

A Taste of Torah Buy Now, Pray Later

Okay, multiple-choice quiz: If you are standing at the water's edge, with the churning Red Sea in front of you, and the mighty Egyptian army behind you, hungry for revenge, which of the following options would you choose: a) Pray to G-d to extricate you from this horrid mess. b) Jump into the sea. If you chose a), you have opted for what our predecessors have done since the days of the Patriarchs: prayer. However, in this particular instance, it was the wrong thing to do.

Rashi (14:10) tells us that the Jewish People, being caught between the sea and the Egyptians, grasped the profession of their forefathers, prayer, and cried out to their Father in Heaven for salvation. Hashem, however, told Moshe, "Why do you cry out to Me? Speak to the Bnei Yisroel, and they shall travel" (14:15). Hashem was informing Moshe that this wasn't a time for prayer; the Jewish People needed to jump into the sea.

To understand why this incident differed from the standard approach, we need to discuss prayer. Prayer is more than connecting to G-d; it is the means of bringing down Hashem's goodness to the world. Instead of Hashem showering His blessings upon our heads for free, He gives us the opportunity to become the conduit through which He bestows His kindness. However, this is effective when, according to the system Hashem has put into the place for conducting day-to-day worldly affairs, there is room for such goodness and blessing to exist in the world. Splitting the sea, however, is not the type of event which usually takes place. Prayer, therefore, would be ineffective in causing the sea to split. (This is not to say that prayer cannot effect a miracle. At times, Hashem may decide to build the miraculous into the normal, natural scheme of things. Regarding the Splitting of the Sea,

however, this was not the case, and prayer would have been insufficient.)

However, all hope is not lost. True, prayer cannot bring that which is beyond the system Hashem has decided to use in running the world. But if one is able to reach a level where he realizes that the natural itself is nothing more than G-d's Will – and that he can manipulate, or totally do away with that system if He so chooses – then all bets are off. Anything can happen. Even the sea can dry up.

The Jewish People needed to display that kind of trust in Hashem – not merely the trust of prayer, that He is the Source of all life and existence in the natural world, but that he can, at Will, ignore the entire natural world He created and do whatever He sees fit. And when Hashem told the Bnai Yisroel to travel into the raging waters, He was informing them that nothing short of the completely miraculous – nothing less than a complete negation of the natural world – would suffice to extricate them from their dire straits. But a miracle wouldn't occur unless the Jewish People could exist at a level where nothing was natural, but merely the Will of Hashem. They needed to exist at a point where the splitting of the sea was no less miraculous than the regular flow of the sea. To reach that level, to display that faith, there was but one option – to jump in.

Sure, it's easy for us to talk about such faith, but to live it is another matter entirely. And while generally, we are obliged to live within the confines of the natural world, and it is generally not a good idea to walk into a dangerous situation and rely on a miraculous event for salvation – in fact, it's downright forbidden – the lesson of the Splitting of the Sea is that nothing is beyond Hashem's ability.

Stories For The Soul

The Grapevine's Lesson

In the 1500s, the King of Tunisia became deathly ill. A Jewish scholar and doctor, Reb Yaakov Teib, saved his life. The king appointed Reb Yaakov as his personal physician.

One day, the King of Algeria came to visit. As they were chatting in the palace garden, the Algerian king noticed that his host seemed distracted. He asked what he was thinking. The King of Tunisia explained that he was contemplating a wondrous creation, the grapevine.

"The grape is a magnificent fruit, yet it grows from a vine whose wood is soft, weak and useless. You never see utensils, furniture or buildings made from its wood. Such a useful, delicious fruit from such a useless vine."

The King of Algeria sneered, "Why do you bother yourself with such pointless pondering? There are no answers to such questions."

"Who told you this question cannot be answered? Let's ask my physician, Reb Yaakov Teib."

The King of Algeria roared, "A Jew?! Do you really think there is wisdom amongst the Jews?"

Reb Yaakov was summoned and said, "There is a scientific answer and Talmudic answer to your question."

"The fruit is so juicy, sweet and useful that it siphons all the useful qualities of the wood, leaving it soft, weak and useless. Further, it is the sponginess of the wood that allows it to absorb all it needs from the earth to pass along to the fruit."

