



Vayigash 5775

December 26, 2014

# A Taste of Torah

## Wagons of Faith

By Rabbi Yossi Kaplan

Egyptian wagons approached Yaakov, heralding the great news: “Yosef is alive!” And now, after twenty-two years of mourning, “the spirit of Yaakov...was revived (Vayigash 45:27).” Twenty-two years earlier, Yaakov’s son Yosef, borne to him by his beloved wife Rochel, had gone missing and was thought to be dead. It was the sight of the wagons that revived him.

But the wagons weren’t the first indication that Yosef was alive. Not wanting her aged grandfather to suffer a shock, Serach, daughter of Asher, had already gently broken the news to Yaakov as she played on her harp.

So let me ask you: Having been informed by Serach that his son Yosef was alive, what greater effect could the wagons have further achieved for Yaakov? Why was his spirit revived only after sighting the wagons?

It was World War I, and the city of Bryansk, Russia, had been invaded by the Germans. In wartime, there are food shortages, and the city of Bryansk was no exception. At this time, pre-WWII, the German army still showed a humane face, and they approached the local rabbi with a request.

The rabbi, the great Rabbi Shimon Shkop (1860-1939), was given the task of distributing life-sustaining ration cards. He, in turn, gathered a number of community laymen and appointed them to oversee this operation. At the time, he told them the following:

The immorality of ancient Egypt was second-to-none; thus, Yaakov’s joy upon discovering Yosef gave way to newfound worry. Yosef had been a seventeen-year-old lad when he was taken from his home. Now, he had risen to the greatest of heights in Egypt, second only to Pharaoh. Could he have kept his faith and purity in these depraved surroundings?

The wagons, writes Rashi, served as a message from Yosef. The Hebrew for ‘wagon’, *agalah*, is phonetically similar to

the Hebrew word for ‘calf’, *eglah*, and both words are spelled with the same letters in Hebrew. The Torah topic that Yosef had been studying with his father prior to their separation twenty-two years earlier was *eglah arufah*. When a person is found murdered outside of a city, the elders of the nearest city must take a calf down to a non-arable valley, where they break its neck and proclaim, “Our hands have not spilled this blood.”

They are, in essence, stating that they are leaders of a city that ensures a traveler’s needs are provided for, giving him the ability to fend for himself on his journey.

Thus, the wagons served as a testimony to Yaakov that Yosef still held on to the Torah he had studied with him so many years earlier. *Wagons of faith*.

But there was a deeper message Yosef was sending to his father, explained Rabbi Shkop. Through the laws of *eglah arufah*, the Torah teaches us the responsibility of a leader. The elders of the city must take responsibility for the well-being of the residents of their city, as well as the needs of those who pass through their city.

Yosef was telling his father, “Yes, I’m a leader of many, many people, but I’ve retained my faith; the Torah’s take on leadership hasn’t been lost on me.”

Rabbi Shkop now turned to the men who would deal with food rationing. “You’re giving out life-sustaining food rations, and these can spell the difference between life and death. You must be careful to distribute them fairly, so that you can faithfully say, ‘Our hands have not spilled this blood.’”

It’s easy to be consumed by our own feelings and needs. But with so many of our brothers and sisters in need, we all have the role of leaders. It’s our job to feel the hurt of other people. The Torah of Yosef; the Torah of Rabbi Shimon Shkop; it’s our Torah too! And Yosef taught us how to be faithful to our Torah. With those *wagons of faith*.

## Stories For The Soul

### Unlikely Reunion

When Rabbi Duvi Bensoussan was a young man studying in Jerusalem, he was planning on visiting an orphanage in Chaderah with his friend Shlomo; Shlomo’s wealthy American uncle had asked him to inspect the orphanage, as he was considering providing it with financial assistance. Just before the visit, Duvi went to a local barber shop for a haircut.

It was only sometime after leaving the barbershop that Duvi realized he had left his gloves there. Not having time to return, he decided he’d retrieve the gloves after his trip.

Once at the orphanage, they were given a tour. At one point, their guide escorted them to the director’s office, and as they waited outside, a 10-year-old boy excitedly ran from the room with a huge smile, congratulating himself for having received a 100 on his chumash test. Duvi went over to the boy to look at the test paper. As he congratulated him for his mark, he glanced at the name of top of the paper, and noticed that the boy’s name was Yitzchak Alfasi - the same name as the Rif, one of the most famous and influential medieval Sephardic sages.

“Did you know you have the same name as the great Rif?” Duvi asked the boy.

“Sure,” the boy replied. “He’s my great-great-great-great grandfather. That’s why my father named me Yitzchak.”

