

A Taste of Torah

A World That Was; A World That Is

By Rabbi Yossi Kaplan

Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler (1892-1953) wrote a letter to his son, describing a world that was before the destruction wrought by World War II. The following is a free translation of that letter:

“There was once a city. Its name was Kelm... And there was once a house in the city; a house of Torah study. That Bais Medrash was full of the holy and the humble; the greatness of their Torah hidden in humility.

“And there was one thing people knew: This holy house would stand forever! But alas, it didn’t stand forever... it wasn’t spared the destruction of WWII. And yet, there is death, and there is death. There is the death of the living dead man, for whom life eludes him, even as he lives. One who carries about living in a fantasy world, pursuing all emptiness, but not that which will bring him to eternal life, the living word of G-d. And then, there is the death of the live man...

“The Bais Medrash of Kelm shed its body, its skeleton. But even as its broken beams lay among the ashes and dying embers, its soul rose through the smoke, untouched, heavenward; the wooden structure was never more than a body housing holiness, anyway.

“I remember days long gone. It was the night of Simchas Torah, a time of intense joy for the Jewish People, the culmination of an entire year of reading the Torah. And the great inhabitants of that house in Kelm went forth into the street, dancing through the city with all their strength... singing, ‘Ashreinu... how fortunate are we... how beautiful is our inheritance.’

“Forty years passed. Imminent danger now faced the Jews, and so entire families gathered in their beloved Bais Medrash, to entreat Hashem, the One G-d of eternal compassion, to have pity on them. But then behold... there in the entryway stood the Nazis. They removed man, woman, and child and had them run through the streets, under blows, without letup.

“Now they stood in the valley of death. And what do you think they did... those holy ones... at that moment? They sang! The Torah commands us in this week’s parsha (Emor 22:32): ‘I shall be sanctified among the children of Israel...’; as you give up your life, you shall sanctify the name of Hashem. And filled with joy to live the word of G-d, even in death, they danced with all their strength. And they sang... ‘Ashreinu... fortunate are we...’ fortunate are we to be the nation of G-d... to be Jews. And the singing intensified as their souls departed.”

A world that was.

But there is also a world that is. Our world. And we live with the same precepts of sanctifying the name of Hashem. Perhaps we may never merit to attain the lofty levels of holiness the Jews of Kelm have attained. But in our own small way, we can sanctify the name of Hashem through our actions. When someone says, “There walks a Jew, look how beautiful is his conduct” - that’s a world alive. A new world built upon the shattered, blackened wood of Kelm. A world that is.



Stories For The Soul

That’s What I Was Taught

Private Yissochor “Rudy” Meyer was a Jewish infantryman for the US Armed Forces during WWII. After the fighting in Germany ended, he was in a displaced persons camp, where he had the opportunity to help his fellow Jews who had survived the horrors of the Holocaust.

One day, Private Meyer was distributing candy to the children in the DP camp. In an effort to bring them closer to the Judaism of their parents’ homes, he told the children that they’d be given the sweet after reciting a blessing. The children eagerly complied, except for one little girl who stubbornly refused.

The soldier, surprised that a child would be so stubborn, pried the girl to explain why she refused to make a blessing.

“I was taught,” said the little child, “that one only makes a blessing once the food is held in the hand.” (This is indeed the law.)

Overawed that a small child, after having gone through such suffering, could so tenaciously hold onto the education of her formative years, Private Meyer handed the child the candy, and she made the blessing.

In this week’s parsha, the Kohanim (Priests) are told to teach their children the special laws that pertain to Kohanim. Rabbi Zalman Sorotzkin (1881-1966) states that the Torah makes a special point of educating the children of Kohanim because those around them, fellow Jews, do not keep the same strictures; a special emphasis is needed to ensure the young Kohanim absorb their special responsibility. But the lesson applies for all Jews - we must strive to inculcate our children with an attachment to Judaism so that they cling to it through thick and thin.

Kollel Happenings

THE M.B. GLASSMAN FOUNDATION GOLD ADOPT-A-BUBBY PROGRAM

Do you know of a senior – a parent, grandparent, aunt, uncle, neighbor, fellow congregant – who would benefit from a weekly phone call to schmooze, share a thought on the parsha or Jewish calendar, or just say hello? Do you have a few minutes a week to call a senior in the community and make a difference in the life of another? Contact the Denver Community Kollel's M.B. Glassman Foundation GOLD Adopt-A-Bubby program! Call Joyce Litzman at the Denver Community Kollel, at 303-820-2855, or email jlitzman@denverkollel.org.

