

THE HARRY H. BEREN TORAH WEEKLY

A project of the Denver Community Kollel



Because Torah Is for Every Jew

Parshas Vayeitzei

November 24, 2017

A Taste of Torah

Days of Your Youth

by Rabbi Avraham Dovid Karnowsky

Our Sages refer to this week's Torah portion as the parsha of *galus* (exile). Our forefather Yaakov conducted himself in a specific way when he left his home and went through the rigors of exile. His behavior serves as a lesson for our conduct during the long and bitter exile we are currently in.

One of the lessons we learn is the idea of making a vow during times of duress. After Yaakov awoke from his sleep, he vowed that if G-d would be with him and provide him with bread and clothes, then the stone which he had set up as a pillar would become a house of G-d. The commentaries explain that the purpose of this type of vow is to bind oneself completely with one's beliefs and morals, creating strength that will prevent them from falling apart because of hardship. Many of our ideals and principles seem to disappear when the going gets rough. But if one promises to adhere to a specific thing no matter what, it has a greater chance of surviving difficult times.

Rabbi Gedalia Schorr (1910-1979) observes that Yaakov made this vow before he had encountered any challenges. Why did he feel the need to commit before anything had happened; why not wait until trouble begins and then promise to adhere to his morals?

King Solomon writes (Koheles 12:1), "So remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come, and those years arrive of which you will say I have no pleasure in them." Rabbi Schorr explains: There are times when we feel incredibly motivated and passionate about serving G-d. Those times are referred to as "days of your youth." Other times, we feel lackluster, almost unable to get out of

bed in the morning; these are referred to as days with "no pleasure in them." King Solomon is teaching us that the optimal time to strengthen oneself is in the days of one's youth, when one tends to have strength, health and sustenance and then, when the evil days come, a person will be strong enough to hold on to his ideals. However, if we wait to support and strengthen ourselves only when difficulties arise, who knows if we will not just throw in the towel and give up. The holy Zohar alludes to this idea by mentioning that if one wants to descend into a deep pit, one has to bind himself to the ground above it with thick rope before lowering oneself down. This is why Yaakov made a vow to serve G-d before he began his exile. Now, when he had firm footing, was the best time to proclaim that he would cleave to G-d no matter what the future would bring.

Many wonder, how is it possible to raise our children in a way that they will be strong enough to withstand all the pitfalls of today's generation? The same principle we have discussed applies. Do not wait until the tests begin to connect them with their heritage. The more one can convey the beauty and satisfaction of Judaism when times are good, the better the odds that they will hold on when they encounter challenges. One has to show them the richness of a life filled with Torah and mitzvos, a warm Shabbos table with delicious food, a festive Pesach and Sukkos, and a joyous Purim and Simchas Torah. Then we can hope to be strong in all times, even when we do not feel so motivated until, eventually, the time arrives when we will merit that the years of "no pleasure" will cease to exist, as we live constantly in the "days of your youth."

Stories for the Soul

An Honest Prayer

Based on a story on revach.net

The Chazon Ish (Rabbi Avraham Yeshaya Karelitz; 1878-1953) would have a daily *minyan* (quorum) for the *mincha* prayers in the early afternoon at his home. Although there was a core group of regulars who attended the *minyan* every day, it could sometimes be difficult to gather the requisite ten adult Jewish men at that hour.

One day, to the great dismay of all the people waiting, it took a particularly long time to gather a *minyan*. When the tenth man finally arrived, it had gotten so late that one of the regulars told the Chazon Ish that he had previously made an appointment with someone, and remaining for the duration of the prayers would make him late to the meeting. The man wondered if he should go, or remain to complete the *minyan* and then arrive a bit late. The Chazon Ish replied, "For a man who cleaves to the attribute of truth, there is no question as to what to do." The man left to his appointment, leaving the group without a tenth man, but with a powerful lesson about honesty.

In this week's parsha, Yaakov spends twenty years working for his deceitful uncle (and, later, father-in-law) Lavan. Despite Lavan's conniving ways, Yaakov maintained his integrity throughout, fulfilling his obligations to Lavan with unimpeachable honesty.

