



THE HARRY H. BEREN TORAH WEEKLY

A project of the Denver Community Kollel



Because Torah Is for Every Jew

Bechukosai 5776

June 3, 2016

A Taste of Torah Always a Challenge

By Rabbi Akiva Stern

Like most complex endeavors, learning how to drive a car begins as a cognitive task, demanding an unwavering focus. A new driver struggles with simultaneously ensuring the vehicle is straight, keeping an eye on the mirrors and maintaining an appropriate speed. Not to mention the other drivers whizzing past, looking at him. But in short order, this becomes an associative task, one we do almost entirely without thought. An experienced driver can weave through traffic while munching on a sandwich and still carry on an intense conversation with his passenger with no difficulty whatsoever! This idea is true in almost all human endeavors or disciplines. No matter how complex, at a certain level of practice and precision any task becomes relatively simple.

It seems from Rashi in the beginning of our parsha that Torah study is a glaring exception to this rule. Prior to the section of the *Tochacha* (Admonition), we are told of the blessing granted to those who follow the will of G-d. The verse begins, "If you will go with my decrees and safeguard my commandments and observe them..." (Bechukosai 26:3) Rashi (ibid.) explains that from the apparent redundancy of the verse we can deduce that the end of the verse is referring to mitzvos while the beginning is talking about Torah study. Furthermore, he understands that the words mean "if you toil in my Torah."

Rashi's comprehensive explanation of the verse highlights the incredible importance of committing to, and expending effort in, the pursuit of Torah study. The entirety of the subsequent blessings are associated only with rigorous study, not armchair philosophy. We also understand from Rashi that

the difficulty Torah study entails is not simply a condition that plagues beginner learners, but it is, rather, an essential rule. At all levels of study, we will always meet resistance and have to work hard and apply ourselves to succeed.

How and why can this be?

Rabbi Shimshon Pincus (1944/45-2001) explains with a profound idea found in the Zohar. The Zohar cryptically states that in the Torah, G-d can be found. The explanation seems to be that being that the Torah is a manifestation of G-d's will, it is therefore a representation of G-d Himself! With this in mind, we can better understand. G-d is infinite and unlimited. It is not possible for a finite human being to complete the study of Torah or to even become proficient to the point that it is no longer challenging.

This explanation brings two very important ideas to the fore. The first is that Torah study is unlike every other form of education. In other disciplines, the goal is to become knowledgeable and/or proficient. They are but a means to an end. In contrast, Torah study is the purpose itself. When we study Torah, we have the unbelievable opportunity to know G-d and cleave to him in the deepest way available to a human being. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, if we find ourselves feeling blasé, bored and unexcited about our Torah study, there must be something fundamentally wrong with the approach to our methodology of learning. It behooves us to revisit and revamp our appreciation of Torah, and what better time to do so than this auspicious period of *Sefiras Ha'Omer*? May we arrive at Shavuot with a renewed excitement for the holy Torah.

Stories For The Soul

Torah before All Else

Based on a story in Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum

Rabbi Moshe Neuschloss (1912-1997) was one of the great halachic authorities of his time. During World War II, he was in a Nazi concentration camp. At one point he was so sick that he was presumed dead, and brought with the other bodies to the crematorium. Miraculously, he revived and managed to survive.

Following the war, he returned to Hungary. His brother had also survived, and, upon discovering that Rav Moshe, thought to be dead, was indeed alive, he made haste to visit him.

He arrived on a Friday afternoon at the doorstep of Rav Moshe's home. Rav Moshe opened the door, immediately invited his brother into the house and said, "We must learn Torah - now." For five uninterrupted hours, they sat together studying. As Shabbos drew closer, they closed their books. Only then did they embrace with great emotion and weep uncontrollably on one another's shoulders over the terrible tragedies that had befallen them and their nation.

Rav Moshe then explained his actions. "Since the world was devoid of Torah for so many years of the Holocaust - and even now, so many are involved with rebuilding their lives - I feel it necessary that someone carry the world's spiritual needs, which can be accomplished only through intensive Torah study. I have made this my life's commitment, expressing my gratitude to Hashem.

"Furthermore," Rav Moshe continued, "there is another reason. In repayment for my room and board in this home, I agreed to a Yissachar/Zevulun partnership with the owner, whereby I spend my time learning, and he shares my reward in the Next World. I did not think it appropriate that I detract from my responsibility for personal reasons."

In this week's parsha, the Torah tells us that toiling in Torah is the first step to achieving spiritual greatness, while failing to do so is the first step on a slippery slope toward spiritual doom. It is thus imperative to immerse oneself in Torah study whenever possible, especially in times of spiritual decline.

