

# A Taste of Torah

## Stop and Think

By Rabbi Mordechai Mandel

The pasuk in this week's parsha (23:27) says, "The poets exclaim: 'Come and calculate.'" Chazal derive from this phrase a key to a successful spiritual life: Analyze your actions.

The Ramchal, in his classic work *The Path of the Just*, describes a person striving to achieve success in his spiritual path of life, confused as to which way to turn to reach his goal of closeness to his Creator. He compares this scenario to a person lost in a maze, not knowing in which direction to turn. Suddenly, he looks up and notices a man in a watchtower overseeing the maze. He calls out to him pleading for direction to lead him out. The man replies with explicit instructions that ultimately lead him out. The Ramchal likens this to one traveling through the challenges of life; he, too, should call out to those with experience in life's struggles for advice. They will lead this lost person through life by recommending to him to take stock of the situation and analyze the action he chooses to take. Harav Ben Zion Brook, in his sefer *Hegyonei*

Mussar, asks the obvious question: how is this situation analagous to the maze? How is the advice of studying one's actions equated to being given clear and implicit instruction in which way to turn? He answers that the lesson here is that the concept of analyzing our actions and behavior is the solution to get us onto the right path.

Megillas Eicha (Lamentations) details how following the destruction of the Temple, the Jewish people were feeling lonely and despondent. They were looking for a way to reignite their relationship with Hashem by finding their way back to Him. Yirmiyahu the Prophet guides them by saying, "Let us search and examine our ways, and return to Hashem"; the path of return is through thorough analysis of our behavior.

By examining each and every action and decision we make, by better understanding our shortcomings and struggles, and by consciously making a plan of action to improve, we will be empowered to emerge successfully from our maze of life.

# Ask the Rabbi

## The Name Thing

Jeremy Ottenstein asked:

I have noticed that while Ashkenazim name their children after animals, Sephardim do not. Why?

UTILAUDIT@aol.com wrote:

Why is it that Sephardim will name their children after living people but Ashkenazim do not?

Dear Jeremy & UTILAUDIT,

First, some background about names. Names are labels we use to convey the essence of something. The first place we find the procedure of giving a name is when Adam names the animals, and then names Chava. The difference between this naming of

# Stories For The Soul

## It's Never Too Late

Once, a burly, gruff-looking man who had served in the Russian army entered a Jewish inn and ordered a meal. He ate it in a most disgusting manner. It was revolting that this man, a Jew, could conduct himself in so repulsive a manner.

The Chofetz Chaim, Rabbi Yisroel Meir Kagan (1838-1933), happened to be a guest at that inn. He saw the man and slowly approached him.

"Is it true that you served in the Russian army?" the Chofetz Chaim asked.

"Yes," snorted the man.

"Tell me," began the Chofetz Chaim, "how did you manage to keep your Jewish identity? So many Jewish boys entered the army, only to eventually give up their Judaism. Yet, when you could have easily gone to any inn, you chose a Jewish one. You still identify as a Jew. I don't know if I could have done what you did. You are an inspiration."

The soldier, clearly moved, replied, "It was so hard. They did everything to pound it out of us - to make us forget that we were Jews."

"It is a miracle that you made it through. Now you can begin to learn the Torah that you were deprived of," replied the Chofetz Chaim.

"But Rebbi, how can I possibly do that?" the soldier, now sobbing bitterly, responded. "Surely it isn't possible for someone like me to learn."

"It is still possible," said the Chofetz Chaim. "It is always possible. And I can show you how."

Had the Chofetz Chaim not

## Kollel Happenings

### 'FIREWORKS WITH THE KOLLEL' MEN'S LEARNING ON JULY 4

Inject some spirituality into your July 4th! Join us on Monday, July 4, for "Fireworks at the Kollel," a men's legal holiday learning program. The event will be held at Congregation Zera Avraham, with Shacharis at 8 a.m., followed by breakfast, and a shiur by Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher from 9 a.m. to 10 a.m. \$125 sponsorship is available. For information, contact Rabbi Erlanger at 303-820-2855 or at [rye@denverkollel.org](mailto:rye@denverkollel.org) or Rabbi Fleisher at [rmf@denverkollel.org](mailto:rmf@denverkollel.org)



### TUESDAY NIGHT TORAH AT AISH KODESH IN BOULDER

Join the Kollel for a dynamic one-on-one and small groups Torah encounter. Maariv will be held at 8:15 followed by Torah study at 8:30. Program will be held at Aish Kodesh, 1805 Balsam Ave. For information, contact Rabbi Moshe Heyman at 303-820-2855 or [rmh@denverkollel.org](mailto:rmh@denverkollel.org) or Charles Fried at 917-499-4307 or [charlesfried@gmail.com](mailto:charlesfried@gmail.com).



### PARTNERS IN TORAH AT AISH

Join the Kollel's Partners in Torah program for men at Aish Denver, on Wed., nights at 8 p.m. If you'd like to join - and learn the topic of your choice, at your own pace, with a knowledgeable mentor - please call the Kollel at 303-820-2855 or email [info@denverkollel.org](mailto:info@denverkollel.org).

## Interpersonal Issues Returning Stolen Property Part X

If the victim is no longer alive, the money should be given to the victim's heirs. forgives him completely.

The victim has the right to pardon the thief of his debt by saying that he

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

## Ask the Rabbi

*Continued from front*

animals and the naming of people is that animal names describe the species but not the individual, whereas people names describe only the individual. The Talmud tells us that the name given to a person can affect his character, and we are therefore careful to give our children names that will affect them positively.

Now, on to your questions. After investigating this subject, I agree with your distinction about animal names. Ashkenazim do, in fact, often name their children after animals, while Sephardim do not. One phenomenon that I encountered in my research is that when Rabbi Yosef Karo (a noted Sephardic Posek) lists the spelling of names for the purpose of writing a Get (bill of divorce), none of the names are "animal names;" yet when the Rama (a noted Ashkenazic Posek) lists names for the same purpose he includes many names of animals. I asked Rabbi Chaim Pinchas Scheinberg, shlita, "Why would one group choose names of animals and another would not?" He told me that really, neither group is naming their offspring for animals, since we are careful about "contaminating"

our children with the tumah (impure spiritual effect) of non-Kosher animals. So why do Ashkenazim seemingly name children after animals? The answer is that when they name the children they are not naming them after the animals per se, but are recalling the qualities of the great people of early generations who are exemplified by those positive animal traits. For example, when someone is named "Aryeh" the trait of Yehudah is being evoked, a "lion-like" - "royal" - "king of the beasts." The animals are mere symbols of very human qualities.

The reason that Sephardic Jews name children after a living relative is in order to honor the one after whom the baby is named. Ashkenazim do not name their children after living relatives, because although it would be a bestowal of great honor, it would be considered an ayin hara ("evil-eye") for the living relative - i.e., naming the child after someone might bring on that person's early demise.

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## Stories for the Soul

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understood this man's challenges, this episode never would have occurred. The former soldier later became an observant, learned Jew.

In this week's Parsha, Moshe was punished for referring to the Children of Israel as "rebels" (Num. 20:10). Even

though they were rebelling at the time, they should not have been perceived as rebels. The Torah expects us to love each other, see the good in each other and perceive each other as good.

*Adapted with permission from ShulWeek by Rabbi Boruch Lederman.*