INSIDE THE NUMBERS

In Judaism, numbers are not simply a way to count things. Every number has a special significance. From gematria to *Who Knows One?* recited at the end of the Passover Seder, discover the world of numbers with Rabbi Moshe Heyman of the Denver Community Kollel. Every other Thursday from 2-3 pm at Marathon Investments, 6565 South Dayton St., #1200. For more info, contact rmh@denverkollel.org.

A DEEPER LOOK AT THE PARSHA WITH RABBI SHACHNE SOMMERS

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 issue, simultaneously conveying a deeper understanding of the material being discussed. Sunday nights, 7:40-8:30 pm, at the Kollel for men, 1516 Xavier, and Tuesday nights at the Southeast Kollel Torah center, 8-9 pm, for men and women.

Increase Your Jewish IQ

By: Rabbi Yaakov Zions

Last week we asked: Sometimes the same blessing will contain a different ending depending on the circumstances or time of year. How many can you think of?

A: 1) When Yom Tov and Shabbos coincide, the endings of the Yom Tov blessings in *kiddush* and *Shemone Esrei* will change due to the addition of Shabbos. 2) On Tisha B'Av at *mincha*, the prayer of *nacheim* is added to the blessing of *Vilrushalayim*, and the ending changes, as well. 3) On Shabbos and Yom Tov at *ma'ariv*, the blessing of *Hashkiveinu* has a different ending than it does during the weekdays. 4) When the *Kohanim* recite

Birchas Kohanim, the blessing of *ritzei* during the chazzan's repetition of *Shemone Esrei* differs from the normal text of the blessing. 5) Some have a custom, during the Ten Days or Repentance, to end the final blessing of *Shemoneh Esrei* with "oseh *hashalom*" instead of the standard text.

This week's question: Most of the blessing we recite have their origins in the Talmud or other Tannaitic or Amoraic sources. There are several exceptions; what are they?

To submit an answer to Rabbi Zions, email ryz@denverkollel.org

Ask the Rabbi

All Night Long

Sam in Chicago wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

This is my first time experiencing Shavuot in a yeshiva environment. I'm told that everybody stays up all night studying Torah, which sounds interesting, but at the same time I'm a little wary of doing so. In school I once had a paper due the next day that I stayed up the entire night writing; in the morning my brain felt like fried tofu and I could hardly function. How important is it to stay up all night on Shavuot and why? Is it perhaps more important to get a good night's sleep to fulfill the mitzvos of the day?

Dear Sam,

Many, especially in the Yeshiva world, have the custom to stay awake and study Torah the entire night of Shavuot. Many Sefaradim and Chasidim follow a special order of study initiated by the Arizal (based on a passage in the introduction to the Zohar) whereby they read selected portions of the entire 24 books of the Tanach, the 613 mitzvos, as well excerpts from some esoteric texts.

Shavuot celebrates the day when G-d gave us the Torah on Mount Sinai. By studying all night, we show our love and enthusiasm for this precious gift. Indeed, the 24 books

of Tanach mentioned above are referred to as 24 bridal ornaments with which the Jewish people decorate themselves in preparation to receive the Torah, their wedding document, from the Groom.

Another explanation for staying up all night is that the Jews at Mount Sinai overslept on that historic Shavuot morning! G-d had to "wake them up" to teach them the Torah (sound familiar?). We rectify this by staying up all night, to ensure that we won't sleep late on this day.

Staying up all night is not a halacha nor a Jewish law, but rather a custom for those who feel they are physically up to it. If staying up all night may cause one to sleep late, what was intended to rectify would be ruined. Even if one was able to stay up, but wouldn't be able to concentrate and enjoy the prayers, the Torah readings, and the other mitzvos of the day such as the holiday meal and making one's family happy, he should not stay up the whole night.

Regarding this type of situation, our Sages taught, "Whether one does a lot, or whether one does a little, the main thing is to direct one's heart to Heaven." Happy Shavuot!

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