Kollel Happenings

LEARN-A-THON & SIYUM THIS SUNDAY, JUNE 5TH

Join the communal completion of an entire tractate of Talmud in the course of one hour of Torah study! Men, sign up and study a preassigned section of Tractate Sotah with a class or chavrusah. Women, sign up and attend a special study session. The siyum will be part of the completion of an entire order of Talmud, Seder Nashim, that is being completed by Daf Yomi participants around the world. Sunday, June 5th, 3:30-5:30 pm at the Ethel A. Beren Auditorium, 1261 Zenobia. Visit denverkollel.org, email info@denverkollel.org, or call 303-820-2855 to sign up or for more details.

THE M.B. GLASSMAN FOUNDATION GOLD LUNCH & LEARN PROGRAM

The M.B. Glassman Foundation GOLD Program is a division of the Denver Community Kollel dedicated to bringing Torah study to seniors in the community. Don't miss a great Lunch and Learn class on the weekly parsha at the East Side Kosher Deli, 499 S. Elm St. at 12:00 am. There is no charge for the lunch or the learning! Transportation can be arranged. For more information, contact rmf@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.

Increase Your Jewish IQ

By Rabbi Yaakov Zions

Last week we asked: Which *perek* (chapter) of *Pirkei Avos* is not actually part of the Mishna, and why is it included?

A: The sixth and final chapter of *Avos* is actually a *b'raisa* (non-Mishnaic Tannaic teaching) and is actually the eighth chapter of *Masechta Kalla* (one of the small collections of *b'raisas*, printed after *Seder Nezikin* in many editions of the Talmud). It was appended to *Avos* due to the importance of its content. Siddur *Avodas Yisroel* suggests that there was a necessity to add another chapter to *Avos*, in order to have a

complete chapter to say on each of the six Shabbosos between Pesach and Shavuos.

This week's question: When Yom Tov is on Motzoei Shabbos, we insert a Havdalah formula into our prayers, beginning "*Vatodi'enu.*" Aside from the difference in wording from the usual Motzoei Shabbos prayer inserted into *Shemone Esrei*, "*Ata Chonantanu,*" what is unique about the Yom Tov variation?

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

Lives of Our Torah Leaders

The Rambam Part III

Many of the Jews of Fez were uncertain as to whether their superficial acceptance of the Moslem faith was the correct approach. In 1163, a number of prominent Fez Jews asked one of the great scholars of the time (who did not reside in the Almohad-ruled areas) for guidance. The scholar responded that their behavior was wrong and that instead, the Jews of Fez needed to prepare themselves for martyrdom.

This response was not at all what the Jews of Fez had hoped for, and some Jews, not ready to make the ultimate sacrifice, despaired of being able to continue living secretly as Jews. Others prepared to die, while many simply did not know what to do.

The Rambam, not yet thirty years old, wrote a letter to the Fez community entitled *Iggeres Hashmad* (Letter of Apostasy). He strongly defended the approach adopted by the Jews of Fez, and encouraged them to remain strong in their resolve to continue to live as Jews. This letter, written in Arabic and later translated into Hebrew, thrust the Rambam into a position of leadership and responsibility, in addition to his already-acknowledged scholarly abilities.

(Much later, the Rambam would write a similar, but much-more famous letter known as *Iggeres Teiman*, *Letter to Yemen*, where he allowed the Jews of Yemen to externally adopt Islam but secretly continue to live as Jews.)

In his *Iggeres Hashmad*, the Rambam had recommended that those Jews who had the ability to flee Fez ought to do so. In 1165, he and his family followed that directive and escaped Fez, boarding a ship bound for Eretz Yisrael (the Land of Israel). The ship was struck by a terrible storm while at sea, but they escaped the perilous situation and arrived at Acre.

The Rambam established the date of the storm - the 10th day of the Jewish month of Iyar - as a day of penance, and the date of his arrival in Eretz Yisrael - the 3rd day of Sivan - as a day of rejoicing, feasting and gift-giving to the poor. (This may sound very much like the holiday of Purim, and, indeed, it has been the custom of individuals and communities who have experienced miraculous deliverance from calamity to establish the day of salvation as their own personal "Purim.")

The Torah Weekly is made possible through a generous grant from the Harry H. Beren Foundation of Lakewood, NJ, in memory of Harry H. Beren, z"l.
Denver Community Kollel | 1516 Xavier Street, Denver, CO 80204 | 303-820-2855

info@denverkollel.org | www.denverkollel.org

To receive Torah Weekly by email, email to info@denverkollel.org