



*Because Torah Is for Every Jew*

Vayigash 5777

January 6, 2017

# A Taste of Torah

## It's All Good

by Rabbi Chaim Yeshia Freeman

Everyone's dream is to live in a perfect world without any challenges or obstacles. However, it is evident that this is not Hashem's current plan for Creation. Realizing this, we may ask ourselves what the proper response is to everyday life experiences that occur. The answer to this can be found in a Medrash cited in the Daas Zekainim (a commentary on the Torah). The Torah describes that when Yosef brought Yaakov in front of Pharaoh for the first time, he asked him his age. This seems to be a strange question to greet someone with for the first time. What is even more perplexing is Yaakov's response. He replied, "The days of the years of my sojourns have been 130 years. Few and bad have been the days of the years of my life, and they have not reached the life spans of my forefathers in the days of their sojourns." (Vayigash 47:9) The Medrash records the frightening words Hashem said to Yaakov. At the time that Yaakov commented that his years were few and bad, Hashem told him, "I saved you from Eisav and Lavan and returned Dina and Yosef to you, and yet, you are still complaining. I promise that for every word you uttered in complaint, a year will be deducted from your life, and you will not live to the years of your father Yitzchak." Since Yaakov used 33 words, Hashem deducted 33 years from his life, and he passed away at the age of 147, unlike his father Yitzchak, who lived until 180. This Medrash is very hard to understand. Why was Hashem so upset at Yaakov for what he said? True, eventually Hashem ensured that everything fell into place, but Yaakov's life was still difficult! I think we can explain this based on what is found in the *Shulchan Aruch* (Code of Jewish Law) (Orach Chaim 230:5) that a person should be accustomed to say,

"Whatever the Merciful One does, He does for the best." The source for this is a passage in Tractate Brachos (60b), where the Talmud cites an example of this attitude from an incident that occurred with Rabbi Akiva. He was traveling and reached a city, but he was unable to find lodging. He said, "Whatever the Merciful One does, He does for the best." He went and slept in a field, along with his rooster, donkey, and lamp. The wind came and blew out the lamp, a cat came and ate the rooster, and a lion came and ate the donkey. Each time, he said, "Whatever the Merciful One does, He does for the best." That night, a band of marauders came and invaded the city, but Rabbi Akiva, who was outside the city, was spared any harm. Rabbi Akiva said, "This is what I said! 'Whatever the Merciful One does, He does for the best.'" Rashi (ibid.) explains that had the lamp been lit, or had the rooster crowed or the donkey brayed, the bandits would have discovered him. Rabbi Shlomo Kluger, in his commentary Chochmas Shlomo on the aforementioned passage in *Shulchan Aruch*, argues that one should rather be accustomed to say "This, too, is for the good" instead of "Whatever the Merciful One does, He does for the best." His source is a passage in Tractate Ta'anis (21a) which states that whatever happened to Nachum Ish Gam Zu (a teacher of Rabbi Akiva), he would always say "This, too, is for the good." There is a slight difference between the two expressions. The term, "Whatever the Merciful One does, He does for the best" means that even though now the good is not obvious, eventually, it will be good. However, the term "This, too, is for the good" indicates that even right now, everything that occurs is good.

## Stories For The Soul

### No Cold Feet

Rabbi Akiva Eiger was once travelling by wagon late in the winter. The snows had begun to melt, but it was still quite cold. The thaw meant that the roads were quite treacherous, and every so often, the wagon would get mired in the muck, whereupon the driver would have to climb down and drag the horses from the mud.

Finally, they reached the main road, which was better maintained and not as swampy. The driver relaxed a bit as the horses sped on their way. Suddenly, Rabbi Eiger leaned out of the coach and handed the driver a pair of dry socks. The driver thanked him profusely for his thoughtfulness - and then wondered to himself how the rabbi had a spare pair of socks if his luggage was in a different part of the wagon.

The mystery was solved when they arrived at their destination. As Rabbi Eiger alighted from the wagon, the driver saw that the sage had no socks on his feet!

The driver, stunned, exclaimed, "Rebbe, isn't it a bit much for someone as great as you to give me his socks?!"

