



Because Torah Is for Every Jew

Noach 5777

November 4, 2016

A Taste of Torah

Trust Above All

by Rabbi Shmuel Halpern

Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzatto (1707-1746) begins his classic work *Mesilas Yesharim* (Path of the Just) with the following sentence: “The foundation of piety and service of G-d is that a man know where it is he put his focus in life.” Before we set out on the path of life, we first need to recognize our destination. The million-dollar question is, of course, just what is this goal that man should focus on? A reading of the first chapter of *Mesilas Yesharim* will give one a good idea as to how to answer this question.

I’d like to focus, though, on an approach presented by Rabbi Avraham of Vilna (son of the Vilna Gaon). In his commentary to Psalm 27, *L’Dovid, Hashem Ori* (which we recite beginning from the month of Elul through Sukkos), he explains that King David is requesting of G-d, through the words of this psalm, all that he needs to be truly successful in life. He beseeches G-d to grant him triumph over his spiritual enemies, a strong relationship with Torah and mitzvos, and, finally, he requests that he attain great trust in the Almighty - known as *bitachon*. It would appear from the order of requests, says Rabbi Avraham, that the ultimate goal here is attaining perfect trust in the Almighty.

If we follow this train of thought regarding the order of the recently celebrated festivals, we see the very same pattern. First we have Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, days of repentance, self-growth and triumph over our moral and spiritual enemies. This is then followed by Sukkos, a time for celebrating our trust in G-d. Here, too, the ultimate goal seems to be trust in the Almighty. This is somewhat puzzling. Saying that placing our trust in G-d is important is an understatement, for it is the only way to truly serve G-d without turning to other powers, be they physical or spiritual. But to say that it is the ultimate purpose of life is a difficult concept to grasp. In an attempt to understand this concept, let

us turn to this week’s Torah portion. The parsha opens with a discussion of Noach, and provides three descriptions of Noach’s virtues. “Noach was a righteous man, perfect in his generations; Noach walked with G-d.” (Noach 6:9) Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch explains that righteousness refers primarily to social justice, treating everyone and everything with justice. Perfection refers to moral purity, the development of one’s character and personality to conform with the highest ideals a human being can strive for. Walking with G-d is a reference to *bitachon*, trust in the Almighty.

Righteousness, explains Rabbi Hirsch, has its roots in moral purity, and moral purity has its roots in walking with G-d, *bitachon*. To understand, let’s take a deeper look at what it means to walk with G-d. Our Sages teach us that the Torah was given to the perfected human. The ultimate perfection comes from a constant perception that G-d is ever-present, a concept the Rema (Rabbi Moshe Isserles; 1520-1572) chose as his opening words in his glosses to the Shulchan Aruch (Code of Jewish Law): See yourself as being in the presence of the Almighty at all times; this is a great level in Torah, and of the truly righteous, who walk with G-d.” I believe that with the background of the comments of Rabbi Avraham of Vilna and Rabbi Hirsch, we can have a new appreciation for these words of the Rema. The way to attain the constant realization that we are in G-d’s presence is to attain trust, *bitachon*, in G-d. True *bitachon* means that we attribute every aspect of our lives to G-d. With every step and breath we take, we realize that if not for G-d’s loving assistance, it wouldn’t happen. When we live life this way, there isn’t an unGodly moment in our lives. We then treat all others with the respect and justice they deserve as creations of G-d. This path is the road to true moral perfection, and, indeed, is the purpose of the creation of Heaven and Earth.

Stories For The Soul

Swimming against the Current

Reb Yaakov Yosef Herman (1880-1967) was known as a pioneer for Torah-observant Judaism in America the first half of the 20th century, when many others were abandoning much or all of their heritage. Despite being mocked, shouted at and scorned, he stood tall and proud in fulfilling the will of G-d, Whom he referred to as “the Boss.”

His daughter, Ruchoma Shain (1914-2013), wrote a book about her father, *All for the Boss*. She relates that when she turned 12, the age of adulthood for girls according to Jewish law, her father forbade her from going to the beach at Coney Island, as the swimsuits were immodest. Ruchoma was quite dismayed, as all her friends would go, leaving her behind, but her father would not budge.

