

A Taste of Torah Whose Choice Is It

by Rabbi Shmuel Halpern

The story of Yosef being sold by his brothers into slavery is a difficult one to comprehend; compounding the problem is the fact that we're dealing with some of the greatest men to have walked this Earth! Needless to say, anything we may learn about their mistake must be understood with the proper perspective; namely, that it was only an error at their very lofty level. The word Torah means "teaching." When stories such as these are written in the Torah, we know that we are being taught very personal and significant lessons. The Tribes' selling of Yosef opens up a myriad of questions. While there is endless discussion we can delve into, I'd like to focus on one angle.

Rabbi Yitzchak Issac Sher (1875-1952) poses the following question: The Medrash, based on a verse in Isaiah, explains that Hashem implanted a great love for Yosef in Yaakov's heart, and a hatred for Yosef in his brothers' hearts. If Hashem implanted these feelings, how is it that Yaakov was held accountable for showing favoritism and the brothers were responsible for their hatred?! In fact, the Vilna Gaon (1720-1797) says that man is responsible for his thoughts and Hashem for the actions, as King Solomon said, "Many are the thoughts of man, but it is the counsel of Hashem that prevails." (Proverbs 19:21) Hashem is the One who decides if an action can be carried out, while we are accountable for the intentions. In this case, it seems that even the thoughts were from Hashem. Where was the free will that is a prerequisite for responsibility?

Rashi (37:14) tells us how Yosef's sale and subsequent journey to Egypt were a fulfillment of the prophecy given to Avraham, "Your descendants will be strangers in a land that isn't their

own." (Bereishis 15:13) Rabbi Sher explains that Avraham was given a choice: His descendants would either have to experience exile or *gehinnom* (purgatory). Avraham chose exile and suffering, which, unlike *gehinnom*, not only purifies from sin, but elevates one to a higher level for all eternity. Avraham's choice bore results. Hashem implanted within Yaakov an extra love for Yosef, and within the hearts of the brothers a small measure of envy.

While not held directly responsible for Avraham's decision, Yaakov and the brothers were now faced with a choice of their own. They could work harder to overcome these feelings within their hearts, in Yaakov's case, by restoring the proper balance of affection for all his children, while for the brothers, this would have entailed removing their feelings of dislike for Yosef. Or, they could let those emotions take root, fester and grow, setting them on a course toward disaster. As it says in Pirkei Avos (4:2), "The reward for a good deed is a good deed, and the reward for sin is another sin." Once a person sets out on a particular path, be it good or bad, the tendency is to continue down that road. Changing direction requires a conscious effort, it is a challenge, but it is doable.

We can learn from here the importance of not getting stuck with our past assumptions. Sometimes we are so absolutely convinced that our position is correct that we cannot hear or appreciate another opinion. We must be open to seeing things from a fresh perspective. If the Tribes could get stuck with a false impression of Yosef, we must certainly suspect that our sometimes-negative impressions of others may be mistaken.



Because Torah Is for Every Jew

Stories For The Soul

It's Worth the Insult

In the late 18th century, there was a famine in Lithuania. Food was scarce, and people wandered from town to town looking for something to eat.

In one small village lived a young child named Moshe, who would later grow up to be the great Chassidic leader Rabbi Moshe of Kobrin (1784-1858). Moshe's mother worked hard all day long to earn enough to purchase some grain, which she ground and baked into bread to provide for her family and as many strangers as she could feed.

Unfortunately, there was never enough bread to go around, and some of the poor, hungry wanderers would insult and curse Moshe's mother, despite her prodigious efforts. It was hard for the exhausted woman to bear the abuse, and, one day, she burst into tears.

"Mother," said Moshe, "don't worry! You just keep on performing your acts of kindness. If these people were to praise you for your good deeds, it would take away from the merit of the mitzvah!"

Yosef was a teenager in Egypt, alone in the most licentious society on Earth, subjected to terrible temptations. When he overcame the temptations thrown at him, he was reviled and thrown into jail. But he held firm and remained faithful to G-d despite the great challenges. It was through this perseverance that he merited his subsequent ascent to viceroy of Egypt.

Kollel Happenings

FAMILY FUN AT JEWISH FAMILY EXTRAVAGANZA THIS SUNDAY!

