



A Taste of Torah

Reverse Order

by Rabbi Yaakov Zions

Imagine attending a class, delivered by a renowned professor. You eagerly await the presentation of an hour-long synopsis of a decades-long study titled *Reforming the World into a Better Place*. The lecture begins with a discussion about how theft is damaging our society and how one must abstain from all forms of stealing and robbery. Wouldn't you be let down? Aren't these basic ideas, taught to us (hopefully!) at a ripe, young age?

Most of our parsha deals with interpersonal dealings and their laws. Many of the laws seem so basic, almost elementary; why must they be part of our eternal spiritual heritage? Must we be told to pay for stolen items or damages caused by one's negligence? Are these the laws about which the verse (Devarim 4:6) tells us, "Observe them faithfully, for that will be (proof of) your wisdom and discernment to other nations, who, upon hearing of all these laws will say, 'Surely, that great nation is a wise and discerning people?'" Rabbi Shamshon Refael Hirsch (1808-1888), in his commentary on Chumash and in other writings, underscores the idea that these laws are different from all other interpersonal laws throughout history and around the globe. They are, indeed, our source of wisdom. To quote his remarkable words (Shemos 19:10): "Jewish Law is the *only* system of laws that did *not* emanate from the people whose constitution it was intended to be. Judaism is the *only* religion that did *not* spring from the hearts of the people who find in it the spiritual basis of their lives. It is precisely this 'objective' quality of Jewish Law and of the Jewish religion that makes them both unique, setting them apart clearly and distinctly from all else on Earth that goes by the name

of law or religion. This quality makes Jewish Law the sole factor in human culture that can be considered the catalyst and ultimate goal of every other manifestation of progress, whereas the Law itself, as the given, absolute ideal, remains above and beyond any idea of progress." Paraphrased beautifully by one contemporary scholar: "In every religion, the people make the laws; in Judaism, the laws make the people." It is precisely the Divine nature of our mitzvos (which include interpersonal laws) that makes us unique!

Perhaps we can take this idea a bit deeper with an insight of Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik of Brisk (1853-1918). The Zohar (2:161b) relates that Hashem peered into the Torah and (only then) created this world. What does this mean and how does this relate to us? Rabbi Chaim explained that we usually divide mitzvos into two categories: *mishpatim*, (rational mitzvos), and *chukim* (mitzvos whose reasoning isn't readily apparent to us). *Mishpatim*, such as abstention from murder and theft, are understood by all civilized people as being wrong, for the existence of civilization as we know it depends on the inviolability of personal life and property.

Quite the contrary, says Rabbi Chaim. Hashem created this world in such a fashion that murder and theft are unacceptable to our minds due to His Torah's prohibitions against them! This is the meaning of the abovementioned Zohar; Hashem created our world according to the blueprint of Torah. These laws may seem simple to us, but that is a byproduct of them being part of Hashem's Torah! May we merit fulfilling these mitzvos, as well all the other mitzvos, and thereby appear wise and discerning to all Mankind.

Stories For The Soul

Its Not Worth It

The Chofetz Chaim (Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan; 1838-1933) once stayed in a village for Shabbos. He had a purse with money in it, and he needed a safe place to leave it for Shabbos. He went to the local rabbi's house and asked if he could leave the money there. The rabbi was taken aback, as the Talmud states one ought not deposit or lend money to another without witnesses, as this may lead the recipient to transgress and deny the money. The rabbi decided he would point out the error to the Chofetz Chaim after Shabbos, when he came to claim his money.

On Sunday, the Chofetz Chaim returned to the rabbi to say goodbye before leaving the town. The rabbi was very surprised that the Chofetz Chaim did not ask for his money back. He assumed that at any moment, he would recall the deposit, but he was shocked to see him climb into the wagon, ready to depart. The rabbi finally ran over to the Chofetz Chaim. "Don't you remember that you left money with me before Shabbos?" "Of course I remember," replied the Chofetz Chaim. "But our Sages forbid us to lend or leave money without witnesses. In order to avoid violating this prohibition, I left the money with you as a gift."

