



A Taste of Torah

All Alone with Yourself

by Rabbi Ari Aragon

Hear ye! Hear ye! Come now and see the final showdown! In the left corner! The Red Avenger! And in the right corner! The Yeshiva Student!

As silly as it may seem, this is, for many of us, the natural way we imagine the fight in this week's parsha between the Angel of Eisav and our forefather Yaakov. The way our Sages describe this wrestling match is slightly different. They tell us that Yaakov fought the Angel with Torah. The Angel would attack with a left hook, and Yaakov Avinu would block him with a passage of Talmud in Sukkah! Then the Angel comes in with a right hook! And Yaakov Avinu would pull out Tractate Makkos! It was the Torah that Yaakov had learned in the yeshiva of Shem and Ever that protected him. What is the nature of this quality of Torah that protects the physical beings of those who learn it? Can knowledge alone physically protect a person?

Several weeks ago, we completed a month known as Cheshvan. However, when we refer to it, even when we recite the pre-Rosh Chodesh prayers on the Shabbos before the first of the month, we call it Marcheshvan. The reason for this is because, in Hebrew, "mar" means bitter. The month of Cheshvan is the only month in the Jewish calendar which doesn't have any holiday in it. It's a month without direction of what to relate to. To a Jew, this lack of content leaves a bitter taste in the mouth. The great *mussar* (ethics) masters, however, explain the name differently. In Aramaic, "mar" means master. A person going naturally through the year of the Jewish calendar has a life packed with spiritual excitement, especially during the time preceding Cheshvan. He's gone through an uplifting month of Elul, working hard to find places in his life where he can grow closer to Hashem. This culminates in a recommitment of self to the King of kings on Rosh Hashana. By Yom Kippur, he's rising to the great spiritual heights of the angels, which leads directly to a comforting atmosphere with Hashem's encompassing presence on Sukkos, culminating in a final crescendo on Simchas Torah, dancing with pure joy with

the Torah. A person feels in his bones that he is a better, more committed Jew than he was a few months ago.

What is the test to find if one has truly ingrained the heights of these holidays into his heart and his life? This, say the great *mussar* masters, is Marcheshvan. You take away any holiday, any boost, and any direction from the outside. The only thing a person has to take himself higher on his spiritual journey is whatever comes from within himself. When one is left all alone, without any help from any outside source, it is the ultimate test to see if he has incorporated and mastered this new level in his life. When we are behind closed doors, are we different? Do we think differently? Talk differently? If so, then we can say that this new way of life is because WE are different, not because our circumstances are different. It reveals to us that we have finally become the masters over ourselves, because our spiritual growth is coming exclusively from us alone.

The verse which tells us about the battle between Yaakov and the Angel of Eisav says, "Yaakov remained alone, and a man (the Angel of Eisav) wrestled with him." (Vayishlach 32:25) One result of Yaakov winning the battle was that he received a new name - Yisrael. The name Yisrael is the name of one who is a living Torah scroll, a complete embodiment of the Torah. This battle, while also a physical match, was, ultimately, about who Yaakov was in his essence. If he truly was Yisrael or not. The only way to test whether the Torah was honestly a part of Yaakov, and not just a bunch of nice ideas and talk, was to test him while he was totally alone, with no one but himself to hide behind. If he truly embodied the Torah and acted according to the will of Hashem, then the Torah would protect him. If not, then he would lose the battle, and, very possibly, even his life.

There are many times throughout life when bad things happen to us, and we are put into difficult and uncomfortable situations where we are demanded to perform. Many times, the natural response is to feel that we are victims of the situation, and there is

Continued on back side

Stories For The Soul

Weather or Not

Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik of Brisk was a brilliant Torah authority and leader of the Jewish People at the turn of the 20th century. It once happened that a decree aimed at the Jewish populace was issued by the government. The minister who had the power to abolish the decree was known to not accept a bribe under any circumstances. Attempting to do so could land one in prison, or worse.

Rav Chaim, unperturbed, told the Jewish community leaders to raise a large sum of money, and he would deal with the rest.

It was a hot summer's day, and Rav Chaim walked into the minister's office. The minister was quite shocked as the rabbi entered wearing a heavy winter coat! He immediately demanded an explanation.

"My grandmother came to me in a dream," explained Rav Chaim, "and warned me that it would snow today and that I should dress properly."

"But rabbi," protested the minister, "you see for yourself that it is a sweltering summer day with no snow in sight for months!"

