



A Taste of Torah

Wise Choice

By Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher

If ever there was a rags-to-riches tale that captures the imagination, it's the story of Yosef's rise to power. A prisoner who spent years in a pit, waiting for G-d to redeem him, he suddenly finds himself standing before Pharaoh, interpreting his dreams. He informs Pharaoh that there will be seven years of plenty immediately followed by seven years of unimaginable famine; he further advises Pharaoh to appoint an administrator to manage the surplus and store it for the coming years of hunger. Pharaoh, duly impressed with Yosef's ability to explain his nocturnal visions, exclaims that he cannot think of anyone as wise as Yosef, and immediately appoints him to the very position Yosef has just proposed. Yosef is instantly propelled into being the second-most powerful person in Egypt.

Pharaoh was no fool. He wouldn't have put Yosef into such a position unless he was confident that he was capable of doing his job. But we are left in the dark as to why, on the basis of an interpretation of a dream, Pharaoh decided Yosef was the wisest person in all of Egypt.

Allow me to veer off to Chanukah for a moment. Chanukah epitomizes a struggle that continues until this very day: The weltanschauung of the Western World - personified by Hellenistic culture - versus the Torah approach. Some have a misconception that the Torah rejects secular wisdom. But this is untrue. The Torah welcomes, even lauds, scientific knowledge, on one condition: it must fall under the rubric of the Torah.

A granddaughter of the saintly Chofetz Chaim was seduced by the secular ideologies that preyed upon so

many Jewish youth of pre-WWII Europe. She once approached her grandfather and exclaimed, "Zaide (Grandfather), why do you remain in the dark ages? Come out into the light and discover the new world that has dawned!" Her grandfather replied, "Today you see airplanes. During the war, they would throw a box of dynamite out of the plane to bring destruction on humanity below. Someday they are going to reach the moon. And those bombs? They are going to create bombs that will be able to destroy the whole world. That is what they make. But we make menschen (people)!"

Wisdom, great, glorious, and attractive as it may be, sows destruction when it is not sourced in Torah. Ultimately, humanity's base desires will overpower and control the wisdom, twist it, and use it for the most perverted, destructive purposes imaginable. But when it is reined in and controlled by the Torah, it builds worlds. A human being whose actions are guided by Torah can be relied upon to use it toward the benefit of Creation and mankind.

It was this idea that King David had in mind when he stated (Psalms 111:10): "The beginning of wisdom is fear of G-d." Wisdom preceded by fear of G-d will allow its owner to grow into a mensch; bereft of that fear, its possessor may well use it for the most diabolical purposes. The wisdom thus fails to achieve anything positive, and is essentially useless; it is under the control of one's lusts and desires.

When Yosef interpreted Pharaoh's dreams, he made it quite clear that he did not take the credit for himself; he attributed any and all success to G-d. It was this quality that impressed Pharaoh.

Stories For The Soul

Never Give Up

In 1933, Rabbi Dovid Leibowitz set out to do the seemingly impossible - to build a yeshiva in America, where assimilation was rampant and people believed Torah was for the ghetto.

In this hostile environment, and in the terrible economic environment of the Great Depression, Reb Dovid forged on despite incredible hardship, and built and built.

On December 5, 1941, a week before Chanuka, Reb Dovid passed away after a terrible illness. The burden of his dream fell on his 26-year-old son, Reb Henschel, who took over the helm of the Chofetz Chaim Yeshiva. He served for 20 years, but the yeshiva never quite got off the ground.

Reb Henschel considered going into a different area of Rabbinics which didn't have the same issues and pressures. After much soul searching, he recalled what his father had told him: that leading the yeshiva was within his grasp and was the best thing he could do. Reb Henschel strategized and revamped the methods by which he led the yeshiva, and it began to turn around.

Since then, the yeshiva has served thousands of students who have gone on to serve many more. They have established branches and affiliates of the yeshiva all over the world.

