



# A Taste of Torah

## Jack Of All Trades

By: Rabbi Eli Mozes

Religions all have a marketing job which they must engage in if they want to attract followers (unless they spread at the point of a sword). One would think that would be reason for them to portray themselves as exciting, uplifting, meaningful, or at least fun, and to stay far away from giving off the impression of being myopic, melancholic or just downright depressing. Yet we find a strange example of the latter; in this week's parsha, the Torah states, "This is the teaching regarding a man who would die in a tent (Numbers 19:14)". The Talmud offers a homiletic interpretation of this: "Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish said: What is the source for the statement, 'The Torah cannot be properly understood unless one kills himself over it' [He answered] the verse states, 'This is the Torah, when a man dies in a tent.'" It seems we are being told that if one wants to attain heights in Torah knowledge, he must kill himself, if not literally, then figuratively. This doesn't sound like the best way to package and brand Torah study. Truth be told, it also seems to contradict many other statements about the Torah, such as the verse we recite when we return the Torah to the *aron* (ark), "It is a tree of life for those who grasp it (Proverbs 3:18)."

We find another mystifying statement about life and death in an interesting passage of the Talmud (Tamid 32a), which relates a conversation that Alexander the Great had with the Sages when he was passing through Eretz Yisrael. He asked the Sages, "What should one do if he wants to live?" They responded, "He should kill himself!" He then asked, "What should one do if he wants to die?" and they responded, "He should live!" What can possibly be the meaning of these strange answers given by the Sages?

Let us explain with a parable. David had just concluded the evening services when an announcement was made in the shul. "Dan is visiting here from Melbourne, Australia. Would anyone

like to invite him over for dinner?" David got excited; he had had grown up in Melbourne many years before but had lost contact with all his old friends. It would be great to hear how they were all doing. He hurriedly called out, "I will host him!" When they arrived at his home, David introduced Dan to his wife, and they sat down to dinner. David was taken aback by how eagerly Dan attacked his food; he seemed to be hungry, but David couldn't hold himself back, so he asked, "So how is my old friend Al Schwartz doing?" Dan looked up and quickly replied, "He's dead," and continued to eat. David was shocked; what could have happened to Al, who was a relatively young man? But he didn't want to put a damper on the conversation, so he decided to inquire about another acquaintance. "So what is Ben Cohen doing these days?" This time Dan didn't even look up. "He's dead," he grunted between bites. David was perplexed; how could two young men, both in their prime, just pass away so suddenly? But he decided to try again to steer the conversation to a more cheerful topic, so he asked, "Well, how are my cousins, the Berger triplets? They're always up to something!" "Dead, dead, dead, they are all dead," replied Dan, as he shoveled in the next fork-full. "But how can that be?!" exclaimed David. "How can everyone in Melbourne be dying like that?" Dan looked at David with a piercing gaze and said, "When I am eating, everyone is dead!"

Although this story sounds strange, there is a very important lesson inside. If you have an activity which demands all of your attention, the only way to do it right is to "kill off" every other distraction. It's easy to be a jack of all trades but master of none, but if you want to master a trade, you need to focus on it, to the exclusion of all else. This explains the Sages' response to Alexander: If you want to live, to really live, you need to learn to kill yourself; that is, to ignore everything else in your life

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### Stories For The Soul

#### To the Point of Death

Rabbi Elya Meir Bloch (d. 1954) was in the United States on a fundraising mission for the Telshe Yeshiva when WWII broke out. He and his brother-in-law, Rabbi Chaim Mordechai Katz, remained in America, and founded the Telshe Yeshiva in Cleveland, Ohio in 1941.

Despite being extremely busy with running the yeshiva, Rabbi Bloch maintained strict times for his own learning, which were inviolable except for emergencies. There was one practice he accepted upon himself (known as a *kabbalah*) under all circumstances - to study Torah for at least an hour a day.

During his final illness, he was hospitalized. Following his last major operation, he was critically ill, with tubes attached to various parts of his body. He could not move and he could hardly talk. Family members and students were with him in the hospital. The second night following the surgery, he struggled to utter a single word to the man who was there with him: "*Lernen* (learning)."

The man opened a chumash and recited the Torah portion of that week along with Rashi's commentary. From time to time Rabbi's Bloch's eyes would turn to the clock on the wall. When half an hour had gone by, he said, "*Genug* (enough)." Extremely fatigued, he closed his eyes. Some time later, he looked at the clock, and again said "*Lernen*." Once again, the man recited the Torah portion with Rashi. After another half hour, Rabbi Bloch said, "*Genug*," with a smile of satisfaction. He had completed his hour of learning.

