



Because Torah Is for Every Jew

Parshas Noach

October 20, 2017

# A Taste of Torah

## A Man of Letters

by Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher

There are people in the Torah whom you think are minor figures in the greater scheme of world history. Until you take a closer look and see that they aren't as unimportant as you thought. They just keep showing up, in places you least expect them to make an appearance.

Haran is an individual who appears briefly in the Torah, at the end of this week's parsha. He is Avraham's brother, one of Terach's three sons. The Torah informs us that he died in front of his father Terach, but not much more information is provided.

As is often the case, *Torah Sheba'al Peh* (the Oral Torah) fills in the blanks. Our Sages tell us that Avraham was dragged by his father Terach before King Nimrod for not toeing the party line on religion in town. After refusing to return to idolatry and renounce his belief in an invisible, indivisible, omniscient and omnipotent Deity, Avraham is cast into a furnace. Meanwhile, Haran and Terach are watching from the sidelines. Haran decides that he will throw his lot in with the religion of the victor of this little spat.

After Hashem miraculously saved Avraham, Haran was asked whose side he was on. Haran announced that his allegiance lay with the one almighty G-d of Avraham, whereupon he was cast into the furnace that had just failed to do away with Avraham. Alas, Haran did not merit the same miraculous deliverance, and he died in front of his father Terach.

The end of the line for Haran, so it seems. But it's not. Because some very important people descend from Haran. Consider: Sarah, Avraham's wife and the first of the four Matriarchs, is Haran's daughter. Lot, Haran's son, travels with Avraham for a while before heading to Sodom. But from Lot descends Ruth, the Moabite convert to Judaism, from whom descends the Davidic dynasty and, ultimately, the Messiah himself.

All this means that we need to get a better understanding of Haran.

Haran gave his life for the one, almighty G-d. True, our Sages tell us he was relying on a miraculous salvation from G-d, something which is frowned upon when giving one's life for G-d, but he nonetheless was willing to take that risk – no small feat. Who was Haran? Why was he willing to be cast into the fires? What is the secret of the success of his progeny?

If you're well-lettered, you'll appreciate this answer. The Shem Mishmuel (Rabbi Shmuel Bornsztain of Sochatchov; 1855-1926) points out that the letters of Haran's name – *heh*, *reish*, and *nun* – are identical to the letters of another very prominent person's name – Aharon the High Priest. He quotes the Arizal (Rabbi Yitzchak Luria; 1534-1572), one of the greatest Kabbalists in history, who states that Haran possessed the soul of Aharon.

In the *aleph-bais* (Hebrew alphabet), every letter has a numeric value, known as *gematria*. The numeric value goes from one until ten, then counts by tens – twenty, thirty, etc., then through hundreds, one hundred, two hundred, etc. The final letter of the *aleph-bais*, the letter *taf*, is valued at four hundred.

The Shem Mishmuel, quoting the Maharal (Rabbi Yehuda Loew of Prague; 1512/1526-1609) says that the three aforementioned letters of Haran's name are unique because they are all in the middle of their sets – *heh* equals five, *nun* equals fifty, and *reish* equals two hundred (which is the middle, along with three hundred, between one hundred and four hundred). A name is indicative of one's essence, and the nature of these letters tell us that both Aharon and Haran were people who were not external or superficial; they both possessed a great deal of internal spiritual greatness.

Yet Haran is not regarded as Aharon's equal in any way, shape or form. Where

## Stories for the Soul

### A Vocal Silent Partner

An accountant was reviewing the books of a health-care facility when he discovered an error in the records. Not just any error – the government had erroneously sent a duplicate check to the tune of \$100,000!

The accountant informed the owner, an Orthodox Jew, about the error. "Look," said the accountant, "legally, you need to return the money. But if you don't, the odds that anyone in the government will realize the mistake are very slim. You are safe if you don't say anything to them."

The owner excused himself from the room and returned several minutes later with his decision.

"I am returning the money," he stated. "My partner has advised me it is the best thing to do."

"Partner?" exclaimed the surprised accountant. "I didn't know you have a partner!"

The owner pointed toward heaven and explained, "G-d is my partner. And he doesn't want me to keep the money."

Our Sages teach that the decree of destruction for Noach's generation was sealed due to *chamas*, which includes not just theft, but general disrespect for the property of others. As Jews, we must live with the highest integrity in respecting others' possessions.