The Maccabees did not give up, and Reb Dovid and Reb Henschel did not give up. No matter how dark and desperate it seems, the light of Chanuka is there to nurture the light that is already deep within us.

Adapted with permission from ShulWeek by Rabbi Baruch Lederman.

Kollel Happenings

A DEEPER LOOK

Join Rabbi Shachne Sommers as he discusses a number of difficulties encountered in the weekly Torah portion, and develops a comprehensive approach to resolve the issues, simultaneously conveying a deeper understanding of the material being discussed. Sunday nights 7:40-8:30 pm at Kollel, 1516 Xavier, and Tuesday nights at Aish Denver 8-9 pm.



DENVER JEWISH CHILDREN'S ANNUAL EXTRAVAGANZA

Join the Jewish Community on December 25th from 11 am - 3 pm at South Suburban's Family Sports Center, 6901 South Peoria (at Arapahoe Road) in Centennial for a day of fun you won't want to miss! From ice skating, laser tag, and rock climbing for teens, to Lollipop Park for younger children, and much more, there's something for kids of all ages. For more info, email info@denverkollel.org or call 303-668-1878.



TRUST THY FATHER

Join Rabbi Shachne Sommers for "Trust thy Father," a series based on Chovos Ha'Levavos/Duties of the Heart. Discover and delve into vital Jewish concepts of Bitachon. The classes takes place on Tuesdays, from 7:55-8:25 a.m., at Aish. For more info, email info@denverkollel.org or call 303-820-2855.

Interpersonal Issues

When Returning a Lost Item Involves a Loss

One is not obligated to incur a loss in order to return a lost item. Therefore, if one has the choice to save his own item or another's, his own item takes precedence. This is true even if his item is worth substantially less than the other item. However, if he is certain the

owner will reimburse the value of his own inexpensive item, he must save the other item.

Adapted with permission from "The Halachos of Other People's Money" by Rabbi Pinchas Bodner (Feldheim Publishers)

Ask the Rabbi Who Commanded It?

Avner Stein from Tampa, Florida wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

I thought that blessings having "asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu" [that G-d sanctified us with his commandments, and commanded us] are reserved for ones that originate in the Torah. Yet the first blessing for lighting the chanukia also contains this phrase even though the holiday isn't in the Torah. Is this an exception?

Dear Avner Stein,

Lighting Chanukah candles is not one of the 613 mitzvot of the Torah. Rather, it is a Rabbinic mitzvah that was enacted by the Sages of the Sanhedrin (Supreme Torah Court) during the Second Temple period. Yet, the blessing we say when we light the Cha-

nukah candles – "v'tzivanu l'hadlik ner shel Chanukah" – means that Hashem commanded us to light them! How can we say that G-d commanded us to perform a Rabbinic mitzvah? The answer is this: One of the 613 mitzvos in the Torah is the commandment to obey the Sanhedrin (Deuteronomy 17:11), and since the Sages enacted the lighting of Chanukah candles, lighting the candles indeed becomes like a commandment from the Torah.

We say a similar blessing for other Rabbinic commandments as well, such as lighting Shabbat candles Friday afternoon and reading the Scroll of Esther on Purim. Both of these are not commanded in the Torah; yet in the blessing we say that G-d commanded these things, because G-d commands us to listen to the Sages who instituted them.

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It is entirely possible that there were other exceedingly wise individuals in Egypt; but of what use is the wisdom if it is under the sway of the lower self? That is not a wise man; that is a depraved person! Yosef's talents, however, were clearly directed by a Higher Authority; this was true wisdom, wisdom that would bear fruit! Such wisdom, exclaimed Pharaoh, was unmatched.

Tragically, the Chofetz Chaim's vision of the future was all too accurate. But we, those who continue the work of Yosef in his time and the Chashmonaim during their long struggle, must carry on the fight. In a world whose light is fleeting and false, we must look to the Torah as our true source for wisdom.