

A Taste of Torah

Dogs and Our Unlimited Potential

By Rabbi Shmuel Halpern

I have often heard people wonder about the spiritual level of dogs and various other animals. They sometimes seem so attuned to whatever is going on around them, a fact which seems to indicate a superior intelligence. In fact, there are several indications of this in the Talmud. In Bava Kama (60b), the Gemara relates that when the dogs of a city whimper, it indicates the presence of the Angel of Death. In addition, when the dogs “laugh”, it indicates the presence of Eliyahu Hanavi. How can they see things that we humans cannot see?

Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz (1902-1979) explains that G-d implanted spiritual powers within every creation. This applies to all aspects of creation, from the immobile rock to the apex of creation, the human being. The Sages teach us that in order for man to receive the ultimate goodness - the World to Come - he must overcome challenges and make good choices using his free will. It is for this reason that his great spiritual powers must remain hidden, only to be accessed by strengthening his spiritual side. Animals, on the other hand, don't function with free will and therefore have easy access to their spiritual powers, enabling them to perceive things that remain hidden from us.

In last week's parsha, we see how our forefather Ya'akov approached the well in Charan, finding the shepherds all waiting for the large stone covering the well to be

removed. Ya'akov easily removed it, as Rashi writes (29:10), “Like one would remove a cork, to show that his strength was great.” On a simple level, this means that Ya'akov was physically very strong. If that is the case, why, in the prayer for rain of Shemini Atzeres, do we ask that we receive the blessing of rain in the merit of Ya'akov who dedicated his *heart* and removed the stone? If it was merely an expression of physical strength, what great merit did it create? Rabbi Shmuelevitz explains that Ya'akov had tremendous spiritual powers that enabled him, through his great dedication to his fellow man, to lift a stone that normally required many people to lift it, thus allowing the shepherds access to the water.

In this week's parsha, we find Ya'akov sending what the verse calls *malachim* to his brother Eisav. Rashi quotes two opinions as to whether they were human messengers or angels. The Shlah Hakadosh (Rabbi Yeshaya HeLevi Horowitz, c. 1565-1630) says that both opinions are true. Ya'akov sent human messengers to Eisav, and he also sent angels to present his case in Heaven, arguing against the ministering angel of Eisav. We thus see how our forefathers lived in two parallel worlds. Beyond the superficial reality, there is a deeper spiritual reality, through which Hashem offers each and every one of us unlimited potential. May we all merit to realize our great potential.

Stories For The Soul

Barngate

Rabbi Chananya Chollak, the head of the charity Ezer Mitzion, often prayed shacharis with Rabbi Elazar Menachem Shach (c. 1899-2001) in his home. One day, following the prayers, Rabbi Shach requested that Rabbi Chollak look on the bookshelves for a certain, hard-to-find *sefer* authored by Rabbi Reuven Dennenberg, a great Lithuanian rabbi of past generations.

Rabbi Chollak found the *sefer*, and Rabbi Shach handed him the key to the safe that was in the room; the safe was used to hold the money that people brought to Rabbi Shach to distribute to the needy. Rabbi Shach instructed Rabbi Chollak to open the safe and put the *sefer* inside.

After he placed the *sefer* in the safe, Rabbi Shach asked Rabbi Chollak, “Rav Chananya, are you positive that you closed the safe?” After answering in the affirmative, Rabbi Shach again asked, “Are you one hundred percent sure?” Rabbi Chollak again confirmed that the *sefer* was tucked away safely. Still not satisfied, Rabbi Shach asked him to make sure the safe was locked. After doing so, Rabbi Chollak could not contain his curiosity, and he asked Rabbi Shach why this *sefer* was so very important.

Rabbi Shach explained, “A short time ago I saw an important idea on a certain piece of Talmud in that *sefer*, and I want to delve into it further. I want to make sure the *sefer* does not get taken or misplaced!”

In this week's parsha, Ya'akov returns alone, at night, to recover some small earthen jugs. Ya'akov placed himself in danger because he understood that all possessions bestowed upon us by G-d are for the sole purpose of serving G-d; thus, they are all important.

