



Because Torah Is for Every Jew

Nitzavim 5776

September 30, 2016

A Taste of Torah

A Perfect Match

By Rabbi Yaakov Zions

Ever since methods of travel have improved and speeds increased, our world has constricted considerably. No longer is any inhabited land off-limits to the adventure seeker, and "Around the World in Eighty Days" can easily be substituted with eighty hours. Even for those whose feet are firmly planted on their local soil, the imagination for the far-off location has more life than ever before.

This week's parsha contains an enigmatic lesson. We are told (Nitzavim 30:11) that "this mitzvah" is neither removed nor far from us; it isn't in Heaven nor across the sea; rather, it is in our mouths and hearts. What does "this mitzvah" refer to? Rashi, quoting the Gemara (Eiruvin 55) understands this to refer to Torah study. One need not travel far to acquire Torah; its readily accessible. However, we are still puzzled; why would we believe Torah is beyond our grasp? Must we be told clearly that we can easily access Torah?

The Netziv (Rabbi Naftali Tzvi Yehuda Berlin; 1816-1893) answers that, indeed, Torah is technically beyond our grasp. The depth and breadth of Hashem's Torah naturally defies human logic and, under normal circumstances, would be incomprehensible to our minds. If so, asks the Netziv, how is Torah close to us? He explains this point with a well-known Gemara in Bechoros (8b) that relates a series of conversations between Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananya and the Elders of Athens. The dialogue seems to be extremely simplistic and non-substantive, and

for us to believe that the greatest minds of these two schools would engage in such conversation seems impossible. Commentators therefore explain their words as metaphors for deep philosophical questions and answers. (For a thorough treatment of the subject, see *The Juggler and The King* by Rabbi Aharon Feldman. Some of the thoughts presented herein were culled from this book.)

The first question posed to Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananya was, "If one seeks a wife and is rebuffed, should he go seek a higher-caliber wife?" Rabbi Yehoshua responded by taking a peg and thrusting into the bottom of the wall; it would not go in. He then tried again further up the wall, and it went in. Said Rabbi Yehoshua, "It, too, has found its match."

The commentators understand that the Elders' question was based on the Torah's teaching that Hashem originally offered the Torah to the various nations before offering it to Klal Yisroel. This must prove, claimed the Elders of Athens, that the intrinsic worth of the Jewish Nation is less than that of the other nations, as per their parable. Rabbi Yehoshua's rebuttal was an insight into what Torah is. Torah is not a "wife" as a status symbol for her husband; rather, Torah creates a perfect pair, a couple that, together, can change their destiny. Originally, Hashem wanted to pair the Torah with other nations who would be able to experience the greatest change through this match. When those nations rejected the Torah,

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Stories For The Soul

We Will Outlive Them

The Jews of Lublin were doomed to fall victim to SS Commander Odilo Globocnik, a notoriously sadistic murderer. He herded them to the outskirts of the city until their backs were up against barbed wire. The Nazi guards beat the hapless Jews backward against the wire. Their flesh was torn as the barbs cut into them, and they tripped and fell upon each other.

Glabocnik, thinking to amuse himself, ordered, "Sing, Jews, sing!" The Jews had no choice, and a few began to sing weakly, "*Lomir zich iberbeten, iberbeten, iberbeten, Avinu shebashamayim*" - "Let us reconcile, our Father in Heaven..." Gradually, the song gained more strength and spirit.

Suddenly, one of the men modified the words: "*Mir vellen zey iberleben, iberleben, iberleben, Avinu shebashamayim*" - "We shall outlive them, outlive them, outlive them, our Father in Heaven!"

Everyone began singing the adjusted lyrics, and within moments, the Jews were dancing as they repeated the refrain. Globocnik roared with laughter until he realized they weren't accommodating him; they were defeating him. He ordered them to stop. They continued. He panicked and pleaded, but the singing and dancing continued. The SS troops plowed in, swinging whips and clubs, and still the singing continued unabated...

In this week's parsha, Moshe assures the Jewish People that despite the trials and tribulations they and their descendants would undergo, they would ultimately prevail, and the sufferings, while horrible and painful, would ultimately make them stronger and ensure their survival.

Kollel Happenings

KOLLEL ANNUAL DONOR APPRECIATION EVENT SUNDAY, OCT. 9TH

The Kollel will hold its annual Donor Appreciation Event on Sunday, October 9th, 6:45 pm at the offices of Altura Periodontics, 3690 S. Yosemite St., Denver, CO 80237. For more info or to reserve, email info@denverkollel.org or call 303-820-2855.

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 rmh@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: The generally accepted custom is to blow 100 *shofar*-blasts each day of Rosh Hashana. Where and when did this custom originate? What alternate customs are there?

A: The Torah commandment of sounding the *shofar* can be fulfilled by sounding thirty blasts. Throughout the ages, many customs developed, including the current widespread 100 blasts. This custom is first recorded by the Aruch (by Rabbi Noson ben Yechiel of Rome, c. 1035 - 1106) (quoted by Tosafos, Rosh Hashana 33b), but seems

to have not been popularly practiced until promoted by the Shelah (Rabbi Yeshaya Horovitz, c. 1565 -1630). The other primary customs throughout the centuries seem to have been 41, 43 or 72 *shofar*-blasts. (Sources: Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 592:1 and 596:1 with Mishnah Berurah)

This week's question: What halacha applies to the *Mincha* (afternoon prayers) of all fast days, with the exception of Yom Kippur?

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

Lives of Our Torah Leaders

Don Yitzchak Abarbanel Part III

The Abarbanel, along with another politically-connected and talented Jew by the name of Avraham Seneor, became the main tax franchisers for Spain. Their abilities and efforts helped make Spain into a world power. (Avraham Seneor was appointed the "chief rabbi and supreme judge" of Castille by Ferdinand and Isabella. Like the Abarbanel, he used his position to aid his brethren. However, when the Jewish community of Spain was given the choice of exile or conversion, he chose to convert to Christianity.)

On March 31, 1492, King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella issued the Alhambra Decree, also known as the Edict of Expulsion, which ordered the

expulsion from Spain of all Jews who would not convert to Christianity. The Abarbanel strove mightily to have the decree rescinded, even offering huge sums of money to the king to cancel the edict. But there was great pressure from the Catholic Church and from the Chief Inquisitor, Tomas de Torquemada (who was also Isabella's confessor), to expel the Jewish population of Spain, and Ferdinand and Isabella refused the Abarbanel's entreaties. The royal couple offered the Abarbanel the opportunity to remain in Spain as a Jew and to retain his position in the palace. However, the Abarbanel chose to go into exile along with the rest of his People.

A Taste of Torah

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Hashem tried "further up the wall." Although not the ideal location, it is a more-perfect match. The offering and acceptance of the Torah to the Jewish People was not going down a rung on the ladder; rather, it was matching two

parties that were already predisposed toward one another. If we understand Torah in this light, we must maximize our predisposed, "natural" connection with the Torah and realize that, indeed, it is in our immediate realm to learn it!