



# A Taste of Torah

## Shock and Awe and Ignore

By Rabbi Akiva Stern

Inertia. Part of Newton's first law of motion states that an object at rest stays at rest, unless acted upon by an unbalanced force. This is more than simply physics. It is a reality that permeates our lives in many ways. We too often procrastinate and avoid making the changes we know we so badly need to make. What does it take to break that inertia and get ourselves moving?

In the beginning of our Torah portion (Yisro 18:1) we are told, "And Yisro heard." Rashi asks, what did Yisro hear that caused him to come join the Jewish Nation in the desert? The answer: He heard about the splitting of the sea and the subsequent war with the nation of Amalek.

The trouble with this approach is that it seems to be at odds with the very verse it comes to explain! The end of the verse actually tells us what Yisro heard - he heard about the Exodus from Egypt. It makes no mention of the tidings Rashi mentions. How can we resolve this contradiction?

My Rebbi, Rabbi Nissan Kaplan, shared a beautiful explanation. At first, Yisro heard the story of the Exodus, as the verse states. He was tremendously moved, yet saw no reason to uproot his life and join the Jewish People. But ultimately, Yisro decided to leave his home and join his son-in-law Moshe in the desert.

Rashi is addressing a second question: What was it that he heard which actually motivated him to get up and leave? What made him realize that if he were to stay at home, his

inspiration would most certainly dissipate? The answer, says Rashi, is the news of the splitting of the sea and the war with Amalek.

Initially, Yisro believed, like so many others do, that the powerful inspiration he'd garnered would remain with him, even in his current location. Then came the next set of news, that G-d had performed an incredible and public miracle, the Splitting of the Sea. The entire world became aware that there was a G-d and that He would protect the Jewish People and destroy those who would attack them. Ostensibly, the effect should have been a long-lasting state of peace for the Jews, a new world in which no one would dare attack the Jewish people. Nonetheless, Yisro hears of the astounding brazenness of the nation of Amalek, who, shortly thereafter, attacked the Jewish People. When Yisro reflected on the news, he recognized that the essence of Amalek's dissonance can be found, to some extent, in each and every one of us. Yisro realized that even the most direct and shocking revelation will be attacked and worn down by our inner cynic until it no longer affects us. Yisro's epiphany and the message of our Rashi is that inspiration must be acted upon before it fades away. We must find a way to incorporate it into our lives in a meaningful, active and sustainable fashion. Only then will we succeed in shattering the inertia that binds us and step forward.

## Stories For The Soul

### Staying on Track

Rabbi Yissochor Frankel, a rabbi in a Brooklyn synagogue, was once attending a lecture given by the great Rabbi Aharon Kotler (1891-1962) in the 1940s. At one point during the lecture, Rabbi Frankel raised a question on a point made by Rabbi Kotler. Rabbi Kotler responded that he did not have sufficient time to answer the question, and promised he'd answer the question at a later time.

Following the lecture, for whatever reason, Rabbi Kotler did not end up speaking to Rabbi Frankel, and the matter was left unsettled. The two went their separate ways, and they did not meet up for quite some time.

Six years later, Rabbi Frankel met up with Rabbi Kotler. With no preamble, introduction or summary of the exchange of six years earlier, Rabbi Kotler said to him, "Reb Yissochor! I have an answer to your question!" He then proceeded to give a lengthy explanation to resolve the issue Rabbi Frankel had raised years earlier!

When the Jewish People accepted the Torah, they not only agreed to observe its commandments, they also committed to dedicate themselves to studying and delving into its depths. Thus, a true Torah scholar, despite other engagements, will always try to focus on his Torah studies.

## Kollel Happenings

### ORGAN DONATIONS & TRANSPLANTS AT NEXT TORAH FOR TYCOONS

Join Brad Kornfeld, Managing Partner, The Kornfeld Companies and Board Chair, The Donor Alliance and Rabbi Aron Yehuda Schwab, Dean, Denver Community Kollel, as they flesh out the parts of this vital topic. February 3, 12-1:15 p.m. at the East Side Kosher Deli. Cost: \$25. RSVP [info@denverkollel.org](mailto:info@denverkollel.org).

### RAV SCHWAB ON CHUMASH AVAILABLE FROM KOLLEL

The Denver Community Kollel is pleased to offer *Rav Schwab on Chumash*, a seminal collection of Rabbi Shimon Schwab's insights on the weekly parsha, for sale.