Kollel Happenings

FAMILY FUN AT JEWISH FAMILY EXTRAVAGANZA ON DEC. 25TH

Join the Kollel for family fun at the annual Jewish Children's Extravaganza on Thursday, Dec. 25th, from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. The event will be held at South Suburban Family Sports Center, 6901 S. Peoria. Cost: \$13; discounted group rates are available before 12/21. Admission includes unlimited rides. Visit www.mazeltot.org to find out how to join for free until 12/24. For general information, call 303-820-2855 or email info@denverkollel.org.

THE M.B. GLASSMAN FOUNDATION GOLD LUNCH & LEARN PROGRAM

The M.B. Glassman Foundation GOLD Program is a division of the Denver Community Kollel dedicated to bringing Torah study to seniors in the community. Don't miss a great Lunch and Learn class on the weekly parsha at the East Side Kosher Deli, 499 S. Elm St. at 11:30 am. There is no charge for the lunch or the learning! Transportation can be arranged. For more information, contact rmf@denverkollel.org or call 303-820-2855.

THE FAR SIDE OF THE TALMUD

Aggada, the passages of the Talmud that focuses on Jewish thought and outlook, provides keen insights into human nature, and offers advice on how to live our lives, can be difficult to understand, but the knowledge and wisdom hiding beneath the surface is ample reason to make the effort. Be fascinated and inspired as Rabbi Moshe Heyman presents a whole new dimension in Torah learning based on the classic work *Ain Yaakov*. Tuesdays, 1:45-2:45 pm at the Kollel Torah Center, 9550 Bellevue Ave. For more info, contact rmh@denverkollel.org.

Increase Your Jewish IQ

By: Rabbi Yaakov Zions

Last week we asked:

Q: There are three places in the prayers where a verse is repeated twice. What are those places, and why are they repeated?

A: Three times: In the *pesukei dezimrah* section of *shacharis*, the verse of "*kol haneshamah tehalel Kah*", as well as the verse of "*Hashem yimloch le'olam va'ed*" are repeated to signify the conclusion of a section of the prayers. In the Motzoei Shabbos (Saturday night) *ma'ariv* prayers, when the Psalm of "*Yosheiv b'seser elyon*" is recited, the

final verse is repeated. Repeating the final verse is, in a sense, tantamount to repeating the entire Psalm. As there are 124 words in the Psalm, saying it twice equals 248 words, which correspond to the 248 limbs of the body.

This week's question: Browsing through used sefarim at a fair, I picked up an old, yellowed siddur. A note attached to the cover read, "Beware, the instructions in this siddur are outdated."

What does this label mean? Should I refrain from purchasing it?

Ask the Rabbi

Divine Comedy

Coby's Daddy from Jerusalem wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

This question is from my 4-year old son, Coby, from the Old City of Jerusalem: "What makes G-d laugh?"

Dear Coby's Daddy,

Your four year old son is asking a very deep question! And, of course, the answer to him is that G-d laughs at stuff that's really funny.

As the old Yiddish rhyme goes: "Ah mentch tracht, und Gut lacht." This means, "Man plans, and G-d laughs."

More than just a stitch of folk wisdom, this idea is well-based in classical sources. "The One who dwells in the Heavens laughs," wrote David, King of Israel, regarding the Divine take on those who try to wipe out

the Jewish People (Psalms 2). "G-d snickers at them" (Ibid.).

The futility of anti-Semitic plans to wipe us out is - ultimately - funny. People make plans, but G-d "laughs" when He knows that these plans will never materialize.

Now, G-d's essence is beyond comprehension. We, the created, can't understand the Creator. Still, the Torah talks about G-d in ways we can relate to, such as "G-d's Hand", "G-d's mouth", even though G-d doesn't have a hand or mouth in the physical sense. So, too, G-d does not laugh as we know it.

But you can't invent something if you don't know what it does. To invent the light bulb and gramophone, Thomas Edison needed to know what sight and sound were. Therefore, G-d, who created everything including our capacity for humor, certainly "knows" a good joke when He hears one.

The Torah Weekly is made possible through a generous grant from the

Harry H. Beren Foundation of Lakewood, NJ, in memory of Harry H. Beren, z"l.

Denver Community Kollel: 1516 Xavier Street, Denver, CO 80204 Tel: 303-820-2855 Fax: 303-820-2806

Email: info@denverkollel.org Web: www.denverkollel.org

To receive Torah Weekly by email, send an email to torah-subscribe@denverkollel.org