



Yisro 5775

February 6, 2015

# A Taste of Torah

## A Nation Apart; A Nation Alive!

By Rabbi Yossi Kaplan

As they encamped at Mt. Sinai 3,327 years ago, the Jews made a unanimous decision: "The entire people responded together and said, "Everything that Hashem has spoken we shall do!" (Shemos 19:8) Thus, amid lightning and thunder, Hashem gave us the Torah. Its guiding light would forever illuminate the way of those who walk along the path of truth.

And yet, says the Talmud (Shabbos 88a) it wasn't until nearly one thousand years later, during the story of Purim, that the Jews accepted the Torah willingly; until then the Torah had been forced upon them.

But how can this be? This was the nation that viewed great miracles performed for them during the Exodus from Egypt. Theirs was a generation in which Hashem's love of His children was clearly apparent. How could they refuse His word? Why *would they* refuse His word? And doesn't this Talmudic passage contradict the complete acceptance of the Torah voiced by the Jewish Nation when they said, "We will do and we will listen"?

Martin Luther, leader of the Protestant Reformation and ensuing split from the Roman Catholic Church in the early 1600's, was first known as a great friend of the Jews. With time, though, he showed himself to be a vicious enemy. So what was this man, a friend or foe? He was one and the same. His primary goal was to convert the Jews. Thinking he could achieve this through sweet talk, he showed himself a friend; when that didn't work, his true colors shone through with evil brute force.

For generations now, we've been wooed by some nations and slaughtered by others. And, more often than not, they have had one directive: "Convert or die; our religion or no religion." And

yet, our nation has kept its identity. To this end, the Torah has given us many laws to keep us apart from the gentiles.

In recent generations, however, there has arisen a new school of thought among some Jews. "The Jewish People can't survive alone," they claim. "This self-imposed segregation will cause hatred!" And so we ask, who's right? Do we separate or join?

Purim. The most astounding turnaround in history. Haman, prime minister of the world power Persia, had a decree issued: "All must bow down to Haman." No one dared disobey - besides Mordechai, leader of the Jews. Haman had an idol hanging from his neck, and Mordechai wouldn't bow to an idol.

Jews, then as now, said, "How can we refuse - it's dangerous!" Indeed, so complained Haman to the king: This is a nation that dwells alone!

And so the Jews had worried too, says the Chofetz Chaim (1838-1933), when offered the Torah at Mt. Sinai: Of course we want the Torah, but how will we keep it when surrounded by the nations? We will be so different! It will cause hatred! Hashem needed to push us into accepting the Torah - until Purim.

As it turned out, it was Haman who needed to fear, not the Jews. Haman was hanged on the very gallows he had prepared for Mordechai. It was the most stunning, irrational turnaround. Everything was turned on its head. Mordechai, who insisted on standing out from the rest of the world, became the savior of the Jewish People.

It was then that the Jews realized that keeping apart is the only way. Hashem created the Jewish people to be a light onto the nations, and for that purpose He keeps us apart. And, defying all odds in every generation, we are a nation alive!

## Stories For The Soul

### Searching for Leaven - on Pesach

It was just moments before the Pesach Seder in the home of the Chassidic master Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev (1740-1809) when he suddenly announced that he would not begin the Seder until the chassidim in attendance brought him fifty Persian scarves, ten pounds of Turkish tobacco, and one loaf of bread.

The chassidim were astounded. "Rebbe, where are we supposed to get these items? The scarves and tobacco are all contraband and no one has any. And bread?! It's Pesach - where can we find a loaf of bread in Berditchev?!" But Reb Levi Yitzchak would not budge.

Having no choice, the chassidim set out to search for the items demanded by Reb Levi Yitzchak. After much pleading and cajoling from the local Jewish populace, they returned with the scarves and tobacco. "Where's is the bread?" asked Reb Levi Yitzchak. With tears in their eyes, the chasidim pleaded, "Rebbe, the scarves and tobacco - that we managed. But where will we find bread among the Jews of Berditchev on Pesach?! It is simply impossible!"

Reb Levi Yitzchak lifted his eyes to the heavens and said, "Dear Father in Heaven, the Russian government has made owning a Persian scarf highly illegal but, nevertheless, the Jews of Berditchev own at least 100 scarves. There is a serious penalty for anyone caught with Turkish tobacco, and the borders of Russia are guarded by hundreds of soldiers; nevertheless, there is plenty of Turkish tobacco to be found in Berditchev."