The book is available through the Kollel at a special discount rate of \$24.

To order, call 303-820-2855, email [info@denverkollel.org](mailto:info@denverkollel.org), or go to [www.denverkollel.org](http://www.denverkollel.org).

### RABBANIT MIZRACHI ON FEBRUARY 7<sup>TH</sup> AT AISH

The Women's Division of the Denver Community Kollel and Aish Denver present a video for women, *Tu BiShvat: Lessons for Our Growth*. Sunday, February 7<sup>th</sup> at 8 pm at Aish Denver. Rabbanit Yemima was voted one of the most influential women in Israel. She is one of the most in-demand speakers today, attracting hundreds of women to her lectures, where she presents deep messages with a sense of humor.

Lecture sponsored by Rhoda Reiss-Pitler for a *refuah shelaima* for Tziporah bas Tzirel and Chana Peshy bas Chaya Sura.

No charge, suggested donation of \$5 to help cover costs of future video presentations.

## Increase Your Jewish IQ

By Rabbi Yaakov Zions

**Last week we asked:** What words in the Torah have two possible sets of *nekudos* (vowelizations), both of them legitimate?

**A:** In Parshas Yisro and Parshas Va'eschanan, we read the *Aseres Hadibros* (Ten Commandments). There are two alternative ways to break up the reading. The first approach bases the breaks on verses; some commandments have multiple verses and some commandments are very small and make up only a part of a verse. The second approach is to break them by commandment; each commandment is one part. The custom in most of the Diaspora is to follow the second method during the public Torah reading, while one reading on his own uses the first method.

In Eretz Yisrael, the general custom is to use the second method during the Torah reading on Shavuos only (when the *Aseres Hadibros* of Parshas Yisro are read).

Based on the variation of breaks, some vowels get changed. For example, the commandment against murder, according to the first approach, appears in middle of a verse, and is read as "*lo sirtzach*," while the second approach reads it "*lo tirtzach*," changing the vowelization due to its end-of-sentence positioning. (Source: Mishna Berurah 494:3 and Biur Halacha *ibid*.)

**This week's question:** What is unique about the *haftarah* of Parshas Mishpatim?

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

## Lives of Our Torah Leaders

### Rabbeinu Tam, Part II

Rabbeinu Tam had two well-known and illustrious older brothers: Rabbi Shmuel ben Meir, known as the Rashbam, who was fifteen years his senior; and Rabbi Yitzchak ben Meir, known as the Rivam, who was five years older than him. Both of these great men were among the *Ba'alei Tosafos*, and left their imprimatur on Jewish scholarship and history.

Although Rabbeinu Tam was a child when his illustrious grandfather, Rashi, passed away, Rabbeinu Tam disagreed with Rashi on many halachic issues and Talmudic interpretations. Perhaps the two most notable disagreements are regarding the proper order of placement of the four *parshios* (Torah sections, written on parchment) placed in the tefillin, and the proper position in which to place a mezuzah on one's doorpost.

While the basic halacha for tefillin follows Rashi, there are many Jews who are stringent and don a pair of tefillin made in accordance with Rabbeinu

Tam's criteria, as well. There is a legend that when Rabbeinu Tam was an infant, he touched the tefillin upon his grandfather's head, and Rashi took this as an omen that his grandson would one day disagree with his position of the positioning of the *parshios* in the tefillin. (It should be noted that this is not the only distinction between the tefillin of Rashi and Rabbeinu Tam, but it is the most well-known difference.)

Regarding the placement of the mezuzah, Rashi's opinion is that it should be attached to the doorpost in an upright position, while Rabbeinu Tam opines that it should lay horizontally on the doorpost. The practical halacha is a compromise; mezuzahs are affixed at an angle (with the top pointed towards the room accessed by the doorway). It has been pointed out that this positioning holds a lesson for us all: When one wishes to have a home of peace and harmony, the ability to compromise with others is vital.

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Denver Community Kollel: 1516 Xavier Street, Denver, CO 80204 Tel: 303-820-2855 Fax: 303-820-2806

Email: [info@denverkollel.org](mailto:info@denverkollel.org) Web: [www.denverkollel.org](http://www.denverkollel.org)

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