



# A Taste of Torah

## Show Me the Money

by Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher

An historic moment is at hand. The Jewish Nation is about to be born, ready to leave Egypt as the first-born Egyptians die at the stroke of midnight. But wait! Don't leave yet, says Moshe. We have one more thing to do. Everyone needs to go to their neighbors and "borrow" their gold and silver vessels and clothing. True, we're not coming back, but this is G-d's order. The Jewish People will leave Egypt with the riches of Egypt.

Rashi comments that G-d had informed Avraham 430 years earlier that the Jewish People would be enslaved and then leave with great wealth. If the Jewish People were to depart without emptying out Egypt, Avraham would complain, "The enslavement, that was fulfilled. But the promise of great riches, that wasn't!" To avoid this criticism, G-d tells Moshe to beg the Jewish People to please make sure they take the goods with them on their way out.

The question is clear, obvious and blatant: It seems as if G-d's only motive in keeping His word is so that Avraham can't call Him out! Whatever happened to making good on your promises?

The Sfas Emes (Rabbi Yehuda Aryeh Leib Alter; 1847-1905) explains, based on an idea discussed by other sources, that in reality, the Jewish People left Egypt early. G-d had told Avraham his descendants would be strangers in a land not theirs for 400 years, but after 210, they had become so assimilated into Egyptian culture that had they remained a moment longer, they would have been lost forever. How to fulfill the promised redemption and the promised 400 years? Switch to Plan B, namely, that the 400 years begin with the birth of Yitzchak. Yitzchak will be a stranger in the Land of Canaan, a land not (yet) his. 210 years from when the Jewish People arrive in Egypt coincide with 400 years from Yitzchak's birth, thus assuring that the Jewish People are saved, and the 400-year decree is fulfilled.

Except that this is Plan B. The Jewish People had a lot more to accomplish in

Egypt during the other 190 years that never happened. Their inability to keep their heads above water meant they had to leave early, leaving unfinished business in their wake (thus setting the stage for the potential of future exiles).

Which brings us back to the promise of great wealth. The treasures of Egypt were not just a financial incentive to make Avraham happy. In Judaism, money is a means; it contains the potential to serve G-d and do good. One aspect of the exile was for the Jewish People to pull the sparks of holiness buried in Egypt; taking Egyptian assets was the manifestation of taking that potential out with them. Because they didn't quite reach the goal line, they did not fully access that latent spiritual potential. The riches were thus not deserved; G-d's promise to Avraham was predicated upon the assumption that after the Jewish People had accomplished all that needed to be done, they'd leave with all that spiritual potential in the form of Egypt's wealth. Nonetheless, because G-d had not specified that to Avraham, there was room for complaint. Hashem therefore asked Moshe to have the Jewish People take the Egyptians' wealth - even though they hadn't really earned it - so that Avraham would not feel he had been shortchanged.

There is much to be learned from this discussion, but I'd like to focus on one aspect. There are times in life when we don't see the light at the end of the tunnel. It is tempting to give up, throw in the towel, look for an easy way out. Sometimes, that is the only recourse - as was the case with the Jewish People in Egypt. But it behooves us to carefully consider whether it really is the end of the road, or if we can hold on just a little bit longer, make one more push, exert just a bit more effort to get across the finish line rather than making an early exit. Giving up when there's still time left on the clock may not spell total doom and failure, but it may well be the difference between a complete victory and a partial one.

## Stories For The Soul

### A Faithful Soldier

Rabbi Yitzchak Blazer, known as Reb Itzele Peterburger, was the rabbi of St. Petersburg. Jews were generally not allowed to reside in much of the city, with the exception of certain privileged Jews who were permitted due to their wealth or status. Another notable exception were the Cantonists, Jewish soldiers in the Czar's army who, as young boys of age 8 or 9, were forcibly hauled off to serve for 25 years. Constantly being pressured to abandon their Judaism and convert, they were beaten, abused, and estranged from their parents and people. Most succumbed and were lost to their nation, but some courageously and heroically managed to hang on to a vestige of their Jewishness.

