



# THE HARRY H. BEREN TORAH WEEKLY

A project of the Denver Community Kollel



Because Torah Is for Every Jew

Pekudei 5776

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## A Taste of Torah Do As I Say

By Rabbi Akiva Stern

Imagine if one sunny afternoon Dale Earnhardt, Jr. gets a call from the President of the United States. "Son," he says, "your country needs you! Please be in Washington tomorrow morning." Well, Dale is a good ole' patriotic boy, and he races his Chevy SS through the night and shows up bright and early at 1600 Pennsylvania Ave. I am sure you can understand how puzzled he might be to find out that the service the POTUS required of him was to drive the number 11 bus in downtown D.C.

Shortly after the start of last week's Torah portion, we are introduced to the craftsmen who were hand-picked by G-d himself to build the *Mishkan* (Tabernacle). They are Betzalel and Ahali'av. Not only are their names and lineage provided, but the Torah lists their extraordinary qualifications for this most awesome of tasks, to build the House of G-d. We are told of their "wise heart," their "wisdom, insight and knowledge in every craft" and of the "G-dly spirit" imbued within them.

With this in mind, we notice something unexpected in our parsha. From the very beginning, through the entire course of the description of the production of the vestments, one phrase keeps popping up: "...as G-d had commanded Moshe." Time and time again, the Torah stresses and reiterates that each and every item was created precisely as G-d had commanded Moshe. This mantra introduces the parsha and concludes it. It punctuates the end of nearly every section. Clearly, the focus of these words tells us it is mighty important, but at first glance, it seems odd. Why choose a craftsman with the knowledge and skills to independently build a perfect *Mishkan*, and then provide him with precise, immutable instructions to follow? Why not simply choose any devoted Jew willing to follow

instructions carefully?

The Bais Halevi (Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik; 1820-1892) explains beautifully. The sin of the Golden Calf, he says, was not out-and-out idol worship. Rather, they had perceived that their leader Moshe was dead, and they desperately needed to replace him. They understood that they needed an intermediary to facilitate their connection with G-d. To fill this need, they choose to create the Golden Calf. One could certainly argue that they were on the right track - that a human being would, in fact, need an intermediary or an interface to interact with the Divine. It seems that the *Mishkan* (and, ultimately, the *Bais Hamikdash* [Temple]) were to be just that! It was a place one could go to actually give to G-d. One could say "I'm sorry" or "thank you" or even "I love you" to G-d in a meaningful way! One could literally perceive a manifestation of G-d and achieve atonement.

So what was so wrong? Why not make the Golden Calf? Couldn't it be a miniature, portable Temple? The answer is that the Jews had received a prohibition to create a form or image such as the Golden Calf, even if there was no intention to worship it. Essentially, they decided to contravene what seemed to be a minor mitzvah for the greater spiritual good. But the truth is that the ends do not justify the means. This was a terrible sin.

Here, says the Bais Halevi, the Torah highlights for us the marked difference between the formation of the Golden Calf and the making of the sacred vestments and the Tabernacle. While the former was built upon an antinomian rationale, the latter was erected precisely in accordance with G-d's dictates. This is also a testimony to Betzalel and Ahali'av's greatness. Although they

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## Stories For The Soul

### For All Intents and Purposes

The Jewish community of Brisk suffered a terrible pogrom in 1937. Lives were lost, and much property was destroyed. A committee was formed to collect and distribute funds to the victims; donations poured in from other Jewish communities. Strangely, the Brisker Rav, Rabbi Yitzchak Zev Soloveitchik (1887-1959), refused to serve as the head of the committee, though he did not explain his reason for refusing.

Sometime later, as the Jewish community slowly got back on its feet, a woman came crying to the Brisker Rav that her husband, the breadwinner of the family, had been killed during the pogrom. Although she had applied for funds from the committee, they had ignored her pleas for assistance and refused to provide her with any help.

The Brisker Rav gave her some money from his own discretionary fund, and, after she left, turned to those with him and said that this was why he had not wanted to be involved with the committee. He quoted his ancestor, Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin (1749-1821), who had said that when Betzalel constructed the *Mishkan* (Tabernacle), he required Divine inspiration to sense the intent of the giver in each item that was donated toward the construction. Betzalel would then direct the item, based on purity of intent, to the most appropriate part of the *Mishkan*, with the items given with greater purity of intent being used for the holier parts of the *Mishkan*.

Here, too, explained the Brisker Rav, purity of intent is required for one's money to be used for true *tzedakah* (charity). The problem, he said, is that a major purpose of the establishment of the committee was to send a message that Jews will stand up for their rights; in reality, the sole purpose ought to have been to provide *tzedakah* for those in need! But since many gave in order to send a message, more than their intent to assist the victims, it is not surprising that someone who is truly in need would not actually receive anything!

