



# THE HARRY H. BEREN TORAH WEEKLY

A project of the Denver Community Kollel



Because Torah Is for Every Jew

Pinchas 5776

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## A Taste of Torah Rabbinic Counsel

By Rabbi Ari Aragon

How does one become a rabbi? The obvious answer is *semicha*! You study the relevant areas of Jewish law, get tested by a qualified rabbi or institution, and you get *semicha* – you are ordained as a rabbi. Simple, right? Actually, there's a lot more to *semicha* than that, and the best place to discover more is in the Torah. The verse in this week's parsha (Pinchas 27:18) states, "Hashem told Moshe, 'Take Yehoshua Ben Nun... and you shall place (*samachta*) your hands upon him... and you shall give of your splendor upon him...'" The word *samachta*, related to the word *semicha*, is the origin of what we call *semicha*. The definition of *semicha* is that the teacher places his hands on the student's head and gives over his spiritual splendor to the next generation.

The Rambam tells us (Laws of Sanhedrin 4:1), "Every one of the Sanhedrin must have *semicha* from someone who had *semicha*..." To put it into our terms, if you don't have *semicha*, you ain't a rabbi! We may ask, "This is a very interesting ritual, but what does this have to do with making someone a rabbi? Surely, if one knows the necessary information, that ought to suffice to allow him to become a rabbi!"

It gets even more puzzling, because the process described above is not done today, and if someone does study the pertinent portions of halacha and has proven that he knows them, he can receive what we now call *semicha* and function as a rabbinical figure. Why is what we have today called *semicha* if it seems to have nothing to do with the actual procedure of *semicha* laid out in the Torah?

The aforementioned passage of the Rambam continues, "And Moshe Rabbeinu bestowed *semicha* upon Yehoshua... and all the seventy elders, he bestowed them with *semicha* [as well], and Hashem's *Shechina* (Divine Presence) dwelled upon them..." Why is the Rambam telling us about the *Shechina* here in the laws of *semicha*?

Shouldn't his focus be on the knowledge and scholarship of the students? Why does the Rambam focus on a side issue and completely ignore the main point?

The answer is that the bond between a teacher and his student is not about giving over information, it's about giving over the path to bring Hashem's presence into one's life.

Why is this the main thrust of the relationship? To explain, I would like to ask another question: What is the difference between the Torah and self-help? If the Torah is supposed to make us better people, what difference does it make if I open up a section of the Talmud or a Stephen Covey book on the seven habits of the highly successful? To put it more bluntly, many people recover from being alcoholics without the Torah, and many people with the Torah don't change at all!

The answer is that the point of the Torah is not to merely make you a better person - it's a guide on how to change yourself so that Hashem enters your life, allowing you to become a living *Bais Hamikdash* (Temple)! The reason one shouldn't be an alcoholic isn't just because it's destructive, it's because an alcoholic can't properly bring Hashem's *Shechinah* into one's life. It's taught that at the building of the *Mishkan* (Tabernacle) in the desert, the only way Hashem's presence was able to rest upon it was if all of the vessels were in their proper places. One inch too far to the left or right for one item – no *Shechina*. Similarly, for a person to allow the *Shechinah* to dwell in one's life, that life needs to be in the right place. Of course, one needs to be a good person, but that is part of a much bigger context - that the Torah demands a certain goodness of a person. Stephen Covey's works may be wonderful, but they can never tell you what you need to do to bring Hashem into your life. The starting point is figuring out where the Torah tells me to go and what the Torah instructs me to do to get there. When that course

## Stories For The Soul

### Culture Shock

Rabbi Shlomo Freifeld (1925-1990) was the founder of Yeshiva Sha'ar Yeshuv of Far Rockaway, New York. Dedicated to outreach, Rabbi Freifeld saw thousands of disciples pass through the yeshiva.

One such person was a man who had grown up in an Orthodox home but had felt the need to leave the world he grew up in and explore nature. He eventually ended up living on a Native American reservation, where he learned their customs and cultures and felt at home.

Constantly searching for truth, the man ended up seeking out a Native American woman who was renowned for her insight and wisdom. The woman, though, told him that he did not belong there, as he was Jewish, and encouraged him to return to his roots.

The fellow eventually made his way to Rabbi Freifeld, who spoke with him for some time about hunting, nature, and human life. The man was shocked that the rabbi would be able to converse on so many subjects, and he returned to speak with Rabbi Freifeld a number of times. The two spoke for many hours.

One day, as they sat in the rabbi's office, Rabbi Freifeld needed to leave for a few minutes, leaving the man alone. Rabbi Freifeld had many *seforim* in his office, and the man walked around examining them, when he noticed a pile of books on the floor. Surprised that books of Torah would be left on the floor, he bent over to get a better look. He was shocked to discover that they were about Native American culture and life! It was then that he realized that Rabbi Freifeld had been reading these books so as to understand the world that his new student was coming from. And it was then that the young man realized how much Rabbi Freifeld really cared about him.

In this week's parsha, Moshe asks Hashem to appoint as his successor an individual who could relate to each and every person at his or her level. For such is the mark of a true leader.

