



A Taste of Torah Acceptance

Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher

If you've ever had any experience in sales, you know that when a pitch is made, you focus on all the advantages and virtues of the product, and avoid any negatives like the plague. Which leaves me scratching my head every time I review the events preceding the Jewish People's acceptance of the Torah. Our Sages tell us that before offering the Torah to Bnai Yisroel, Hashem first approached other nations, one at a time, to see if they were interested. Every nation responded, "What does the Torah say?" Hashem would tell each nation of a commandment that He knew they would have a hard time fulfilling, and they all declined the offer. For example, when he approached Edom, the descendants of the murderous Eisav, He replied, "It says, 'Thou shall not kill'". Well, you can imagine what their response was. "After all," they exclaimed, "did not Eisav's father, Yitzchak, bless him, 'By your sword you shall live? How can we be expected to give that up!'"

Now, if you're trying to sell Judaism to someone, you don't tell them about fast days, no bread or pizza for the entire Pesach, and how much it costs to keep kosher; you tell them about cholent, Simchas Torah, and latkes! Later, after they're interested, you can move on to the aspects that require more effort. Yet G-d seems to have gone out of His way to make the Torah unappealing.

The Jewish People didn't ask any questions; they eagerly replied, "Na'aseh v'nishma!", "We will do and we will listen!" But how could they be so sure?

What if the demands of the Torah were too great?

Let's understand why Hashem gave the Torah in the first place. It is not merely a set of rules that govern our lives, although certainly that is a major aspect of the Torah. But it's much more than that. The Torah is a means of self-perfection, a means of becoming a better, more spiritual person, one who can connect and live with G-d. But perfection means changing oneself, not just keeping the rules. The mistake the other nations made was that they were only interested in observing the laws of the Torah as long as they could stay the same; change wasn't on their radar screen. When they asked what the Torah demanded of them, they were ensuring that there wasn't anything in it which would cramp their style or impinge upon their way of life. Since that was the underlying motive of their question, Hashem had to tell them which aspects would interfere. And, upon hearing those parts, they refused to consider the Torah.

The Jewish People, on the other hand, were fully cognizant that while they weren't necessarily capable of fulfilling all the laws of the Torah at the moment, they certainly had the potential to do so, pending personal growth and progress. They realized that G-d wouldn't offer something that they lacked the potential to accomplish. Once they knew that, they were more than willing to undertake the challenge of self-improvement.

Stories For The Soul

Follow Your Leader

Rabbi Yechezkel Landau, who would eventually become world famous as the Nodeh B'Yehuda, had a challenging beginning to his Rabbinic career. After he was appointed Rabbi of Prague, there were some people who felt he was too young and kept looking for ways to undermine him.

They once sent a woman to ask him a question about the kashrus of a chicken. Rabbi Landau ruled that it was kosher. There was, however, a very obscure commentary that ruled that such a chicken was rendered unkosher by this particular blemish. Since in those days printed sefarim were very expensive and rare, Rabbi Landau was unaware of that particular ruling. His detractors did have a copy.

The men confronted the Rabbi with the printed ruling in a most condescending manner, intimating that the venerable Prague community would be better served with a more experienced Rabbi.

"When a Rabbi, who is a competent Torah authority, issues a ruling on an inquiry," replied Rabbi Landau, "Hashem gives him Divine assistance in the merit of the Jewish community which he serves, so that even if he errs in his reasoning, his ruling will wind up being correct. This did not happen here. The only logical conclusion is that the inquiry was not a real one, but rather an invented case made up in an attempt to simply vex me. That is why I had no special Divine assistance."

The schemers were stunned that the Rabbi had seen right through them, and they shamefacedly admitted

Kollel Happenings

14TH ANNUAL BENEFIT EVENT
TO BE HELD MARCH 20, 2012

Please join us for the Kollel's 14th Benefit Event on Tuesday, March 20, 2012 at 7 p.m. at District 475. Event Chairs: Shlomo Fried, Jay Kamlet, Harvey and Stephanie Milzer, Rich and Rochelle Sokol. The theme of the event is "Heartbeat of our Nation" and will include an original musical experience composed and Presented by the Kollel. Special guest speaker: Rabbi Yechiel Spero, author of the 'Touched by a Story' series. The event will feature "Wrap and Roll" a Creative Selection of Sides and Sushi.



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 an item was found in an unprotected place, even if it appears to have been deliberately placed there, it is regarded as a lost object, because we assume that it was mistakenly left in that location, and that the owner placed

it there temporarily and then forgot it.

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

Ask the Rabbi Shakesprayer

Burt Falkenstein wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

Why is it when we pray, many people "shuckle" back and forth while others do not? Isn't it disrespectful to sway back and forth when we are talking to Hashem?

Dear Burt Falkenstein,

'Shuckling' - swaying back and forth during prayer and Torah study - is a legitimate custom. Several reasons are offered for this custom:

The soul is akin to a flame. Just as a flame always flickers upward, so too the soul is never still, constantly striving to reach upward towards Hashem.

Shaking allows you to pray with your whole body, as King David said "Let all my bones exclaim 'Hashem, who is like You!'"

When we stand before Hashem, we tremble in awe of the King of Kings.

The Kuzari gives a historical explanation for 'shuckling.' He explains that shuckling originated when there was a book shortage, and several people needed to share one book. To allow as many people as possible to study from

one book, they would sway back and forth. This allowed each person to look into the book and read a bit, and when he swayed back, another person could sway forward and look in the book.

A valid alternative to shuckling is to stand completely still, like a soldier standing at attention.

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein zt"l was known to stand stock still during the silent prayer. He explained that, while living in Russia, he was once arrested for teaching Torah. One form of torture he experienced was being forced to stand completely still. It was on one of these occasions that Rabbi Feinstein was struck with the realization that if he could stand with such intense concentration for the sake of his captors, then he should afford at least the same respect when standing in front of Hashem.

Deciding whether to 'shuckle' or stand still depends on which one helps you concentrate better. In any case, a person shouldn't move his body or contort his face in any way that will make him look weird.

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Stories for the Soul

Continued from front

to their ploy. Rabbi Landau's public esteem rose as a result of this plot.

The generation that stood at Har Sinai was the greatest generation of all time. Their leader was the greatest leader

of all time. This was no coincidence. Each generation has leaders befitting them, and they must listen to their leaders.

Adapted with permission from ShulWeek, by Rabbi Baruch Lederman.