

# A Taste of Torah

## Personal Joy

by Rabbi Ari Aragon

There is an important principle that has proven itself over and over again during the course of time. It is felt by every single person at some point in his or her life, and it shapes many of our decisions, often in a completely subconscious fashion. That principle is: Nobody likes tests.

The Torah says, “There [at Marah] Hashem gave them [the Jewish People] laws and statutes, and there He tested them.” (Shemos 15:25) From the general context of the verses, it seems that there were two disparate events that occurred at Marah. One: Hashem gave the fledgling nation some mitzvos. Two: Hashem tested the Jewish People by taking them into a desert without any water to see if they would trust in Him. The Ramban, however, connects the two statements. He says, “Rashi says that Hashem gave the Jewish People parts of the Torah so they could be in engrossed in it. It is implied from his words that Hashem both informed them of the laws, and taught them how to learn them... And the purpose of this was so the Jewish People could accustom themselves to mitzvos and see if they would accept the mitzvos with joy and a good heart. And this was the test, as Hashem wanted to give more mitzvos to them later on.” The Ramban reveals to us that the test was really in the giving of a few mitzvos. However, the test wasn’t merely to see if they would observe the mitzvos, it was to see if they could enjoy the mitzvos. But what a strange test this is - either you like something or you don’t! The test of whether or not Hashem should give them more mitzvos should, seemingly, be dependent on whether or not they obey His command, not

if they enjoy it. A math whiz may not enjoy the math portion of the SAT, but if he knows the material, he will do well. Would anyone think to fail him because he would rather be playing baseball or drinking a coffee with friends? Why do mitzvos have to be so intense?

Let’s ask the basic question - how did the Jewish People actually pass this test? How did they develop a joy for mitzvos and learning inside themselves? Rabbi Yisroel Salanter (1809-1883), in a letter (letter 30 in Ohr Yisroel), states, “The fundamental point that a man should accomplish in his youth is to seek out different places in his life where he can fix his character, and to begin to fix them until his entire personality naturally gravitates toward that which is truly right and just. And with this he will have a joy (in the mitzvos).” The way a person feels joy in something is when his entire personality identifies with, and expresses itself through, that which he is doing. In other words, joy is a sign of who a person really is. If our enjoyment is in spiritual things, then our enjoyment in physical things is diminished because who we are is spiritual. And it works the other way, as well.

The test of the Jewish People was to see if their collective unique individuality could be expressed through the mitzvos themselves, thus resulting in an enjoyment of the mitzvah itself. To illustrate, one of the mitzvos given at Marah was Shabbos. It is easy for Shabbos to be a day of enjoying food, singing, family time, and relaxation. However, if the Shabbos itself doesn’t excite us, it’s a sign that deep down, we have yet to identify with the Shabbos.

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Because Torah Is for Every Jew

## Stories For The Soul

### Nothing Else to Worry About

When the Brisker Rav, Rabbi Yitzchak Zev Soloveitchik (1886-1959), was a young man, he was ordered to appear before the Russian draft board to be inducted into the Czar’s army. This fate was tantamount to both a spiritual and physical death sentence. As the date of his appearance neared, his father, Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik, instructed him to concentrate on the words of his ancestor Rabbi Chaim Volozhiner (1749-1821), who writes in his magnum opus *Nefesh HaChaim* that when faced by danger, if one concentrates on the idea of *ein od milvado*, “there is no other power other than Hashem,” then all other forces will be nullified and the danger will disappear.

Yitzchak Zev went before the draft board, concentrating with all his might on this concept, and he was exempted from the draft.

Later, when the Nazis occupied Poland at the beginning of WWII, Rav Yitzchak Zev fled from Warsaw to Vilna. There were Nazi soldiers everywhere, and the journey was extremely perilous. Rav Yitzchak Zev traveled along undaunted, for he never stopped focusing on the teaching of his ancestor Rav Chaim Volozhiner.

At one point, Rav Yitzchak Zev was distracted and his mind wandered. Suddenly, a Nazi soldier approached the wagon. Rav Yitzchak Zev immediately renewed his focus, and the Nazi guard moved on.

