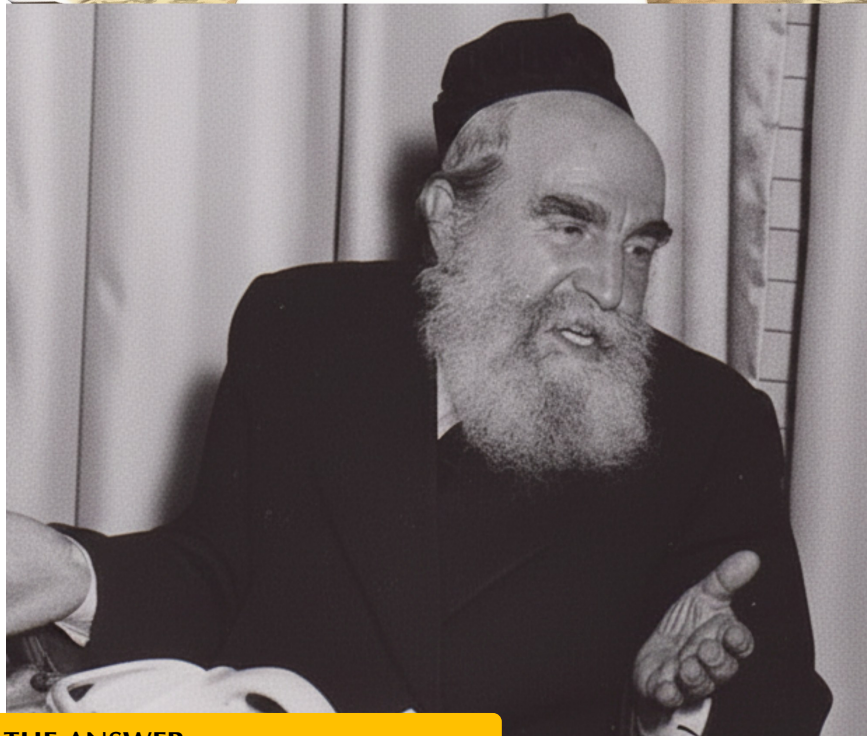
Rav Nota Greenblatt (pictured top) told of one summer when he went to visit Rav Moshe Feinstein (pictured bottom) in the Catskill Mountains.

He arrived in the evening, and Rav Moshe greeted him warmly. As they spoke, Rav Moshe noticed that Rav Nota had a cough. Rav Moshe insisted that he stay the night rather than travel back to New York.

"I didn't sleep that night," Rav Nota said, his eyes welling with tears. "You know why? Because Rav Moshe didn't sleep! He came into my room every half hour to make sure the blanket was covering me properly."

The mere mention of Rav Moshe's name brought tears to Rav Nota's eyes.

From Rav Nota, by R' Shmuel Botnick, published by ArtScroll/Mesorah



THE ANSWER

Regarding last week's question about the Gabbai who made a mistake and gave away one Hagbah to the wrong person, Rav Akiva Meister answered that since the Gabbai is not a paid employee, he has less responsibility and is not obligated to pay for the error. In this case, the man who bought the kibbudim should pay 1,500, and the shul should be willing to accept the loss. Of course, if the Gabbai wants to pay, he's allowed to, but he is not required to.

This week's TableTalk is dedicated in honor the 65th yartzeit of
Yitzchok ben Shaul

By his children Diane and Dovid Lapin

and in appreciation of Rabbi Paysach Diskind and all that he does for the community.



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