After crying and pleading with her father, Reb Yaakov Yosef went to seek an audience with the mayor. After much cajoling, he succeeded in accessing then-New York City Mayor Jimmy Walker. He asked Mayor Walker if he would set aside an area of the beach to be used exclusively by women. Walker replied politely, “Rabbi, you are the first person in New York City to suggest such an idea. You can well understand that I cannot set aside a beach just for you.”

Mr. Herman, never one to be deterred, managed to acquire a special swimsuit for his daughter - one that would allow her to

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Kollel Happenings

**JEWISH LEADVILLE ON
NOVEMBER 8TH**

The M.B. Glassman GOLD Senior Division presents the latest in its Lifelong Learners series, Jewish Leadville. Presented by William Korn, founder and president of the Temple Israel Foundation of Leadville, this presentation will explore the Jewish history of the town of Leadville, Colorado. Class is open to men and women of all ages. There is no charge for the class. Tuesday, Nov. 8, 1:30 pm at the Mizel Museum, 400 S. Kearney St.

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.

A DEEPER LOOK AT THE PARSHA WITH RABBI SHACHNE SOMMERS

Join Rabbi Shachne Sommers as he discusses a number of difficulties encountered in the weekly Torah portion, and develops a comprehensive approach to resolve the issue, simultaneously conveying a deeper understanding of the material being discussed. Sunday nights, 7:40-8:30 pm, at the Kollel for men, 1516 Xavier, and Tuesday nights at the Southeast Kollel Torah center, 8-9 pm, for men and women.

Increase Your Jewish IQ

By Rabbi Yaakov Zions

Last week we asked: While the Torah refers to the months of the Jewish calendar by number only (e.g., the first month, second month), during the time of the second *Beis Hamikdash*, the Jews began using Babylonian names for the months (e.g. Nissan, Iyar, Sivan). Which month is commonly referred to by a shortened version of its name?

A: The month after Tishrei is commonly called Cheshvan, shortened from the original Marcheshvan. Whenever the name of this month appears in rabbinic literature it appears in full, and that's how it is written on halachic documents (such as marriage contracts and divorces). The *S'dei Chemed* (an encyclopedic work by Rabbi Chaim

Hezekiah Medini of Constantinople and Chevron, 1834-1905; vol. 6, page 103) quotes the unique custom of the Jewish community of Salonika, Greece to write only the shortened version Cheshvan in their halachic documents. (Sources: *Shulchan Aruch Even Ha'ezer* 126:6 and *Pischei Teshuva* *ibid.*:12)

This week's question: There is a custom followed by many communities (especially those that follow Nusach Ashkenaz) to add special prayers during the months of Cheshvan and Iyar. What are these prayers, why are they said and what is their source?

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

Lives of Our Torah Leaders

The Ran - Part III

The Ran lived during a period of increasing persecution against Spanish Jewry. Though the Spanish Expulsion would not occur for more than another century, the writing was on the wall, as the local populace, encouraged by Church leadership, turned on the Jewish citizenry.

The Ran had a number of prominent disciples who became Torah leaders in their own right. One of them, Rabbi Yitzchak ben Sheshes Perfet (1326-1407), known by the acronym RiVaSH, was a merchant who became a Torah leader in Barcelona.

In 1367, the Ran and the Rivash were imprisoned by the ruler of Barcelona on trumped-up charges. They were eventually released after the accusations

proved false.

The Rivash left to Saragossa, where he became the rabbi of the city. He later relocated to Valencia, where he founded and led a yeshiva. In 1391, terrible pogroms swept across Spain, killing some 50,000 Jews and destroying more than seventy Jewish communities. The Rivash fled Spain during this tragic time and settled in Algiers in Northern Africa, where he eventually became the rabbi of the community.

The Rivash wrote many responsa, which were published and are extensively studied, quoted, analyzed and used in the halachic decision-making process. Many of his responsa deal with the difficult issues facing Spanish Jewry at the time.

Stories for the Soul

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remain modestly attired! (Ed. Note: This took place in the 1920s. Today's public beaches present a number of issues of immodesty, not the least of which is the modern mode of dress.)

Noach lived in a generation of great evil. But he managed to rise above it all and maintain his attachment to G-d. His efforts merited salvation for him and his family, and he became the progenitor of humanity in the post-Flood world.