

A Taste of Torah

Turned Upside Down

By Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher

There are certain moments in our lives that are so frightening, we are sure the world is about to come to an end. Remember when the Twin Towers went down? The word “terror” was never so apropos. People were frozen by fear, awe-struck, unsure of what the next moment would bring. Anything and everything was believable, because the entire world order had just crumbled.

Now, imagine the following scene: A mob, composed of the entire citizenry of the city, has gathered outside your father-in-law’s home. They are demanding that he send out his guests – wayfarers, illegal aliens, who have no business being in town, being hosted by anyone – so that they can do with them as they please. Your father-in-law comes out, closing the door behind him, and pleads with the crowd to let the guests be, offering his betrothed daughters instead. The crowd is enraged at the impudence of your father-in-law, a relative newcomer to town, and they advance on him, ready to break the door down to get what they want.

Suddenly, hands emerge from the door, as the guests pull your hapless father-in-law inside and lock the door. The entire seething mass outside – young and old alike – are suddenly, miraculously struck blind! They cannot see anything as they grope about wildly, futilely, unable to vent their rage.

And now, dear son-in-law, how would you react to these events? Would you think this terrible city, renowned for its cruelty to the less fortunate, is finally coming apart? If these guests – whom, you hopefully

realize by now, are not ordinary guests – told you to leave the city at once, for it is about to be destroyed, would you comply? Or would you snicker derisively and go on with your life?

Lot’s sons-in-law, shockingly, took the latter approach. Upon being informed that they had to flee Sodom immediately once before it was literally turned upside down, they laughed at their father-in-law as if he were a comedian. And that was their last laugh – because shortly thereafter, they perished, along with the rest of the inhabitants of Sodom, save for Lot and his two daughters.

How are we to understand this incomprehensible reaction? The Klei Yakar (Rabbi Shlomo Ephraim Luntschitz, 1550-1619) explains that Lot’s sons-in-law laughed because when Lot informed them that Hashem was going to obliterate Sodom, he referred to Hashem with the Tetragrammaton, the four-letter name of Hashem that is indicative of mercy. Having a keen awareness that the various names of Hashem represent different attributes through which He relates to the world, they found it ludicrous that Hashem would destroy Sodom when He was in a mode of mercy.

But, says the Kli Yakar, they made a critical, ultimately fatal error, for the wicked turn Hashem’s mercy to strict judgment. Despite the reality that Hashem was interacting with Creation in a merciful fashion, the evil perpetrated by Sodom brought catastrophe.

The Shem MiShmuel (Rabbi Shmuel Bornsztain, the Sochatchover

Stories For The Soul

Seeing Past Yourself

Rabbi Moshe Leib Sassover (1745-1807) had a close disciple who lived in poverty. Despite his lack of means, he was known for his hospitality and generosity.

Rabbi Moshe Leib once visited his student and, being impressed by his kindness, blessed him with wealth. The tzaddik’s blessing was fulfilled, and the man became quite wealthy. He built a spacious mansion for himself, but his previous openhandedness vanished. Though he still gave some money to the poor, he would not let them into his opulent home.

Rabbi Moshe Leib soon heard of the change in his student, and he set out to visit him.

Upon arriving, Rabbi Moshe Leib was warmly welcomed into the now-rich man’s home. After speaking with his student for several minutes, he led him to the window and asked, “What do you see?”

“I see all the townspeople going about their daily lives,” replied the disciple.

The rebbe then brought his student to an ornate mirror that was hanging on the wall. “What do you see?” he asked.

“Why, I see myself!” replied the confused man, wondering why he was being asked seemingly-irrelevant questions.

“And why do you see yourself?” pressed on the rebbe.

“Because the glass is coated with silver,” explained the rich man. “It reflects whatever you place in front of it.”

“So,” said Rabbi Moshe Leib, “when the glass is clear, you see others. But when you coat it with silver, all you see is yourself...”

The rich man got the message and changed his ways.

Our Patriarch Avraham excelled in the trait of *chesed*, loving kindness, because he saw beyond himself.

Kollel Happenings

CAPITAL PUNISHMENT IN THE MODERN WORLD AT NOV. 4 TORAH FOR TYCOONS

Join Richard K. Kornfeld, Shareholder, RechtKornfeld, and Rabbi Aron Yehuda Schwab, Dean, Denver Community Kollel, as they explore the capital punishment debate. November 4th, 12-1:15 p.m. at the East Side Kosher Deli. Cost: \$25. RSVP info@denverkollel.org

MIX BUSINESS WITH PLEASURE

Would you like to incorporate some Torah study into your day? Do you have colleagues at your office who would appreciate a class on a Judaism-related topic of their choice? The Executive Learning Program is for you! Contact Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher at rmf@denverkollel.org for more information on taking your day at the office to a whole new level

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.

Increase Your Jewish IQ

By Rabbi Yaakov Zions

Last week we asked: When is *Kaddish Tiskabel* not recited after a prayer?

A: 1) On Tisha B'Av morning (see Orach Chaim 559:4) 2) According to some customs, in a house of mourning.

Addition to last week's answer: Another type of *kaddish* erroneously omitted in last week's answer is

Kaddish Derabanan, which adds in a section beginning with *al yisrael...*

This week's question: *Kaddish Tiskabel* is generally recited following every *Shemone Esrei* prayer. When else is it recited?

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

Ask the Rabbi

Fishing for Food or Fun

Morris Olitsky wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

May I assume that fishing for sport is prohibited but that fishing for food is acceptable? Shalom

Dear Morris Olitsky,

You're right. Only fishing for food is permitted according to Halacha.

While it's considered "sportsman-like" to put the fish back in the water, the Torah outlook is exactly the opposite. Do the fish a "flavor": Eat it for Shabbos!

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Continued from front side

Rebbe; 1855-1926) expands on the Kli Yakar's explanation. The Kli Yakar's intent, he says, is not merely that Hashem's attribute of mercy changes to strict justice due to the wicked. The fact that the Tetragrammaton is used is indicative that it is the very attribute of mercy that rendered the terrible judgment upon the people of Sodom.

The Shem MiShmuel explains with a parable of a father who gives his son a gift. As the son takes the gift, a scoundrel comes along and snatches the item away from the child. The son is forlorn, and the father, seeing his progeny's distress, is enraged at the assailant and metes out swift retribution. It is not so much the severity of the crime as much as the father's love and mercy toward his

child that drives him to dispense with any form of compassion toward the attacker and dispatch him without delay.

By the same token, continues the Shem MiShmuel, Sodom had tortured and victimized so many people, that Hashem's attribute of mercy toward the victims brought Divine wrath down upon the heads of the Sodomites.

Having mercy upon suffering people is a wonderful trait to possess, and certainly something that one should strive towards inculcating in himself and others. But sometimes, the mercy is misplaced. When one shows compassion toward aggressors, he may well end up being the cause of great cruelty toward those who will suffer at their hands.