

# A Taste of Torah

## Deep Concern

By Rabbi Levi Lebovits

In this week's parsha, Shemos, we begin the story of the Jewish people's detainment in Egypt and their eventual exodus. We are introduced to Moshe, future leader and savior of the Jewish people.

When we look into the story of Moshe, specifically Rashi's commentary on that section, we learn a tremendous lesson about what it takes to be a Jewish leader. The Torah (2:11) tells us, "And it was in those days, and Moshe grew up, and he went out to his brothers and saw their burdens". On the words "...and (he) saw their burdens" Rashi comments, "He focused his eyes and heart to be distressed for them". Rashi's words seem unnecessary; when one sees the plight of another, additional focus is not necessary to comprehend the tragic

circumstances.

Rashi is teaching us a tremendous lesson about the qualities of a leader: we often hear of terrible tragedies and are overwhelmed with sorrow. We picture the horrible scene in grave detail. This is the first level of showing care and concern for others. There is, however, a deeper and more personal level of concern. This occurs when we take the facts which we are already aware of and build upon them. We try to put ourselves in the other's shoes and feel their exact pain. In order to do this we must focus ourselves on their pain and not merely allow ourselves to become overwhelmed by the tragedy. This is the trait of a true leader of the Jewish people; be it the leader of a nation, an organization, or the head of a family. May we all learn this lesson from Moshe regarding how to properly lead and guide others.

# Ask the Rabbi

## Varying Vowels

Case E. Krell wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

Why is the Torah written without any vowels?

Dear Case. E. Krell,

Your question has two answers: A simple one and a Kabbalistic one.

The simple reason the Torah has no vowels is that the Hebrew alphabet doesn't have any. The vowel sounds are sometimes written as dots under the

letters. But they aren't necessary. Just as you can read tricky English words like 'psychic' and 'queue' without looking in a dictionary, Hebrew speakers can read Hebrew without the dots.

Hence, the entire Torah, Prophets, and Writings, the Mishna and Talmud, and all the classic commentaries were written without any vowels. Even today, Israelis read menus, soup cans, and street signs with no vowels. That's just how Hebrew is.

But there is another answer to your question:

The Hebrew language is Holy, and

## Stories For The Soul

### Of Bread & Butter

Moshe Rabbenu was the quintessential leader. He embodied all the lessons he taught. He did not practice one thing and preach another. Whatever he demanded of others, he performed himself. His integrity was beyond reproach. His caring and devotion were legendary.

The court summons hanging on the milkman's door bewildered him. He was an honest man who always behaved appropriately. He never cheated, lied or stole anything. He had no idea why he was invited to court.

But the baker knew.

The baker used to buy butter and cheese from the milkman. One day he suspected that the lumps of butter that the milkman sold him were under a kilo - even though the milkman insisted otherwise. The baker decided to check out the matter and for a period he consistently weighed every lump of butter that he bought from the milkman. He discovered that they in fact weighed less than a kilo.

He went to the local court and complained about the milkman. "We have to prosecute him" said the baker. "We can't let him cheat all the villagers, people trust him!"

The milkman and baker arrived at the court, the milkman shaking with fear.

"I assume you have a very accurate scale in your dairy." said the judge.

"No your honor, I do not have a scale" said the milkman.

"So how do you weigh the butter? Do you just guess that it is one kilo?" said the judge.

"No G-d forbid, your honor - I am an honest man; it never occurred to me to do something like that. I built myself a scale - the kind that needs a weight on

## Kollel Happenings

### LEGAL HOLIDAY LEARNING ON FRI. DEC. 31

The next legal holiday learning program will take place on Fri., Dec. 31 at two locations. The Zera Avraham program is for men only and will start with Shacharis at 8 followed by breakfast and a class from 9:00-10:00. \$125 sponsorship is still available. For information, call 303-820-2855 or email [rye@denverkollel.org](mailto:rye@denverkollel.org). At Aish, men and women are invited to davening at 8:15 followed by breakfast and debate at 9:00. For information, call 303-820-2855 or email [rmh@denverkollel.org](mailto:rmh@denverkollel.org)



### 'MEDICAL MARIJUANA' AT JAN. 5 TORAH FOR TYCOONS

Join Ean Seeb, Owner, Denver Relief, and Kollel Dean Rabbi Shachne Sommers for "Medical Marijuana: Is it Kosher?" at the next Torah for Tycoons, Wed., Jan. 5. The program will be held at noon at the East Side Kosher Deli. CLE credits pending. Cost: \$20. To RSVP, call 303-820-2855 or email [info@denverkollel.org](mailto:info@denverkollel.org)



### CHERRY CREEK MUNCH AND LEARN, MON., JAN. 10

The next Cherry Creek Munch and Learn for men, led by Rabbi Yehuda Amsel, will be held on Mon., Jan. 10, 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.org](mailto:rya@denverkollel.org)

## Interpersonal Issues Borrowing Without Permission Part II

Even if one is certain that the owner will not mind and will even be happy if he borrows his item, it is nonetheless prohibited according to many halachic opinions. Similarly, if one borrowed without permission and was subsequently told by the owner that he didn't mind,

the borrower is, according to many opinions, not absolved of theft.

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

## Ask the Rabbi

*continued from front*

even the shapes of the letters contain many lessons and mysteries. So too, the absence of the vowels has much to teach us. For example:

The letters of a word are like its 'body.' The vowels are like its 'soul.' Just as the soul is the life of the body, yet it is invisible, so, too, the vowels remain unwritten and invisible, yet they breathe 'life' and meaning into every word.

The Torah is not just a book, but an interactive medium. The absence of vowels beckons us to become partners with the Torah, to breathe life into its letters. In return, the Torah breathes life into us, as it says, "It is a Tree of Life to those who uphold it."

Just as one hammer blow shatters a rock into many fragments, so every word in the Torah has many meanings and secrets. Some of the hidden

meanings of the Torah are derived by reading the words using various vowel combinations. For example, the words 'In the beginning' can be read to mean that G-d created a single 'stone' - the focal point from which the universe expanded.

According to Kabbalah, the primeval Torah which preceded the creation of the world was written as 'black fire upon white fire.' It had no spaces between the words. Rather, it was a long string of letters. This Torah was composed entirely of various 'Names' of Hashem. This was the Torah given to Moses on Mount Sinai, along with the explanation of how to break the letters into the words we have today.

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## Stories for the Soul

*continued from front*

one side to balance the butter on the other". The judge nodded his head, and the milkman continued. "Every morning when I come to weigh the butter for the baker I place a kilo loaf of bread on one side of the scale and this way I know that the butter that I will give to the baker will be exactly one kilo."

"So," the judge said, "you are telling us that the amount of butter that you

give the baker is exactly the weight of the loaf of bread he supplies to you?"

"That is it exactly it!" said the milkman.

The baker's face fell.

When judging others, we must look inward and see if our perception of their flaws is simply a reflection of ours.

*Adapted with permission from ShulWeek by Rabbi Boruch Lederman*