The King of Tunisia asked, enraptured, "And what do the wise men of

Kollel Happenings

PUBLIC PRAYER AND THE TEBOWING QUANDARY AT FEB. 1 T4T

Join Brad Licht, Owner, Licht Realty, and Kollel Dean Rabbi Aron Yehuda Schwab for "Public Prayer and the Tebowing Quandary" at the next Torah for Tycoons class, Wed., Feb. 1. The program will be held at noon at the East Side Kosher Deli. Cost: \$20. To RSVP, call 303-820-2855 or email info@denverkollel.org



WEST SIDE NIGHT SEDER AT THE KOLLEL

Join the West Side community for vibrant Torah learning at the Kollel. Sunday- Thursday, except Wednesday, learning from 8-9 p.m., followed by Ma'ariv. For chavrusas or other information, contact Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher at rmf@denverkollel.org or 303-820-2855.



LIBERATED PARENTS, LIBERATED CHILDREN WITH MRS. AVIGAIL STEINHARTER

Join Mrs. Avigail Steinharter for "Liberated Parents, Liberated Children: Your Guide to a Happier Family." This six-part series for moms integrates the timeless wisdom of the Torah with the approach of the world-renowned Dr. Haim Ginott. Classes will be held on Tues., Jan 10, Jan 17, Jan 24, Jan 31, Feb 10, Feb 17 from 12:30 - 1:30 p.m. at Barnes & Noble, 960 S. Colorado Blvd. Cost: \$80 for all six classes. For information, call 303-820-2855 or email info@denverkollel.org

Interpersonal Issues Returning Lost Objects

If one found an item in a safe, protected place, it is not regarded as a lost item, because it was probably placed there by the owner. It may not be taken, even for the purpose of returning it to the owner.

Adapted with permission from "The Halachos of Other People's Money" by Rabbi Pinchas Bodner (Feldheim Publishers)

Ask the Rabbi Starry Starry Night

Ian Pamensky wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

Why does Shabbos end plus or minus 1 hour after sunset? Can you rely on the 3 stars? Many thanks in advance.

Dear Ian Pamensky,

The Talmud says that three medium-sized stars together in the sky signify nightfall. Halachic opinions about when this is range from 20 minutes to 72 minutes after sunset.

Ideally, you shouldn't rely on "three stars." Cloudy skies can make it hard to

know exactly when this is. And even on a clear night, it's difficult to determine exactly which stars are considered "medium" and which are considered "large." Furthermore, the Chafetz Chaim writes that "three medium stars" was a reference for people in Babylon (Middle East). But people who live far to the north (Europe and America) where the sky takes much longer to darken should wait for three small stars. Ideally, you should go by the clock and a reliable Jewish calendar.

Reprinted with permission of Ohr Somayach, Jerusalem, www.ohr.edu

Stories for the Soul

*Continued from front
your nation say?"*

"First," Reb Yaakov replied, "they note that grapes produce wine, which is used in the Holy Temple service. It would be incongruous for the wood of such a noble fruit to be used for idolatry. Therefore, it is rendered useless. No idolaters have ever worshiped it.

"Further, the Jewish nation is likened to a grapevine, as it is written, 'Out of Egypt You brought a grapevine' (Psalms 80:9). Just like a grapevine is soft and weak, while its fruit is sweet and juicy; the Jewish nation is small and weak, while its Torah and mitzvos are the pinnacle of excellence."

The King of Tunisia was beaming with delight. His guest became very

quiet.

"If my king will permit me," concluded Reb Yaakov, "I would like to add that when the proper amount of wine is consumed, it gladdens the heart. If too much wine is consumed, it causes one to lose his senses. So, too, with the Jews: If the king taxes them fairly, their presence will cause his kingdom to prosper and flourish. If he overtaxes them, his kingdom will suffer, for he will lose their presence, as happened to Pharaoh and all oppressors of Israel."

The King of Tunisia smiled a knowing smile. There are some who believe he later secretly converted to Judaism.

Adapted with permission from ShulWeek by Rabbi Boruch Lederman.