



Vayechi 5777

January 13, 2017

A Taste of Torah

Up Down, Down and Up

by Rabbi Avraham Dovid Karnowsky

Every human possesses two components: positive character traits and negative character traits. Understandably, our job in this world is to increase the positive and eliminate the negative to the best of our ability. However, we are faced with a dilemma in the proper approach to this: Do we begin with a focus on eradicating the bad and then build our way up with the good, or should we first build the positive and then try to decrease our negative aspects?

In this week's Torah portion, we find a fascinating exchange between Yosef and his father Yaakov. Yaakov is on his deathbed. Yosef brings his two sons, Menashe and Efraim, to his ailing father for a final blessing. Naturally, Yosef places the older son, Menashe, to the right of his father, and the younger one to the left, as the right is always the more significant side.

However, Yaakov makes an interesting maneuver and crosses his hands, so that his right hand is placed on the head of Efraim and his left on Menashe. Yosef protests and tries to remove the hand from Efraim, reminding his father that he is not the firstborn. But Yaakov insists, explaining that, while great people will descend from Menashe, Efraim will have greater progeny, and Yaakov's hands remains where they were. This exchange between father and son begs an explanation!

The Shem Mishmuel (Rabbi Shmuel Bornsztain; 1855-1926) reveals a beautiful understanding. Menashe's main strength was his ability to completely remove and detach

himself from all the bad on this world. Efraim's main ability was to attach himself to the highest levels of holiness and good available in this world. Yosef felt that Menashe should be blessed first, for his viewpoint was that one first has to focus on abstaining from the bad elements before reaching out to attain lofty levels.

In response, Yaakov switched his hands, teaching his son, and all of us, an important lesson. The more we experience the heady pleasure of holiness and blessing, the easier it will be to then lose interest in the material pleasures of this world. Instead of forcing ourselves to abstain from the negative elements, first jump into the positive, taste its sweetness, and then, by extension, our earthly cravings will slowly disappear.

Our Sages teach us that we all have inside us a *nekuda tova*, a point of untainted goodness that cannot be corrupted. Even someone whom, at first glance, appears to be completely evil contains this element of goodness; one just needs to dig deep enough to reveal it. The first step is for one to identify this *nekuda tova*, to realize in which area lies one's goodness. Then one must follow the lesson that our great forefather Yaakov taught, to focus and build on that spark of holiness, improve it and elevate it higher and higher, until all the negativity slowly and surely fades away. If we elevate our personal stronghold of greatness, our undesirable traits will fall by the wayside, ultimately fulfilling our mission on this world.

Stories For The Soul

Funeral Insurance

A young Jewish man from the city of Stutchin was drafted into the Russian army during World War I. As he lay in the trenches, a Jewish man beside him was mortally wounded. The man begged the young soldier to make sure he'd receive a proper Jewish burial, and the young man gave his word. The injured man passed away shortly thereafter, and the soldier waited for a lull in the battle to fulfill his promise.

Unfortunately, the awaited-for break did not come quickly, and the young fellow, determined to keep his word, slung the body over his shoulder and, at great risk to his life, climbed out of the trenches and ran toward the nearest city. Miraculously, he was not hit by any gunfire, nor was he stopped by any officers as he abandoned his post. Handing the body over to the local *chevra kaddisha* (burial society), he hastened back to his post before his absence was noticed.

The battle eventually ended with the German army victorious; the young man was captured and inducted into the service of the Germans, tending their animals. One day, as he was out in the field, he heard a gunshot, and saw a soldier in the distance topple over. As there was no one else around, he realized the soldier was attempting to take his own life. He ran to the soldier, and tried to stop the bleeding from the wound. His efforts were in vain, though, as the soldier soon died. By then, other soldiers had arrived, and they accused the hapless boy of murdering the soldier. His protests were in vain, and he was brought

Continued on back

Kollel Happenings

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST AT FEB 1 T4T

Join Ben Figa, Assistant City Attorney for the City and County of Denver and previously Deputy Legal Counsel for the Office of Governor John Hickenlooper, and Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher, Senior Educator for the Denver Community Kollel, as they explore the limits of corporations. February 1st, 12-1:15 p.m. at the East Side Kosher Deli. Cost: \$25. RSVP info@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.