"Should I have sat with dry socks, dry and comfortable, while you sat cold and shivering after your exertions?!" replied Rabbi Eiger. "Absolutely not! Of course I gave you my socks!"

In this week's parsha, Yosef resettled his family in Egypt, where he provided for their needs. But he was not satisfied with this - he went out of his way to ensure that they were comfortable and would not feel awkward as strangers in a foreign land.

## Kollel Happenings

### 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.

### WINTER GARDENS WOMEN'S NIGHT OUT JAN. 11<sup>TH</sup>

The Kollel Women's Division is excited to announce that its 5<sup>th</sup> 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](http://denverkollel.org), email [info@denverkollel.org](mailto:info@denverkollel.org) or call 303-820-2855.

### 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](mailto:rmh@denverkollel.org).

## Increase Your Jewish IQ

By Rabbi Yaakov Zions

**Last week we asked:** What are two unique aspects about the fast of *Asara B'teves*, aside from being the shortest public fast of the year?

**A:** 1) It is the only public fast that can coincide with, and be observed on, Friday. 2) According to Abudarham (by Rabbi Dovid Abudarham [c. 1340]; quoted by Bais Yosef, Orach Chaim 550), if this fast were to coincide with Shabbos (which is an impossible occurrence according to our current Jewish

calendar setup), it would be observed on Shabbos! This is unlike most other fasts (with the notable exception of Yom Kippur) which are either postponed to Sunday or moved up to Thursday in such a situation. (Many disagree with the Abudarham; see Rashi, Megilla 5a.)

**This week's question:** When and how do we customarily congratulate someone for completing a mitzvah?

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

## Lives of Our Torah Leaders

### Rabbi Yosef Caro – the Bais Yosef Part VII

A brief biography of the Mahari bei Rav is in order. Rabbi Yaakov was born in Spain in 1475. He studied under Rabbi Yitzchak Abohav, one of the leading Torah figures of the time. When the Jews were expelled from Spain, he fled to Fez, Morocco. He then moved to Tlemçen, the chief town of the Barbary states. At the time, he was all of eighteen years old, but was nonetheless appointed rabbi of the Jewish community there. He later emigrated to Jerusalem, but soon left due to the severe hardships of living there. He lived in Egypt and Syria at various times, becoming at one point the rabbi of Cairo, and he eventually returned to the Land of Israel (then known as Palestine), settling in Safed in 1524. Once there, he established a yeshiva, and his charisma and scholarship attracted numerous students, many of whom grew to become major Torah leaders.

The Mahari bei Rav is most famous for his attempt to reinstate *semicha*, and Rabbi Caro played a major part in his efforts.

True *semicha*, or rabbinical ordination, began with Moshe, who ordained his pupil, Joshua, who in turn ordained his students. This passing of the Torah from one generation to the next continued unbroken for centuries, and *semicha* was the only way to become a fully-qualified rabbi and judge.

The Romans, though, put great pressure on the Jews to terminate *semicha*, outlawing it on the pain of death. Despite much self-sacrifice on the part of many Mishnaic and Talmudic Sages to perpetuate *semicha*, the vicissitudes of the bitter exile took their toll, and *semicha* was eventually discontinued. Without *semicha*, a Sahnedrin – the 71-member judicial body that was the final word in matters of Jewish law – could not exist, and many powers of the courts are severely limited when lacking judges who have *semicha*. (What is referred to as *semicha* today is actually permission for an individual to serve as a halachic decisor or rabbinical judge.)

## A Taste of Torah

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Perhaps this was the problem with Yaakov Avinu's response. Yaakov should have recognized how every incident that occurred to him was not merely a chain of events which would ultimately end up for the best; rather, every event itself was an act of goodness and kindness from our Father in Heaven.

While we have no comprehension of

Yaakov's supernal levels of greatness, and his error was very subtle and slight, inasmuch as our Sages record the misstep, we can try to take a lesson to our lives, as well. When things are getting stressful, we should remember that everything Hashem does is for an ultimate greater good. Even better, we can strive to recognize that not only will it be good, but it is already good right now!