"You, Hashem, have no visible army or police force, nor are there any physical signs of Your Heavenly Court. Your command of not possessing any *chometz* was declared over 3,000 years ago, yet there is no bread at all to be found in the entire city! *U'Mi K'Amcha Yisroel* - Who is like Your nation of Yisroel!" And with that, he began the Seder.

## Kollel Happenings

### CONTAGIOUS DISEASES AT FEB. 11 TORAH FOR TYCOONS

Join Dr. Daniel M. Mogyoros, infectious diseases specialist, and Rabbi Eli Mozes, Community Scholar of the Denver Community Kollel, as they explore the ethics of treating contagious diseases. February 11th, 12-1:15 p.m. at the East Side Kosher Deli. Cost: \$25. RSVP info@denverkollel.org.

### LEARN 2 LEARN

You have long dreamed of acquiring the tools to achieve proficiency in learning Gemara on your own. But how? The Denver Community Kollel offers a comprehensive, step-by-step, level-by-level program crafted for people just like you. All you need is the ability to read Hebrew; we will teach you the rest. For more information, contact mh@denverkollel.org.

### 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 mh@denverkollel.org.

# Increase Your Jewish IQ

By: Rabbi Yaakov Zions

**Last week we asked:** How is it possible, under some circumstances, to read the same Torah reading eight times in one year (besides the readings of Rosh Chodesh, Pesach, or fast days)?

**A:** When Pesach begins on Shabbos (as it will this year), the beginning of Parshas Shemini is read eight times in the Diaspora: 1) at mincha of Shabbos of Parshas Tzav, 2-3) at shacharis on the Monday and Thursday preceding Pesach, 4-5) twice at mincha on Shabbos of the first and last day of Pesach, 6-7)

at shacharis of Monday and Thursday of the week following Pesach, and 8) on the Shabbos after Pesach when the entire Parshas Shemini is read.

**This week's question:** Every *haftarah* we read on Shabbos or on a holiday is followed by four blessings, and three when read on a weekday. What is the exception to this rule? (besides Rosh Chodesh and Pesach)?

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

## Ask the Rabbi

### A Page from History

Gloria Weber from Sherman Oaks, CA wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

Where can I learn about the history of the Daf Yomi (the worldwide coordinated study of a page of Talmud per day). My recollection is that the "uncoordinated coordination" began about 70 years ago, but I don't know that for sure, and I don't remember the name of the Rabbi who promoted or proposed it. I assume there were scholars and laymen who were studying a page of Talmud a day before that. Were they all studying different pages then? What prompted the promoter to make his proposal? How was it first coordinated or promulgated?

Dear Gloria Weber,

The idea of having a universal Daf Yomi was first proposed by Rabbi Meir Shapiro of Lublin. It was accepted in 1922 by the Council of Torah Sages in Eastern Europe, and thus began what is today an international study scheme by which tens of thousands of Jews worldwide study the same folio page of Talmud every day.

When Rabbi Shapiro raised the idea, one of his most prominent backers was Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan, known as the Chafetz Chaim. He supported the idea because certain portions of the Talmud were not commonly studied, "neglected" in favor of more "popular" portions. The methodical study of a page of Talmud a day ensured that the entire Talmud would be studied in the course of seven-and-a-half years.

The first completion of the Daf Yomi cycle took place on Tu B'Shvat 1930. In honor of Rabbi Shapiro, it was celebrated in his

town, Lublin. The second completion in 1938 attracted 20,000 celebrants to Lublin, indicating just how popular Daf Yomi had become over such a short period.

The third completion was in 1945. Because of the Holocaust, the largest celebrations were in Israel. The fourth completion was in 1953. The fifth celebration in 1960 was the first one attracting mass attendance in America. Amongst others, it was attended by Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, Rabbi Yaakov Kaminetzky and Rabbi Aharon Kotler.

The sixth completion in 1968 came shortly after the reunification of Jerusalem and the return of the Western Wall. At that time, celebrations were held in the USA, England, Belgium, Argentina, Mexico, Holland and France. The eighth completion in 1982 was the first to cater to large crowds in America, filling New York's Felt Forum to capacity (5,000 seats) with thousands of people standing outside. In Israel there were 20,000 participants.

In 1990, 20,000 people crowded into Madison Square Gardens to celebrate the ninth completion. The tenth completion was in 1997. In America alone there were over 70,000 participants! And tens of thousands more through out the world.

Virtually any place Jews are, there are people studying Daf Yomi. It's wonderful that a person can go almost anywhere in the world and participate in a class on the exact same section of Talmud he is currently studying. It draws Jews together in a unique way.

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