RABBI FRAND & RABBI REISMAN WEEKLY IN DENVER

The Kollel is offering the renowned weekly lectures of Rabbi Yissochor Frand and Rabbi Yaakov Reisman. Rabbi Frand's Thursday evening parsha shiur will be shown at the Kollel Southeast Torah Center, 9550 E. Belleview Ave., on Thursdays at 7 pm. Rabbi Reisman's Motzoei Shabbos Navi shiur will be shown at Beth Jacob High School, 5100 W. 14th Ave., at 8 pm. For sponsorships and info, contact info@denverkollel.org.

Increase Your Jewish IQ

By Rabbi Yaakov Zions

Last week we asked: When and how do we customarily congratulate someone for completing a mitzvah?

A: Upon the completion of the Torah reading, we congratulate the *oleh* (pl. *olim*; the person receiving an *aliyah*) for his part. The Sephardic custom is to do so for all *olim*, by wishing them “*chazak u'baruch*” (be strengthened and blessed). The Ashkenazic custom is to congratulate upon the completion of one of the five books of Torah only, wishing “*chazak, chazak v'nischazek*” (be exceedingly strengthened and may we be

strengthened together). (This is the most common version; there are, however, other slight variations.) According to all customs, the accolade is from the congregation to the *oleh*; the *oleh* need not say it, and, in fact, it may constitute an interruption for him to do so!

(Sources: Orach Chaim 159:11 and Piskei T'shuvos ibid.)

This week's question: What is the largest space in the Torah scroll mandated by halacha?

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

Lives of Our Torah Leaders

Rabbi Yosef Caro – the Bais Yosef Part VIII

The Mahari bei Rav understood a passage in the Rambam's halachic work *Mishneh Torah* as providing a method for reestablishing *semicha* and, by extension, a Sanhedrin. The Rambam, according to this interpretation, stated that if a majority of the rabbis in the Land of Israel agreed that a particular scholar was worthy of *semicha*, they could confer him with ordination. He, in turn, could now confer that special status upon other worthy scholars.

In 1538, the Mahari bei Rav organized a convocation of the leading scholars of Safed, and they conferred *semicha* upon him. The Mahari bei Rav then ordained four other rabbis, including Rabbi Caro.

There was opposition to the Mahari bei Rav's actions, however. In Jerusalem, which

was not as great as Safed in Torah scholarship and Torah personalities at that time, there lived a great Torah scholar named Rabbi Levi ibn Chaviv (c. 1480-c.1545), known as the Maharilbach. He opposed the Mahari bei Rav's innovation, and there was much discussion between the two great men on the subject. Many other Torah leaders outside of Safed also opposed the move. Rabbi Caro himself supported the new *semicha*, and he ordained a number of other scholars, but the opposition of so many, for a variety of reasons, some practical, some based on opposition to the Mahari bei Rav's halachic reasoning, doomed the movement. The Mahari bei Rav passed away in 1546, and his hopes for the reinstatement of *semicha* and the Sanhedrin largely died with him.

Stories For The Soul

Continued from front

before a military tribunal, where, despite his protestations of innocence, he was quickly sentenced to death. He was tossed into a cell until the following day, when he would face a firing squad.

In the middle of the night, as he dozed fitfully, he suddenly beheld a vision of the man he had buried several months earlier. The man told him, “Don't be afraid! In the merit of your efforts to have me buried properly, you will be saved. Even if you stand at the gates of death, they will not kill you.”

The next morning, the poor ex-soldier was hauled out and made to face a wall. Behind

him, a firing squad raised their weapons. “One!” came the cry. “Two!” But before “Three!” could ring out, the sound of hoof beats resounded, as a messenger, waving a paper, called to them to stop.

The paper had been found in the dead soldier's pocket. It was a suicide note to his family – proving that the young man was, in fact, innocent. He was saved!

Yaakov requested that Yosef bury him in the Land of Israel. Despite the difficulties involved, Yosef made sure that his father's final wishes for interment would be fulfilled.