Hearing of the boy’s distinguished lineage and seeing that the boy had potential for Torah study, Duvi asked the director how much Torah was taught at the orphanage; the director replied that due to limited funds, they could only bring a rabbi once a week to teach the boys chumash. Duvi offered to arrange for daily Torah study with the child, and the boy and director agreed.

After leaving the orphanage, Duvi returned to the barber shop in Jerusalem.

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## Kollel Happenings

### JUSTICE AND THE MEDIA AT NEXT TORAH FOR TYCOONS

Join Daniel N. Recht, Shareholder, Recht Kornfeld and Rabbi Aron Yehuda Schwab, Dean of the Denver Community Kollel, as they explore the parameters and limits of self-defense. January 7th, 12-1:15 p.m. at the East Side Kosher Deli. Cost: \$25. RSVP [info@denverkollel.org](mailto:info@denverkollel.org).

### RAV SCHWAB ON CHUMASH AVAILABLE FROM KOLLEL

The Denver Community Kollel is pleased to announce the publication and distribution of Rav Schwab on Chumash. The book is available through the Denver Community Kollel at a special discount rate of \$24. To order, call 303-820-2855, email [info@denverkollel.org](mailto:info@denverkollel.org), or go to [www.denverkollel.org](http://www.denverkollel.org).

### WOMEN'S WELLNESS WORKSHOP ON TUES., JANUARY 13TH

Don't miss the Kollel's 3rd Annual Women's Wellness Workshop at Cableland, 4150 Shangri-La Drive (at Leetsdale Dr. and Cedar Ave.), on January 13th at 5:00 pm. Discover how to achieve optimum health in mind, body and soul. As always, there will be great food and camaraderie. Cost is \$54; reserve by Jan. 9th and receive a free copy of Dr. David Lieberman's book *Seek Peace and Pursue It*. To reserve, visit [www.denverkollel.org](http://www.denverkollel.org), email [info@denverkollel.org](mailto:info@denverkollel.org) or call 303-820-2855.

# Increase Your Jewish IQ

By: Rabbi Yaakov Zions

Last week we asked:

**Q:** The *haftarah* of Shabbos and Yom Tov is generally related to the topic of the Torah portion being read that week, with the notable exception of the weeks from the 17th of Tammuz through Sukkos, when the *haftarah* is related to the season. What other exceptions can you think of?

**A:** When Rosh Chodesh occurs

the day after Shabbos and Shabbos Hagadol (the Shabbos that precedes Pesach). (All other special *haftaros* are linked to a special *maftir* Torah reading.)

**This week's question:** There is a halachic discussion as to whether one may repeat a single word during the recitation of *Shema*. Can you find a proof to this question from the Shabbos prayers?

## Ask the Rabbi World's Youngest Rabbi

Duncan Flett from London, UK wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

I am a researcher with Guinness World Records, the world's biggest selling copyright book. I write as one who needs some help with an issue concerning Judaism ~ should you not be able to help me could you please kindly pass this mail on to a colleague or associate whom you think may be able to help. I am currently looking into finding the world's youngest qualified rabbi ever. I was hoping you could help point me in the right direction. Many thanks.

Dear Duncan Flett

The Talmud records that Shmuel Hanavi (Samuel the Prophet), at age two, rendered a complicated yet correct legal decision

based on the Talmudic principles of Biblical interpretation. The correctness of his ruling was endorsed by the High Priest and the leading sage of the day, Eli Hakohen. (Talmud Bavli, Tractate Berachot 31b)

The basis for understanding that the above encounter occurred while Shmuel was only two is the Book of Samuel I, chapter 1, which records this event as having taken place just after the child was weaned, which throughout the Talmudic writings is considered to be age two. (Tractate Ketubot and elsewhere.)

That would make him just about the youngest Rabbi around!

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## Stories for the Soul

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The barber proudly handed him his gloves, and announced, "Now everyone will know that Moshe Alfasi is an honest man!"

Duvi, hearing the fellow's last name, asked him if he had a son named Yitzchak. The barber sadly replied that he indeed did, and told Duvi of how he had once been married, but his wife had serious problems and mistreated their son. The courts stepped in and took their son away from them, placing him in an orphanage. Even after the couple divorced, the courts refused to tell Moshe where his son was; he hadn't seen him in

years.

Duvi excitedly informed the barber that he had just met his son in Hadera, and that he was doing quite well, having received 100 on his chumash test, and that he had agreed to study Torah daily.

Moshe was overjoyed. He ended up moving to Hadera to be with his son, and he became very involved in his son's life.

In this week's parsha, Yaakov is reunited with his long-lost son Yosef, whom he thought dead. But Hashem orchestrated a reunion, even as things looked their bleakest.

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