The first verse in this week's parsha says, "This is the statute of the Torah - a man who will die in a tent (Bamidbar 19:2)." Our Sages interpret this verse homiletically to refer to the tents of Torah, and explain that one's devotion to Torah study must extend to the point he gives his life for it. Not that one must necessarily endanger oneself for the study of Torah, but the Torah teaches us how integral Torah study is in the life of a Jew.

## Kollel Happenings

### OUT OF THE ASHES: TAP THE SPIRITUAL POTENTIAL OF TISHA B'AV

Join Kollel Senior Educator Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher for a three-week series on maximizing the spiritual potential of the Tisha B'Av period.

For men and women, Mondays, June 29, July 6 and 13, 7:45 pm at Aish Denver.

This Monday, June 29, will feature *A World That Was: Appreciating What it Means to Have A Bais Hamikdash*

### A DEEPER LOOK AT THE PARSHA

The weekly parsha is replete with halachic issues. Every week, Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher will choose one topic based on the parsha, and lead an in-depth exploration of the sources and practical halachic conclusions of that issue.

The class takes place Sunday mornings at EDOS, 198 S. Holly St. Shacharis is at 7:30 am, and is followed by breakfast and the class at approximately 8:15 am.

For more info, please contact Rabbi Fleisher [rmf@denverkollel.org](mailto:rmf@denverkollel.org)

### INSIDE THE NUMBERS

In Judaism, numbers are not simply a way to count things. Every number has a special significance. From *gematria* to *Who Knows One?* recited at the end of the Passover Seder, discover the world of numbers with Rabbi Moshe Heyman of the Denver Community Kollel. Every other Thursday from 2-3 pm at Marathon Investments, 6565 South Dayton St., #1200.

For more info, contact [rmh@denverkollel.org](mailto:rmh@denverkollel.org).

# Increase Your Jewish IQ

By: Rabbi Yaakov Zions

**Last week we asked:** The original Ashkenazic version of the middle blessing of the Shabbos prayers concluded with "...and may the Jews, lovers of Your Name, rejoice with You." The text was later changed to "...and may the Jews, sanctifiers of Your name, rest on it." Why was it changed?

**A:** The change was made based on the writings of Rabbi Isaac Tyrnau (14th century Austria), who argued that 1) *Simcha*/joy is not a hallmark of Shabbos, but, rather, of festivals, and 2) the conclusion of a long

blessing (one that ends with a blessing) must be similar to its beginning or the final blessing that follows the concluding line. The original version, which spoke of joy, did not follow this rule; the adjusted version does, as the blessing concludes, "Blessed are You, Hashem, Who sanctifies the Shabbos."

**This week's question:** Hallel is recited on Yom Tov (festival) and Rosh Chodesh. What are the origins of this recitation?

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

## Ask the Rabbi

### Fathers and Sons

George Wiley from Baldwin City, Kansas wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

I read in the paper that when Edgar Bronfman, Sr., named his son Edgar Bronfman, Jr., he violated a Jewish belief against naming a son after his father. Assuming that the newspaper report was correct in this regard, what is the basis for this prohibition?

Dear George Wiley,

There's no prohibition against naming a son after a living father. However, it is the custom of Jews of European descent not to name children after living relatives. If they name the child after a relative, their custom is to name

the child after a deceased relative, as if to say that this child will carry on their tradition.

The Jews of the Middle East, North Africa and Asia do name children after living relatives, and they consider it a great honor to have a child named for them. However, they, too, generally refrain from naming a child after a living parent. Usually, grandparents are the first ones honored by having a child named for them.

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and focus on the task at hand. The reverse is true as well. If you want to kill yourself, and the moment, try and live everything else in your life at the same time; that will surely kill the moment. The next time you are on top of a mountain overlooking breathtaking scenery, don't forget to appreciate it, instead of immediately taking a selfie and sending it to everyone; kill your phone and your contacts and drink in the beautiful landscape that Hashem created. That doesn't mean you can't take pictures and send them to your friends, but the key

is to compartmentalize.

If this is true in other areas, it is doubly true when it comes to Torah. To truly understand the Divine will, one must focus all of his energy and concentration; thus, the Talmud states, "The Torah cannot be properly understood unless one kills himself over it." Let us take the message from this week's parsha and commit to removing all distractions during our time of Torah study, so that it will be a "tree of life for all those who grasp it."