

# A Taste of Torah

## Polishing Diamonds

by Rabbi Avraham David Karnowsky

One of the great Chassidic masters famously said, "If you believe that it's possible to destroy, believe that it's possible to rectify." The meaning of the popular adage is that the same G-d Who said sin and iniquity destroy also gave us the ability to rectify the damage that we caused.

This is a subject that needs understanding, especially this Shabbos, which is referred to as Shabbos Shuva (Shabbos of Return). What are the mechanics of such a system? If we really caused destruction and ruin through our misdeeds, how is it possible to repair that? The past has already happened and the harm is done, so how can it be that one can repent sincerely and become clean and holy once again?

The Medrash in Parshas Toldos says something so incredible that it appears almost impossible to comprehend. It is discussing the episode where Rivka wants Yaakov to impersonate Eisav. Yaakov responds that this will not work because "Eisav my brother is a hairy man and I am a smooth-skinned man." (Bereishis 27:11) The Medrash expounds, "Like the verse says in Ha'azinu, 'For Hashem's portion is His people.' This is comparable to a hairy man and a smooth-skinned man who were standing at the edge of a silo and some chaff blew onto them. The hairy man had it stuck in his hair, but the smooth-skinned man wiped his hand and removed it. So, too, Eisav the *nasha* (wicked) is dirty from sin all year and is unable to clean himself. But Yaakov is dirty from sin all year, comes to Yom Hakippurim, and is able to atone for all his sins."

This does not sound very fair! Yaakov

and Eisav can both sin all year, yet one has the ability to atone while the other cannot. How is one to understand such a phenomenon?

The Maharal (Rabbi Yehuda Loewe, c. 1512-1609) in his work *Gevuros Hashem* (Ch. 8) explains that for an Eisav personality, the hairiness is indicative that all dirt that comes his way becomes entangled and caught; it cannot be removed. A hairy person is one whose predilection is to be dirty, having lost the ability to separate the dirt from himself. The Eisavs of the world are defined by the filth that has become part of their essence, and every new speck of dirt becomes part of the person. For someone who is clean, though, a little dirt is no big deal; all he has to do is wipe it off, and he will be clean once again.

This is the key to the difference between Yaakov and Eisav. A Jew's essence is holy, completely removed from sin. Even when a Jew sins, it does not enter inside, but adheres to the outside like dirt on one's clothes. The Maharal goes on to reveal that this is the root of the eternal connection between the Jewish Nation and the Land of Israel. The Torah tells us that the Land of Israel will disgorge anyone who tries to defile it, because its essence is holy. So, too, the soul of a Jew rejects anything that tries to make it impure. We are the smooth-skinned person who, when dirty, can simply swipe his hand and, in one swoop, remove the grime.

This is the key to our power of repentance. It is precisely because of our holiness that we have the ability to rectify our shortcomings. "G-d's portion is His people;" we are a people

## Stories For The Soul

### Blind Faith

Rabbi Yosef Karmel, director of Lev L'Achim (an outreach organization) in the United States, related that he once took some supporters on a trip to Israel to show them the organization's work. During their trip, they stopped in Meron to pray at the grave of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and other great people buried in the area. While there, they met a man who was blind and whose face and neck were badly scarred.

The man related that some years earlier, he had fallen from a roof. He had lain in a coma for days, and when he finally awoke, he had lost his vision and was left with scars from his injuries.

The men speaking with him had nothing to say; all they could respond was, "Oy!"

The man exclaimed in Hebrew, "*Al tagid li 'Oy!'*", "Don't tell me 'Oy!'"

The man explained that prior to the accident, his life had been in shambles. He had been a drug addict, with no spirituality in his life.

The accident forced him to reexamine his life. He was visited by an Orthodox volunteer, and slowly he discovered a new world of G-d, faith and trust. Today, said the man, he was far happier than he was before. He observed mitzvos and had developed a relationship with G-d.

"Now," concluded the man, "you understand why I say, '*Al tagid li 'Oy!'*'"

The Song of Ha'azinu details the calamities that will befall the Jewish People. It is called a song despite the doom and gloom because ultimately, those calamities are the means for a much brighter future, as discussed at the end of the song.