## Kollel Happenings

### WHOSE RIGHT & WHO'S RIGHT?: THE DEBATE OVER THE TERMINATION OF PREGNANCY

Join J. Joshua Kopelman, MD, FACOG, FACS, and Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher, Senior Educator for the Denver Community Kollel, as they explore this emotionally-fraught and sensitive subject. Wednesday, November 1, at 12-1:15 p.m. at the East Side Kosher Deli. Cost: \$25. RSVP [info@denverkollel.org](mailto: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 [rmh@denverkollel.org](mailto:rmh@denverkollel.org).

### HELP BUILD THE FUTURE OF TORAH IN DENVER

Claim your part in building the future of Torah in Denver! The Kollel is in the midst of a capital campaign to build a three-story, state-of-the-art Torah Center that will serve the entire Denver Jewish community. To contribute, or for dedication opportunities and details on the building, visit [denverkollel.org](http://denverkollel.org) or email [info@denverkollel.org](mailto:info@denverkollel.org).

# Increase Your Jewish IQ

By Rabbi Yaakov Zions

**Last week we asked:** There are some words in the Torah scroll which are pronounced different than they are written. This is known as *K'ri-K'siv* (literally, read-written). What is the first example of this phenomenon in the Torah, and where is the source of our tradition in these matters?

**A:** The first noticeable example of *K'ri-K'siv* is in Parshas Noach 8:17. In the 10<sup>th</sup> century (approximately), there were two great schools of *Mesorah* (tradition) and *dikduk* (grammar). One was the Ben Asher school, and the second, the Ben Naphtali school. Many of their disputes

were preserved by the Radak (Rabbi Dovid Kimchi, 1160-1235) and Minchas Shai (by Rabbi Yedidya Norzi, 1560-1626). Today, the tradition of Ben Asher is universally followed. For further reading on these abovementioned schools, see Minchas Shai, Bereishis 1:3.

**This week's question:** What is a common *K'ri-K'siv* (literally, read-written, words pronounced different than they are written) which appears over 1000 times throughout the Torah?

To submit an answer to Rabbi Zions, email [ryz@denverkollel.org](mailto:ryz@denverkollel.org).

## Lives of Our Torah Leaders

### Rabbi Aryeh Leib Gunzberg, the Shaagas Aryeh - Part IV

Rabbi Aryeh Leib arrived at a town and went to study in the local synagogue. He soon met the local rabbi, and engaged him in a Torah discussion. The two soon began

arguing upon a particular point, and the local rabbi tried to bolster his position with a passage from a new sefer, *Shaagas Aryeh* - Rabbi Aryeh Leib's own work!

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lies the difference between these two men? The only difference is that Aharon's name also has the letter *aleph*. *Aleph*, being the first letter of the *aleph-bais*, has a *gematria* of one, which symbolizes G-d Himself, Who is one. The addition of an aleph indicates that the tremendous spiritual content carried by Aharon was constantly connected with G-d.

Haran, on the other hand, may have been greatly inspired to join Avraham, but he was unable to translate that experience into living his life with G-d at all times. Living, as he did, during the period of the *Dor Haflagah*, the Generation of the Dispersion, a period when Mankind's goal was to disconnect from G-d and wrest control of the world from Him, Haran could not reach the pinnacle and move past the culture in which he lived. Through his death, however, he created a great *Kiddush Hashem* (sanctification of G-d's Name), thus achieving in death what he couldn't in life. The fire that took his life also cleansed the negative aspects that did not allow the internal goodness to shine through. Tragic and horrifying, but a necessary step in allowing Haran's hidden greatness to be expressed

through his descendants.

The Shem Mishmuel notes that we, too, are often deeply moved by an event that transpires in our lives. It may be a meaningful prayer or Torah thought, perhaps a special Shabbos or holiday, an inspiring Torah class or article (ahem!) that stirs us to great heights. But, more often than not, we have trouble bringing that inspiration into our daily life, and it soon fades. The problem, says the Shem Mishmuel, is that we are not properly connected with Hashem and this impedes our ability to take the inspiration further. There are ways to change that, though. Torah study is compared to fire, points out the Shem Mishmuel, as it has the spiritual power to cut through the layers of externality that hinder our spiritual ambitions. In addition, Shabbos is a day we have the opportunity to draw close to Hashem and make Him a part of our lives. Through proper Torah study and utilizing the opportunity of Shabbos, we have the ability to raise our mundane daily grind to a life of connectedness that will allow those bursts of inspiration to penetrate far more deeply into ourselves.

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