One year, on Erev Yom Kippur, Reb Itzele somehow ended up in a section of town where only the Cantonists were allowed to live. He did not have time to return home, and sought out the nearest synagogue - but the only one he could find was the Cantonist synagogue, attended by former soldiers who had clung to their Judaism. The members asked the rabbi to lead their Yom Kippur prayers, until they came to the final prayer of the day, *ne'ilah*. At that point, they summoned a particular Cantonist to lead the services.

As the man approached the ark, he suddenly opened his shirt, revealing a mass of deep scars, cuts, and bruises from years of

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## 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 Betzalel 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.

### 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.

### 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.

## Increase Your Jewish IQ

By Rabbi Yaakov Zions

**Last week we asked:** What is the source of the recitation of *Az Yashir* in our daily *shacharis* prayers before *Yishtabach*?

**A:** This custom is mentioned over 1000 years ago in the siddur of Rabbi Amram Gaon (d. 875). The Rambam (c. 1135-1204) in *Mishneh Torah* (Laws of Tefilla

7:13) mentions the custom to recite *Az Yashir*, the Song of *Ha'azinu* (Devarim 32:1-43), or both, after *Yishtabach*!

**This week's question:** Is *Az Yashir* ever officially omitted from our daily *shacharis* prayers?

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 XI

The *Bais Yosef*, though not without controversy, became a widely-accepted work among both the Sephardim and Ashkenazim. Numerous glosses and commentaries have been written on it, notably the *Darchei Moshe*, written by Rabbi Moshe Isserles of Krakow (1520-1572; known by the acronym of his name, the Rema). Rabbi Isserles's primary focus was to point out where Ashkenazic custom differed from the opinions quoted and decisions rendered by the *Bais Yosef*.

An interesting story, which shows the intellectual honesty that was possessed by the great Torah leaders during the controversy around the new work, is told of Rabbi Yosef ibn Lev, one of the leading Torah authorities of the time. Rabbi Yosef told his disciples not to use the *Bais Yosef*, for they would come to rely on the many sources he quoted, sacrificing their chance to become expert in their own right. When teaching from the *Tur*, Rabbi Yosef would cite, from memory, all the sources upon

which the *Tur* had based his rulings. Once, he could not remember a particular source, and, after searching for it in vain, was left with no choice but to refer to the *Bais Yosef* to discover the origins of the *Tur*'s ruling. He decided that this was Heaven's way of showing that the *Bais Yosef* ought to be widely used, and he rescinded his opposition to using the great work.

Rabbi Yosef followed this success with his most famous work, the *Shulchan Aruch* (lit., the Set Table), also known as the Code of Jewish Law. The work's arrangement was based on the *Tur*, divided into four sections, subdivided into *simanim* (chapters), each of which consisted of numbered laws. Much of the work was predicated upon the *Tur* and the *Bais Yosef*, but it focused on the final ruling on the issue, not the discussion that led to it. Generally, Rabbi Caro followed the opinions of three great medieval authorities: the Rif, the Rambam, and the Rosh. When they disagreed, he would usually follow the majority.

## Stories For The Soul

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punishment. As he stood there, he spoke. "Master of the World, during *ne'ilah*, Jews pray for health during the coming year. Look at my beaten, broken body. I don't think of requesting health. Jews pray for wealth. Look at me. Possessing wealth doesn't even occur to me. Whatever I own belongs to the Czar. Jews pray for a spouse or children, but who would ever take me, after all that I've been through?"

"All I ask for," continued the man, "is *Yisgadal v'yiskadash shemei rabbah* - May

Your great Name become great and sanctified!" And with that, he began reciting the *kaddish* preceding the *ne'ilah* prayers.

The Jewish People went through terrible tortures in Egypt, specially designed by Pharaoh to destroy the identity of the Jewish People. Through it all, they persevered and hung on to their heritage, ultimately being redeemed by G-d in a fantastic display of His might and power over Creation.