"You can have it back!" exclaimed the rabbi. "I give it to you wholeheartedly." The

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Kollel Happenings

KOLLEL 19TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION THIS TUESDAY

The Kollel will celebrate 19 years of bringing Torah learning, Torah teaching and Torah living to Denver this Tuesday, Feb. 28th, 6:30 pm, at Aish Denver. Rabbi Daniel and Adina Krausz will receive the Betzalel Award, and the Kollel will mark the opening of its new Southeast Torah Center and its temporary West Denver location. To reserve, email journal@denverkollel.org, visit denverkollel.org, or call 303-820-2855.

IMMIGRATION & NATIONAL SECURITY THIS WED. AT 4T

Join Kenneth H. Stern, Partner, Stern & Curray LLC, and Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher, Senior Educator for the Denver Community Kollel, as they explore the issues of immigration and maintaining security. Wednesday, March 1st, 12-1:15 p.m. at the East Side Kosher Deli. Cost: \$25. RSVP 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 12:00 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.

Increase Your Jewish IQ

By Rabbi Yaakov Zions

Last week we asked: From what age was one obligated to provide the annual *machatzis hashekel* (half-shekel) to provide for the *Bais Hamikdash* (Temple) service?

A: The Mishna (Shekalim 1:3-4) tells us that only adult males were obligated to give the *machatzis hashekel*; if women, minors or slaves donated it, though, it was accepted. The commentators differ

whether the minor in this context is the usual halachic minor prior to Bar Mitzva (age thirteen), or below the age of twenty.

This week's question: What prayer-related halacha is based upon whether one was obligated in the annual *machatzis hashekel* (half-shekel)?

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

Lives of Our Torah Leaders

Rabbi Yosef Caro – the Bais Yosef XIV

Countless other commentaries have been written on the *Shulchan Aruch*, thus removing the *Shulchan Aruch* from the realm of simplicity to the realm of the scholarly. The *Shulchan Aruch*, like the Rambam's *Mishnah Torah* written centuries earlier, ultimately did not remain a basic, concise work intended to provide basic halacha, due to the huge amount of analysis, discussion, and writing that it underwent, and continues to undergo, by later generations of serious Torah students.

Rabbi Caro wrote another work, this one a commentary on the Rambam's *Mishnah Torah*. One of the criticisms of the Rambam's *Mishnah Torah* was that he did not quote his sources. Rabbi Vidal di Tolouse (14th-century Spain) wrote a commentary titled *Maggid Mishnah* on the *Mishnah Torah*, wherein he referenced the sources for the Rambam's rulings, defended them against the critiques of the Ra'avad (Rabbi Avraham ben Dovid of Provence; 1125-1198) (though he himself does not always agree with the

Rambam's viewpoint), and analyzed the Rambam's opinions and those of other Torah scholars. The *Maggid Mishnah* commentary is only extant on six of the fourteen sections of *Mishnah Torah*.

Rabbi Caro's work, as well, seeks to provide sources for the Rambam's rulings and to discuss the Rambam's viewpoint and those of other medieval Torah authorities. Unlike the *Maggid Mishnah*, the entirety of the *Kesef Mishnah* is extant today, and it is an invaluable resource for the serious Torah student seeking to understand the Rambam's words.

The *Kesef Mishnah* was published between 1574-1576 in Venice, when Rabbi Caro was already at an advanced age. It is interesting to note that one prominent Torah scholar, upon publication of the *Shulchan Aruch*, had stated that because it was written when Rabbi Caro was already older, it contained many errors. Yet Rabbi Caro published the masterful and scholarly *Kesef Mishnah* after the *Shulchan Aruch*!

Stories For The Soul

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rabbi was flummoxed when the Chofetz Chaim gently refused and explained that he never accepted personal gifts, as the verse states, "He who despises gifts shall live." (Proverbs 15:27) Finally, the two men agreed to donate the money to

charity!

Much of this week's parsha focuses on monetary laws. While most of us will not reach the level of the Chofetz Chaim's integrity, we can certainly learn what we have to strive toward.