

## A Taste of Torah Making it Count

By Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher

Shuttle launches. Fourth quarters. Summer vacation. What do all of these things have in common?

Countdowns. When people are eagerly awaiting an event, they count down to it. And when it comes to the period between Pesach and Shavuos, the Torah, in this week's parsha, commands us to count the days as we excitedly approach the Giving of the Torah that occurred on Shavuos. Beginning with the second night of Pesach, the day when the special Omer offering was brought in the Temple, we count for forty-nine days until we reach day fifty, the holiday of Shavuos.

But wait! The Torah doesn't tell us to count down, the Torah tells us to count up! An explanation is definitely in order; why don't we count down, as would have been expected?

A process that is necessary to reach a goal is usually merely a means to get there. A person rides a bus to arrive at his destination; the bus ride serves no purpose other than to bring the person to the location he wants. A countdown,

too, is merely a way of expressing one's eagerness to arrive at the point of destination. It serves no purpose other than that.

The period of Sefiras HaOmer, Counting the Omer, is quite different. We are not merely awaiting the Giving of the Torah; we are preparing ourselves for the Giving of the Torah. When the Jewish People left Egypt, they needed to purify and perfect themselves to a level where they were worthy of receiving the Torah. We, too, prepare ourselves every year, as we relive the period following the Exodus, to be worthy of receiving the Torah.

Because the process is an ends unto itself, we count each day from the bottom up. We are monitoring our progress; today is day one, today is day two, and so on. Sure, the Torah is our final goal, but we need the process of Sefirah to get there. Day after day, we strive to perfect ourselves so that when day fifty rolls around, we will be ready.

Sefiras HaOmer is not merely a countdown to Matan Torah. It is a period of building our own selves.

## Ask the Rabbi Stay Covered

Anonymous wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

I'm 22 and work in a totally non-Jewish business setting in Manhattan where. I wear a yarmulke to work every day. I feel that wearing a yarmulke here will prevent me from moving up in the company, as much of my job

involves seeing potential clients and I am starting to think that perhaps an outright religious article like a yarmulke makes them uncomfortable. Also, my co-workers treat me differently and do not accept me. The "damage" has been done in this office, so I am thinking of leaving to another office and not wearing a yarmulke there. What are

## Stories For The Soul

### The Lost Jewel

One day Reb Yitzchok, a poor French winemaker, was walking home when he noticed a shiny object. Thinking it was a pretty stone, he brought it home to his wife. He was always looking for ways to make her happy since they were childless.

His wife realized the stone was quite valuable and brought it to the jeweler. She was shocked to discover it was worth a hundred thousand francs! They were now the wealthiest couple in the entire Champagne region of France.

Before long, a soldier of the emperor himself came to buy the stone.

"The emperor requests that you accompany us to personally hand the jewel over to him and receive your payment. The jewel shall adorn the emperor's idol, which is missing the jewel from one of its eyes. We sail tomorrow morning."

There was no way Reb Yitzchok would allow his jewel to be used for idolatry, but you didn't say no to the emperor - not if you wanted to live. He spent the night tearfully beseeching Hashem. Having no other option, the next day he boarded the ship.

After many days at sea, he got an idea. Reb Yitzchok began loudly bragging to the sailors about his great treasure. Standing by the side of the ship, he held the jewel high for all to see. Suddenly, the ship rocked and the jewel fell from his hand into the sea, where it was lost forever. Reb Yitzchok began wailing hysterically, "My jewel, my jewel. I was going to

## Kollel Happenings

### CHERRY CREEK MUNCH AND LEARN, MON., MAY 9

The next Cherry Creek Munch and Learn for men, led by Rabbi Yehuda Amsel, will be held on Mon., May 9 at 12:30 p.m. at Colorado Capital Bank, 55 Madison Ave. The class focuses on Pirkei Avos. For information, contact Rabbi Amsel at 303-820-2855 or at [rya@denverkollel](mailto:rya@denverkollel)



### PARTNERS IN TORAH AT AISH TO RESUME WED., MAY. 11

The Kollel's Partners in Torah program for men at Aish Denver, which was on Pesach break, will resume on Wed., May 11. 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](mailto:info@denverkollel).



### FATHERS-AND-SONS PROGRAM SUN., MAY 15 AT EDOS

The next Fathers-and-Sons learning program will be held on May 15 at EDOS. Breakfast begins at 9 a.m. with learning following. For information, contact Rabbi Yehuda Amsel at 303-820-2855 or email [rya@denverkollel.org](mailto:rya@denverkollel.org)

## Interpersonal Issues Returning Stolen Property Part II

One should not put off repenting for theft until Yom Kippur; it should be done at the earliest opportunity. Every moment of delay is putting off a fulfillment of a positive commandment.

Once one has returned the stolen

property, one completes the repentance by acknowledging that what he did was wrong, regretting it, and resolving not to repeat the misdeed.

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

## Ask the Rabbi

*continued from front*

your thoughts on this, halachically and philosophically?

Dear Anonymous,

To get ahead, or to cover your head: That is your question.

The Shulchan Aruch writes that a head covering is an obligation during prayer and something that one "should do" at other times. Some later authorities suggest that a head covering has gained the status of Torah Law due to the prohibition against "going in the ways of non-Jews," because the non-Jews bare their heads as a sign of honor.

In certain cases, there is room for leniency if wearing a yarmulke causes a financial loss. But let me tell you a story: The Rabbi of Berditchev once saw a man running. "Where are you running?" he

asked. "To my livelihood." "How do you know your livelihood doesn't lie in the other direction and you're running away from it?" said the Rabbi.

Who knows? Maybe for every client you "lose" because of your yarmulke, you may gain two clients who respect you specifically for the integrity and courage you display by wearing a yarmulke.

A yarmulke is a very powerful reminder of your Jewish identity. It seems to me a major mistake to cast it off, even if only at work. To wear a yarmulke is to proclaim "I'm a proud Jew," and it makes you worthy of extra-special Divine protection and blessing, especially today when so many Jews are assimilating into oblivion.

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## Stories for the Soul

*Continued from front*

be a wealthy man. Woe is me. Woe is me."

When they arrived, they told the emperor all that had transpired. The emperor felt pity for Reb Yitzchok and ordered him sent home. Little did anyone suspect that Reb Yitzchok had staged this entire "accident."

Upon arrival home, Reb Yitzchok was approached at the port by an old man who said, "You threw away your precious jewel to honor Hashem. At this time next year, your wife will bear you a son who will be a precious jewel

unequaled in all of the world."

And so it was. The boy was named Shlomo and grew up to be the famed Rav Shlomo Yitzchaki, or Rashi.

"You shall not desecrate My holy Name... I am the L-rd Who sanctifies you, Who took you out of the land of Egypt" (Lev. 22:32-33).

Hashem took us out of Egypt so that we may sanctify His holy Name. When we exert ourselves for Hashem's honor, He does miraculous things for us.

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

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