Kollel Happenings

RABBI REISMAN WEEKLY IN DENVER

Join thousands around the globe in listening to the renowned weekly Navi shiur of Rabbi Yisroel Reisman! Rabbi Reisman's weekly Motzoei Shabbos class is shown at Beth Jacob High School, 5100 W. 14th Ave., this week at 7:30 pm. For sponsorships and info, contact info@denverkollel.org.

SHOW THEM WHO'S BOSS: DEALING WITH UNETHICAL SITUATIONS IN THE WORKPLACE

Join neurosurgeon Fredric Sonstein, MD, and Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher, Senior Educator for the Denver Community Kollel, as they discuss how to deal with ethical challenges in the workplace. Wednesday, December 6, at 12-1:15 p.m. at the East Side Kosher Deli. Cost: \$25. RSVP info@denverkollel.org.

A DEEPER LOOK AT THE PARSHA WITH RABBI SOMMERS

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 Aish Denver (lounge area), 8:15-9 pm, for men and women.

Increase Your Jewish IQ

By Rabbi Yaakov Zions

Last week we asked: What is the longest traditional chapter in the Torah (i.e., most verses between *pesucha* or *setuma* spaces, not chapters as they are generally numbered)?

A: Parshas Vayetze, with 148 verses, contains no *pesuchos* or *setumos* at all! It is followed by a very close second: Parshas Miketz with 146 verses.

This week's question: What city name 1) is mentioned hundreds of times in *Nevi'im* and *Kesuvim* (Prophets and Writings), but never in Torah, and 2) in about 99% of its occurrences, its *K'ri* (read or pronounced version) is slightly different than the *K'siv* (written version)?

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

Lives of Our Torah Leaders

Rabbi Aryeh Leib Gunzberg, the Shaagas Aryeh - Part IX

In the Metz synagogue, the custom on Shavuot was that the first verse of the Torah reading was said, then *Akdamus* was recited, followed by the conclusion of the Torah reading. Rabbi Gunzberg objected to the practice of interrupting the Torah reading, and ordered the *ba'al koreh* (reader) to continue and not stop for *Akdamus*. This caused quite a stir in the synagogue, and Rabbi Gunzberg left in disgrace. Afterwards, the trustees of the synagogue regretted treating their rabbi badly, and they implored him to remain as rabbi of Metz. The Shaagas Aryeh agreed to remain, but he never entered the synagogue save for his four annual sermons.

Rabbi Gunzberg's death at the age of 90 is the stuff of legends. It is said that a bookcase, loaded with *sefarim*, toppled onto him, critically injuring him. He was discovered, still alive, and rescued from underneath the bookcase. Rabbi Gunzberg saw this accident as Divine retribution for the sharp words he had uttered against the authors of the many books that had caused his injury.

As he lay dying, Rabbi Gunzberg beseeched the souls of the no-longer-alive Torah scholars whom he had insulted to forgive him for his wrongdoing, and he perceived that all agreed save for one, Rabbi Mordechai Yoffe, author of the halachic work known as the *Levush* (lit., the Garment). Rabbi Gunzberg is said to have uttered

the verse "A lion roars, who will not be fearful?" in regard to his attempt to procure forgiveness. The lion of the verse is a reference to Rabbi Gunzberg himself, for his name, Aryeh, means lion. The Hebrew letters of the Hebrew word for "who" in Hebrew, *mi*, are an acronym for Mordechai Yoffe. The verse can thus be interpreted as saying, "Aryeh roars, Mordechai Yoffe is not fearful," a reference to Rabbi Yoffe's refusal to be placated. Rabbi Gunzberg died of the injuries sustained in the accident.

(Interestingly, there was a famous Jewish composer by the name of Charles-Valentin Alkan (1813-1888) who hailed from Metz, the city where Rabbi Gunzberg served as rabbi. There is an urban myth that he died after a bookcase fell on him, and this legend is attributed by some to the tale of Rabbi Gunzberg's death in a similar fashion.)

The Shaagas Aryeh, Rabbi Aryeh Leib Gunzberg, thus passed away at the age of 90 in 1785. His son, Rabbi Asher, became rabbi in Karlsruhe, carrying on his father's legacy.

There are numerous other legends and stories associated with the Shaagas Aryeh, but, ultimately, his greatest legacy is the brilliant works of Torah he left for future generations to study and ponder.

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