"That's true for now," said Rav Chaim, "but you know how weather changes abruptly. I have to be prepared."

The minister scoffed at the rabbi's gullibility, while Rav Chaim continued to insist that he must heed the nighttime counsel. This went on for several minutes, with the minister becoming more antagonized by the sage's stubbornness.

Suddenly, Rav Chaim exclaimed, "I am convinced my dream is correct, and I'll wage 50,000 rubles that it will snow before sunset!"

The minister was taken aback. He couldn't believe that the famous rabbi of the Jews was so foolish and would so easily part with such an enormous sum. "I must warn you," he said, "that if I win the bet, I don't intend to return the money to you under any circumstances."

"It is understood," said the rabbi, adding that he did not intend to lose the money. And with that, Rav Chaim placed an envelope with 50,000 rubles on the desk

Continued on back side

Kollel Happenings

FAMILY FUN AT JEWISH FAMILY EXTRAVAGANZA ON DEC. 25TH

Join the Kollel for family fun at the annual Jewish Children's Extravaganza on 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; discounted group rates are available before 12/21. For general information, call 303-820-2855 or email info@denverkollel.org.

NEW! 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.

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: How is the starting date of *Tal U'matar* (the supplication for rain in our daily prayers) an indication of our belief in the Final Redemption?

A: We began asking for rain in *Shemone Esrei* this year on Sunday evening, December 4th. This is the starting date for every year which doesn't precede a 29-day February (when it begins on December 5th). As noted in an earlier column, this is only accurate during the 20th and 21st centuries. Following that, the date will move forward at the rate of three days every four centuries. This supplication is recited until Pesach, a date on the Jewish calendar which doesn't change over the centuries. It therefore follows that

after many, many centuries of the starting date moving closer toward the ending date, these supplications will begin after Pesach. This would obviate the entire concept, and obviously can never be allowed to occur. It won't, due to the future redemption when the *Sanhedrin* will again function and our calendar will be a living one rather than a fixed, pre-determined calendar. [For a broader understanding, see *Artscroll's Birchas Hachamah*, by Rabbi J. David Bleich, page 62.]

This week's question: What halacha is different for someone living in Earth's Southern Hemisphere?

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

Lives of Our Torah Leaders

Rabbi Yosef Caro – the Bais Yosef, Part IV

In 1523, a man by the name of Dovid HaReuveni appeared, claiming to come from the Ten Lost Tribes, a member of the Tribe of Reuven. Amazingly, he sought and received an audience with Pope Clement VII, to whom he proposed a venture to raise an army consisting of papal forces and members of the Lost Tribes to free the Land of Israel

from the Moslems. The Pope would regain control of Eastern trade routes and Christian sites in the East, while the Jews would create a state in the Land of Israel. Clement agreed, but stipulated that first, the German and French rulers had to end their dispute, and this could be effected only by the king of Portugal.

A Taste of Torah

Continued from front side

nothing to do but sulk about it. The lesson of Yaakov is that these trials are not punishments from Above as much as they are opportunities given to us, directly from Hashem, for the goal of actualizing the true potential that we have cultivated inside ourselves. To test whether we respond to challenges with anger, with despair, or with Torah. If we succeed in continuing to attach ourselves to Hashem's will in the challenging situations of life, then we have the satisfaction of knowing that we are truly

instilling the ideals of the Torah into our very being. If we fail, it is because we still have what to work on and grow inside of ourselves. It means that that we need to be more honest with ourselves, and recognize what level we're really on. Then, from that point, we can begin to take the next positive step in our lives toward becoming greater people and ultimately coming closer to Hashem. There is no such thing as failing or being a victim if our ultimate goal is to know ourselves.

Stories For The Soul

Continued from front side

of the Russian minister.

The two discussed some other matters for a few minutes, and then Rav Chaim departed. He returned home and assured the Jewish community leaders that the bribe had been delivered, and all would be well. "Wait several days, and then go speak with him regarding the edict."

Sure enough, the minister agreed to abolish the

decree. Rav Chaim, in his wisdom, recognized that there are multiple ways to deliver a bribe.

Yaakov, on the final leg of his exile from Eretz Yisrael, encountered his murderous brother Eisav. He sent him a substantial gift in an effort to appease him – and our Sages learned from this that when in exile, we must do what we can to mollify those who wish to harm before resorting to other, more forceful methods.