## Kollel Happenings

### USE GOOD JUDGMENT SERIES

The Kollel is offering a two-part series for women in two different locations titled *Use Good Judgment: The Nature of Rosh Hashana & Yom Kippur*.

*Why Is This Day Different?: The Repentance of Yom Kippur vs. Year Round* with Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher will take place this Sunday, September 24, 9:45 am at the Hoffman home, 1582 Winona Ct., and on Wednesday, September 27, 8 pm at the Meyer home, 9532 E. Grand Pl.

### DONOR APPRECIATION EVENT MONDAY, SEP. 25

The Kollel will hold its annual Donor Appreciation Event on Monday, September 25, 6:45 pm at the Beth Jacob High School of Denver Educational Building, 5100 W. 14<sup>th</sup> Ave. For more info or to reserve, visit [www.denverkollel.org](http://www.denverkollel.org), email [info@denverkollel.org](mailto:info@denverkollel.org) or call 303-820-2855.

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

The GOLD Senior Division of the Denver Community Kollel dedicated to bringing Torah study to seniors in the community. Don't miss a great Lunch & Learn class on the weekly parsha at the East Side Kosher Deli, 499 S. Elm St. at 12:00 am. There is no charge for the lunch or the learning! Transportation can be arranged. For more information, contact [rnf@denverkollel.org](mailto:rnf@denverkollel.org) or call 303-820-2855.

## Increase Your Jewish IQ

By Rabbi Yaakov Zions

**Last week we asked:** On which day of *selichos* (of the period surrounding the *Yamim Nora'im*) are the smallest amount of *selichos* recited?

**A:** Many assume the answer is simple: Erev Yom Kippur. However, this is not completely accurate for two reasons. First, this depends on custom. According to the custom of most Ashkenazic communities, Erev Yom Kippur has the shortest *selichos* service. The Sephardic custom, however, is to recite the same *selichos* every day (with slight variations for the day of the week and the Days of Repentance). Even among Ashkenazim, the German custom (based on Rema Orach Chaim 604:2) is to recite a very

lengthy version of *selichos* on Erev Yom Kippur. Second, the term *selichos* (or *selicha* in singular) technically refers only to the actual chapters of liturgy. Erev Yom Kippur has three *selichos*, similar to the days at the beginning of the *selichos* period. All of the above mentioned days (except the opening day of *selichos* when we recite four *selichos*) qualify for the title of the days with the smallest amount of *selichos* recited. It is only through the deletion of some beginning and ending parts of the service that it becomes the shortest *selichos* service!

**This week's question:** What non-food *bracha* is recited daily, but omitted on Yom Kippur?

## Lives of Our Torah Leaders

### Rabbi Mordechai ben Hillel – the Mordechai, Part VIII

Rabbi Yosef Karo used the Mordechai as a major source for his Bais Yosef commentary to the Tur. The Bais Yosef was later condensed into the *Shulchan Aruch* (Code of Jewish Law).

Rabbi Moshe Isserles (known as the Rema), who wrote glosses on the Tur and Bais Yosef titled *Darchei Moshe*, and also incorporated a gloss into the text of the *Shulchan Aruch*, largely to note where Ashkenazic differed from the Sefardic Rabbi Karo's decisions, also drew heavily on the Mordechai. In fact, the Rema

lectured on the Mordechai in his yeshiva in Krakow, and numerous responsa from the Rema deal with resolving difficult passages in the Mordechai.

The Mordechai continues to be studied in *batei medrash* throughout the world until today. It is part of the never-ending sea that is the Torah. While the wicked men who murdered Rabbi Mordechai ben Hillel and their ilk have joined the ash-heap of history, Rabbi Mordechai lives on forever through the Torah he left us.

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of smooth skin. Granted that some may sin a great deal during the year, but comes Yom Kippur and we can receive atonement. The destruction never reached into the recesses of our souls, and with real repentance we can wipe away the dirt that stuck to our clothes all year.

Shlomo Hamelech writes in *Shir Hashirim* (1:5) "I am black [with sin], but still

beautiful." This is the essence of a Jew; we may look blackened from sin, but the inside is still beautiful. Every Jew has to know that however mired in sin he may be, his inside is still clean and beautiful. Some people may have to scrub harder than others, but, ultimately, the soul will shine through like a sparkling diamond.

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