In this week’s parsha, as the fledgling Jewish Nation stood at the sea, their situations seemed hopeless. Hashem told Moshe that they must travel into the sea. It was their faith that Hashem could do anything that was their salvation as the sea split before them.

## Kollel Happenings

### KOLLEL 19<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION FEB. 28<sup>TH</sup>

The Kollel will celebrate 19 years of bringing Torah learning, Torah teaching and Torah living to Denver on Tuesday, Feb. 28<sup>th</sup>, 6:30 pm, at Aish Denver. Rabbi Daniel and Adina Krausz will receive the Betzael Award, and the Kollel will mark the opening of its new Southeast Torah Center and its temporary West Denver location. To reserve or place an ad in the commemorative journal, email [journal@denverkollel.org](mailto:journal@denverkollel.org), visit [denverkollel.org](http://denverkollel.org), or call 303-820-2855.

### IMMIGRATION & NATIONAL SECURITY AT MARCH 1<sup>ST</sup> T4T

Join Kenneth H. Stern, Partner, Stern & Curray LLC, and Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher, Senior Educator for the Denver Community Kollel, as they explore the issues of immigration and maintaining security. Wednesday, March 1<sup>st</sup>, 12-1:15 p.m. at the East Side Kosher Deli. Cost: \$25. RSVP [info@denverkollel.org](mailto:info@denverkollel.org).

### 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](mailto:rmf@denverkollel.org) or call 303-820-2855.

## Increase Your Jewish IQ

By Rabbi Yaakov Zions

**Last week we asked:** Is *Az Yashir* ever officially omitted from our daily *shacharis* prayers?

**A:** The Tur (by Rabbi Yaakov ben Asher, 1270 - c. 1340) cites a custom of some communities to recite the Song of *Ha'azinu* (Devarim 32:1-43) on Tisha B'av in lieu of *Az Yashir*. Seemingly, this was due to the more somber nature of the latter, in keeping with the somber

nature of the day. This is the custom today in many Sephardic communities, including those that follow the customs of Aleppo, Syria.

**This week's question:** Which halachically controversial custom is associated with the Torah reading on Shabbos Parshas Yisro?

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 XII

The Shulchan Aruch was not without controversy and opposition. A number of prominent Torah scholars and Torah leaders opposed it for a variety of reasons.

Some felt that the Shulchan Aruch would result in people not studying earlier Torah sources, from the Talmud down,

and instead rely upon the Shulchan Aruch. Others felt that the Shulchan Aruch would inhibit the normal halachic process, as the decision would have already been handed down, thus leading to a stagnation in the halachic process of future Torah scholars.

## A Taste of Torah

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To identify with the Shabbos, you have to learn, simply, what Shabbos is (not the ideas behind it) and then see what excites you! The holiness of the day? The special closeness to the King of kings? The list of what to connect to, how you can connect to it, and how you can express yourself through it is literally endless, because every person is a complete individual in his or her own right! This is true for every mitzvah in the Torah, so much so that Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe (1914-2005) identifies this process of identifying one's personality in connection with mitzvos as the "mitzvah to serve Hashem." It's clear that the possibility of true individuality is infinite and an absolute necessity in living a life of Torah. When one looks at the Torah world from the outside, at first glance, one may see a world of robots where everyone looks and acts the same. One may see a world completely devoid of individuality and color, and,

admittedly, a world which is quite stifling to individual personalities and ways of life. However, when one looks at it through the Torah's lens, one discovers two things. First, that one's personality is malleable, and a person is able and obligated to identify himself with the entire Torah. Second, there is nothing more individualistic than simply living the life of a Torah Jew. Hashem actively desires that we personally attach to His Torah and not leave it as something outside of ourselves. Hashem wants YOU! The means of determining how close or far the Jewish People were to the Torah - on a personal level - was joy.

What do we derive enjoyment from? We owe it to ourselves to give honest answers to these questions, to begin developing our Judaism into one of color and flavor, and to transform ourselves into true Torah personalities.