

A Taste of Torah

Blood Pressure

by Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher

The time has almost arrived. Four hundred years after the birth of Yitzchak, the Jewish People are about to leave Egypt. Nine plagues have decimated Egypt, leaving a shell of the most powerful civilization on the planet. One final blow, the death of the firstborn, and Pharaoh will finally cave in and free the Jewish Nation. All the Jews have to do is sit back and wait for the final moment to come, right?

Not so fast.

Hashem tells Moshe that the Jewish People must perform two integral mitzvos - circumcision and the Pesach offering. Our Sages tell us, based on a verse in *Shir Hashirim* (Song of Songs), that the Jewish People at that time required performance of a mitzvah to serve as the merit that would propel them out of Egypt.

Hold on just a second. Last I checked, Hashem had promised Avraham that after four hundred years as strangers in a land not theirs, his descendants would leave Egypt. Where did the additional need for mitzvos come into the picture?

The two mitzvos given by Hashem share a unique property: they are the only two positive commandments in the Torah whose failure to fulfill them results in a penalty of *kares* (lit., excision - a punishment from Heaven that includes premature death, along with other misfortunes). Why are these two positive mitzvos so vital that they warrant this severe punishment?

The Shem MiShmuel (Rabbi Shmuel Bornsztain; 1855-1926) states that circumcision and the Pesach offering both focus on blood. The blood of circumcision is a vital part of the mitzvah, and an integral part of the Pesach offering in Egypt was the application of the blood upon the doorposts and lintel (and, in subsequent years, upon the Altar).

The Jewish People were almost

completely lost in the morass of Egyptian culture; one more moment, and they would have been rendered unredeemable. Our Sages compare the Jewish People in Egypt to a fetus inside the womb of Egypt. Much as the circulatory system of a fetus is part and parcel of the mother within which it exists, the Jewish People were inextricably linked to the Egyptians. Hashem had a promise to keep, but the promise required a nation that could disconnect itself from Egypt and, instead, connect itself to Hashem Himself as the source of its existence. How could this be accomplished? By redirecting the nation's circulatory system. The Jewish People needed a mitzvah - a mitzvah of blood - to allow their spiritual lifeblood to come from Hashem Himself, and not the Egyptians.

The Talmud tells us that the purpose of the Pesach offering was to pull away from the idolatry of Egypt, for the Egyptians worshipped sheep. Circumcision is referred to as a removal of a blockage - an impediment between a Jew and G-d. The blood of the Pesach offering served to allow the Jewish people to break away from Egypt, while circumcision allowed them to connect with Hashem! This explains why these two positive commandments are so essential - they create our most basic connection with Hashem, and one who lacks that connection will suffer *kares*, excision, for this person remains cut off from Hashem.

Pesach is the holiday that celebrates the birth of the Jewish Nation, and, based on the above discussion, that description is quite literal. It is a time when Hashem waits to take us out of our own personal Egypt, the temptations of the physical world. But we need to make the effort to get out of the quagmire and make the connection. To the extent one succeeds, one can reach great heights on Pesach.



Because Torah Is for Every Jew

Stories For The Soul

Honest Bread

Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev (1740-1809) had a neighbor whose son did not want to observe the mitzvos. One year, during the *seder*, the family was about to make a sandwich of *matzah* and *maror* (bitter herbs) for the *korech* sandwich. To everyone's shock, the boy pulled from his pocket two slices of bread and some meat, and made himself a sandwich. His father started to cry, "How dare you bring bread to my *seder*!?"

"But father," the boy answered, "I'm hungry after reading the Haggadah. What difference does it make if I eat bread or *matzah*? I'm sure Rabbi Levi Yitzchak wouldn't mind."

The father jumped up from the table and grabbed his son. "Oh, wouldn't he? Let's go ask him." The whole family marched next door, the father leading the boy by the ear. "Rebbe," the man said, "even you would not tolerate what my son just did. He ate bread at our *seder*. I have four sons, rabbi, and I don't have to tell you which one he is."

Everyone in the room was shocked; everyone, that is, except for Rabbi Levi Yitzchak. He smiled at the boy and asked if it was true.

"Of course, rebbe. I was hungry, so I made myself a sandwich."

"Don't you know that on Pesach, Jews don't eat bread?" asked Rabbi Levi Yitzchak.