Join the Kollel for family fun at the annual Jewish Children's Extravaganza this Sunday, Dec. 25th, from 10:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. The event will be held at South Suburban Family Sports Center, 6901 S. Peoria. Cost: \$15 per child, \$7.50 per adult - includes entire facility. For more info or to reserve, visit denverkollel.org, email info@denverkollel.org or call 303-820-2855.

WINTER GARDENS WOMEN'S NIGHT OUT JAN. 11TH

The Kollel Women's Division is excited to announce that its 5th annual Women's Wellness Workshop will be held on Jan. 11, 2017. *Winter Gardens Women's Night Out* will feature noted psychotherapist and speaker Lauren Roth, three intriguing TEDx-style talks, and great food and camaraderie. Don't miss the most unique event of the year! For more info or to reserve, visit denverkollel.org, email info@denverkollel.org or call 303-820-2855.

LEGAL HOLIDAY LEARNING THIS DECEMBER 25TH

Start your day off on the right foot with Torah study! Join the Kollel for learning at three locations around Denver. At the Kollel West Side Bais Medrash, breakfast at 9:15 followed by learning. At the Kollel Southeast Torah Center, shacharis at 8 followed by breakfast and learning at 9, and at EDOS, shacharis at 7:30 followed by breakfast and learning at 8:30. Topic being studied is *Right on the Money: The Origins of Chanukah Gelt and Gifts*.

Increase Your Jewish IQ

By Rabbi Yaakov Zions

Last week we asked: What halacha is different for someone living in Earth's Southern Hemisphere?

A: There is a fascinating halachic discussion as to when those in the Southern Hemisphere should begin reciting *v'sain tal u'matar* (the thrice-daily supplication for rain), as their rainy season is the opposite of ours. Should they begin on December 4th, as we in the Northern Hemisphere do, based on the Talmud (Ta'anis 10a), or is that only for those in places where the need for rain begins around that time? Most contemporary halachic authorities rule that the Talmudic ruling applies to them, as well, since that's the beginning of the rainy season

for most Jewish communities. However, there is a difference for these Southern Hemisphere locales. If one mentions *v'sain tal u'matar* during the summer months, halacha rules that the prayer must be repeated, as rain is then unnecessary and unwanted. This would not apply to those in the Southern Hemisphere. Since it actually is needed in those areas, one need not repeat the prayer! (Sources: Har Tzvi Orach Chaim 1:56 and Piskei Teshuvos 114:6)

This week's question: There is a *minhag* (custom) of some to give Chanukah gelt (money) to children on the 5th night of Chanukah. What is unique about that night to warrant this *minhag*?

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

Lives of Our Torah Leaders Rabbi Yosef Caro – the Bais Yosef Part V

In 1525, Dovid Hareuveni appeared in Portugal, bearing a letter from Clement, as well as from the king of Abyssinia. He was recognized as an ambassador in the Portuguese court, and messianic hysteria broke loose among the downtrodden Sephardic communities. Dovid, overconfident, began teaching Torah to Marranos, converted a Moslem maidservant to Judaism, and in general did little to avoid inflaming the wrath of the Inquisition.

Meanwhile, Dr. Diego Peres, inspired by Dovid, came to him and told him of dreams and visions ordering him to return to Judaism. He then went and circumcised himself, began calling himself Shlomo Molcho, and taught Torah. By now, the Inquisition had had quite enough, and they demanded that the king of Portugal do something. The king ordered Dovid to convert or leave Portugal; Dovid departed for Italy, with Shlomo Molcho following him.

Messianic fervor spread through Europe, especially in the Marrano communities.

Meanwhile, Shlomo managed to meet with Pope Clement VII, and he made three predictions: that the Tiber River in Rome would overflow, that there would be an earthquake in Portugal, and that there would be certain comets seen in the skies. When the Tiber River did, indeed, overflow its banks, Clement, already impressed with the charismatic Shlomo, invited him to live in the papal palace.

However, many Jews feared the fallout from the messianic movement, and tried to stem the enthusiasm that was sweeping through the communities. One such person, a physician by the name of Joseph Mantino, took some of Shlomo's writings that were critical of Christianity, translated them into Latin and sent them to Church leaders. Shlomo was promptly deemed a heretic and condemned to be burned at the stake. Pope Clement, though, had taken a liking to Shlomo, and he arranged for his escape, substituting a look-alike to be executed in his stead.

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