## Kollel Happenings

### SUMMER NIGHT SEDER FOR BACHURIM

Attention boys entering 7<sup>th</sup> grade and older! The Kollel is once again holding its Summer Night Seder for Bachurim at the Kollel West Side Bais Medrash. Sunday-Thursday, mincha 7:45 pm, followed by learning. Ma'ariv at 9:10 pm. Stipends available for boys who maintain the schedule. For info or sponsorship opportunities, please contact [rmf@denverkollel.org](mailto:rmf@denverkollel.org).

### RABBANIT MIZRACHI THIS SUNDAY, JULY 31<sup>ST</sup>

The Women's Division of the Denver Community Kollel and Aish Denver present a video for women, *Leading up to Tisha B'Av*. Sunday, July 31<sup>st</sup> at 8 pm at Aish Denver. Rabbanit Yemima is one of the most in-demand speakers today, attracting hundreds of women to her lectures, where she presents deep messages with a sense of humor. Lecture sponsored by Reb Zvi and Shoshana Gelt. No charge, suggested donation of \$5 to help cover costs of future video presentations.

### A SECOND LOOK AT TU B'AV

Ever wonder what the holiday of Tu B'Av (the 15<sup>th</sup> of Av) is really about? Join Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher for a second look at this enigmatic holiday. At two locations: Sunday, August 7<sup>th</sup> at the Kollel West Side building, 2<sup>nd</sup> floor, 10 am, for women only, and Monday, August 8<sup>th</sup> at Aish, 7:45 pm, for men and women. For more info or sponsorship opportunities, contact [rmf@denverkollel.org](mailto:rmf@denverkollel.org).

## Increase Your Jewish IQ

By Rabbi Yaakov Zions

**Last week we asked:** During the summer months, someone erroneously said "*mashiv haruach*" during his *amida*, did not correct the mistake, and yet does not have to repeat the prayer. How is this possible?

**A:** The Gemara (Ta'anis 3a) teaches that one may, but is not required to, mention Hashem's gifts of dew and wind in the second blessing of *Shemone Esrei*, regardless of the season. Nevertheless, the custom is to mention wind only in the winter, as a preface to rain ("*morid hageshem*" - "Who causes rain to descend") which is mentioned only in winter). The Ran (in his commentary on the Rif [ibid. 1a]) explains this idea, as well as why the custom (followed today by Sephardic and *Nusach Sefard* communities, as well as in Eretz Yisroel) is to

mention dew in the summer months only.

Getting back to our question: One who mentioned only wind ("*mashiv haruach*" - "Who makes the wind blow") need not correct himself, as it is halachically acceptable to mention wind even in the summer! The same would apply as well for one who mistakenly said "*v'sain tal*" (in the *Barech Aleinu* blessing of *Shemone Esrei*) during the summer months.

**This week's question:** Which custom is associated specifically with the Torah reading of *Parshas Masei*?

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

## Lives of Our Torah Leaders

### The Rambam - Part XI

Upon seeing how matters had gotten completely out of control with the burning of the Rambam's works in 1233, much of the firestorm surrounding the Rambam and his works calmed. However, the Church, seeing that they could burn Jewish holy books with impunity, took matters a step further.

In 1236 a Jewish apostate, Nicholas Donin, submitted a memorandum to Pope Gregory IX listing 35 charges against the Talmud. This eventually led the pope, in 1240, to issue an order to seize all Jewish books. King Louis IX of France (known as Louis the Pious for his fanatical adherence to his religion) obliged, and all Jewish holy books were seized.

In 1242, 24 cartloads of *seforim*, including virtually all copies of the Talmud in France, were burned in the very same spot where the Rambam's works had been burned nine years earlier. This was a double calamity, for besides the tragedy of the burning of holy

works, it also created a great dearth of *seforim*, particularly the Talmud. It must be kept in mind that the printing press had not yet made its appearance, and every copy had to be meticulously and painstakingly hand-copied.

This catastrophe, along with other persecutions, contributed to the steady decline of French Jewry.

Rabbi Yonah of Gerona, who had earlier opposed the Rambam's works and had co-signed the ban against them at his teacher's behest, saw in the burning of the Talmud Heavenly revenge for the travesty that had been perpetrated against the Rambam. He retracted his previous views and spent much time travelling to Jewish communities withdrawing his past criticisms as a means to atone for his earlier actions. His famous ethical work on repentance, *Sha'arei Teshuva*, is said to have been written as part of that penance.

## A Taste of Torah

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is determined, a person is walking on the King's highway. The only way to become Hashem's emissary is through His Torah. To make up what spirituality means on our own simply doesn't work!

This is why a person needs a *rebbe*, a teacher. Granted, without a *rebbe*, a person can know the information, and he can even be a professor in Biblical or Talmudic studies, but as long as he's not part of that chain that goes back to Moshe Rabbeinu, he can't

translate that information into life. He can't pass the *Shechina* on to the student. Judaism is not a religion of ideas - it's a way of life with Hashem. And only with a *rebbe* is a person able to truly live in that reality of life. Even today, ideally, *semicha* should come through a rabbi with whom the student is connected. The relationship with a *connected* rabbi is not only integral, it is one of the most pleasant and meaningful relationships that we can cultivate.