"Well, rebbe," the boy answered, "to be totally honest, I don't really believe in all this. What difference

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Kollel Happenings

A DEEPER LOOK AT THE PARSHA WITH RABBI SOMMERS & RABBI FLEISHER

Join Rabbi Shachne Sommers as he discusses a number of difficulties encountered in the weekly Torah portion, and develops a comprehensive approach to resolve the issue, simultaneously conveying a deeper understanding of the material being discussed. Tuesday nights at the Southeast Kollel Torah Center, 8-9 pm, for men and women. Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher presents Sunday nights at the West Denver Bais Medrash 8-8:45 pm for men. Class will resume following Pesach break.

RESPONDING TO ANTI-SEMITISM AT MAY 3RD TORAH FOR TYCOONS

Join Scott Levin, Regional Director for the Anti-Defamation League, and Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher, Senior Educator for the Denver Community Kollel, as they explore the proper response to anti-Semitism. Wednesday, May 3rd, 12-1:15 p.m. at the East Side Kosher Deli. Cost: \$25. RSVP info@denverkollel.org.

HELP BUILD THE FUTURE OF TORAH IN DENVER

Claim your part in building the future of Torah in Denver! The Kollel is in the midst of a capital campaign to build a three-story, state-of-the-art Torah Center that will serve the entire Denver Jewish community. To contribute, or for dedication opportunities and details on the building, visit denverkollel.org or email info@denverkollel.org.

Increase Your Jewish IQ

By Rabbi Yaakov Zions

Last week we asked: How many times a year do we perform *Birchas Kohanim* (priestly blessing) in the Diaspora?

A: According to the original practice, *Birchas Kohanim* (priestly blessing) was performed every day at *shacharis*. This custom is still maintained by Sefardim worldwide, as well as most Ashkenazic communities in Eretz Yisroel. In the Diaspora, however, the custom among most Ashkenazic communities is for the *kohanim* to recite *Birchas Kohanim* only during the *mussaf* prayers on holidays. This includes Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur, the first two days and last two days of Sukkos, the first two days and last two days of Pesach, and Shavuos - a total of 13 times a year. However, there are some communities that do

not perform *Birchas Kohanim* if any of the abovementioned days coincide with Shabbos. Additionally, among the communities following the Western European (German-Jewish) custom, some perform *Birchas Kohanim* at *shacharis* (and *ne'ila* on Yom Kippur) as well, more than doubling the number mentioned above!

(Sources: Rema, Orach Chaim 128:44, Responsa of Chasam Sofer, Orach Chaim 22 and Aishel Avraham Butchatch Orach Chaim 128)

This week's question: Who is obligated in the mitzvah of *Birchas Kohanim* (priestly blessing) - the *kohanim* only or the entire congregation?

To submit an answer to Rabbi Zions, email ryz@denverkollel.org.

Lives of Our Torah Leaders

The Rema, Rabbi Moshe Isserles - Part III

Rabbi Yaakov Pollak and his student, Rabbi Shalom Shachne, while adherents of the *pilpul* methodology, were of the greatest scholars of their generation, with impeccable reputations. Their legacy should not be tainted by the controversy that later swirled around their approach to Torah study.

In addition to Rabbi Moshe Isserles, a number of individuals who would become prominent leaders of the Jewish people attended the yeshiva in Lublin,

including Rabbi Shlomo Luria, known as the Maharshal, who later became the Rosh Yeshiva (Dean) of the yeshiva in Lublin after Rabbi Shalom Shachna's passing, and Rabbi Chaim ben Betzalel, a brother of the Maharal of Prague.

Rabbi Moshe married the daughter of Rabbi Shalom Shachna, but she died at the young age of 20; it is said that the famed Krakow synagogue associated with the Rema, known as the Rema's Shul, was dedicated in her memory.

Stories For The Soul

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could it possibly make if I eat bread or *matzah*?"

The entire room was silent. Only the boy's mother could be heard sobbing in the doorway. "Please come here," Rabbi Levi Yitzchak called to the boy. The boy walked slowly, afraid that this time he had gone too far. As he approached the table, the rebbe hugged him. "Such a fine boy," he said to the father, "and so honest, too!"

"He's ready to admit what he did and he's

acting according to his beliefs. Such a fine, honest boy must sit with me at my *seder*. I have so much to learn from him! Just one thing though." The rebbe turned to the boy and said, "There'll be no sandwiches at the *seder* table - unless you make them with *matzah*."

There are four sons discussed by the Hagaddah, and it is a parent's responsibility to know how to properly deal with each one.