## Kollel Happenings

### KOLLEL'S 18<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION THIS TUESDAY

The Denver Community Kollel will hold its 18<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration this Tuesday, March 15<sup>th</sup> at 6:30 pm at Aish Denver. Kollel founders Rabbi Myer J. and Mrs. Bruria Schwab will be the guests of honor. The Kollel will recognize the 18 current and past Kollel families who reside in Denver. To reserve, visit [www.denverkollel.org](http://www.denverkollel.org), email [journal@denverkollel.org](mailto:journal@denverkollel.org), or call 303-820-2855.

### DEVELOPING TALENTS AT NEXT TORAH FOR TYCOONS

Join Charlie Miller, Co-Curator of Off-Center at the Denver Center for the Performing Arts, and Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher, Senior Educator for the Denver Community Kollel, as they explore the responsibility of utilizing one's talents. April 6<sup>th</sup>, 12-1:15 p.m. at the East Side Kosher Deli. Cost: \$25. RSVP [info@denverkollel.org](mailto:info@denverkollel.org).

### RAV SCHWAB ON CHUMASH AVAILABLE FROM KOLLEL

The Denver Community Kollel is pleased to announce the publication and distribution of Rav Schwab on Chumash. The book is available through the Denver Community Kollel at a special discount rate of \$24.

To order, call 303-820-2855, email [info@denverkollel.org](mailto:info@denverkollel.org), or go to [www.denverkollel.org](http://www.denverkollel.org).

## Increase Your Jewish IQ

By Rabbi Yaakov Zions

**Last week we asked:** According to the Ashkenazic custom, the prayer of *Avinu Malkeinu* is recited during the Ten Days of Repentance as well as on public fast days. Which custom is of earlier origin?

**A:** Although the source of its recitation was Rabbi Akiva's prayer during a public fast day when rain was needed (Ta'anis 25b), the custom of its recital during the days of repentance predates our custom of reciting it on public fast days. Reciting it during the Days of Repentance is recorded in the Tur

(Orach Chaim 602, quoting Rav Amram Gaon, a 9<sup>th</sup> century scholar); its recital on fast days is of much later origin (eastern Europe, circa 19<sup>th</sup> century).

**This week's question:** On Purim, many congregations insert a liturgical series into the chazzan's repetition of *shacharis*. These are known as *Krovetz*, and are inserted into every blessing except the 15<sup>th</sup> blessing, *Es Tzemach Dovid*. Why is that blessing the exception?

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

## Lives of Our Torah Leaders

### Rabbi Asher ben Yechiel – the Rosh, Part IV

The Rosh himself, due to the governmental pressure in Germany, fled his home. After travelling for some time, he arrived in Spain in 1306. At the recommendation of the Rashba (Rabbi Shlomo ben Aderes; 1235-1310), the Rosh was appointed the Rav of Toledo, Spain.

Thus, an Ashkenazic (German/French) Torah scholar now become the halachic authority and leader of a major Sephardic (Spanish) Jewish community. The Jewish communities of Ashkenaz had a very different culture than did their Spanish brethren; the more tolerant and enlightened Moslems who had ruled most of Spain for centuries had fostered an environment where Jews were integrated into the gentile society (though by this time the Christians had regained most of Spain). Spanish Jewry was involved in the philosophy, poetry and secular wisdom of their time and location. The Ashkenazic communities, living in areas that were just emerging from the Dark Ages, were set apart from the gentile communities, tended toward much greater piety, shunned secular philosophy, and were not involved in poetry save for some who wrote liturgical pieces.

In addition, the halachic traditions of

the communities differed in many areas; numerous conclusions reached by earlier authorities, based on the Talmud and other halachic works, differed from each other.

The Rosh brought the more pious worldview as well as his Ashkenazic halachic traditions with him to Toledo, and this introduced new religious influences and halachic approaches to the Spanish Jewish communities.

This influence would be felt in later halachic works. Several centuries later, Rabbi Yosef Karo, a premier Talmudic and halachic authority of Spanish origin, would author the *Shulchan Aruch* (Code of Jewish Law). Many of his rulings were based on three major authorities: Rabbi Yitzchak Alfasi, known as the Rif; Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon, known as the Rambam; and Rabbeinu Asher, the Rosh. The Rif, although of Moroccan origin, was one of the major authorities used by later Spanish halachic decisors, as was the Rambam (who was born in Spain). The Rosh seems to be the enigma, as he is of Ashkenazic origin, but because he lived the latter part of his life as rabbi of Toledo, his opinions became part of the *Sefardic mesorah* (tradition).

## A Taste of Torah

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had the standing, intellect, wisdom and knowledge to do the jobs under their very own guidance, the Torah testifies, again and yet again, that never did they waver. Always, they did as G-d had commanded Moshe.

Certainly, there is room for individualism and personal strengths, but the lesson of Betzalel and the Golden Calf is that all efforts must remain firmly within the clear boundaries and parameters of halacha.