



A Taste of Torah Strength in Numbers

by Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher

The importance of community manifests itself in so many places in Judaism, from the need for a *minyan* for proper prayer services to the mitzvah of *hakhel*, when the entire Jewish People gathered in the *Bais Hamikdash* on Sukkos following the *Shemita* year to hear the king read from the Book of Devarim. Indeed, the notion that the entirety of the Jewish Nation is actually a single, united entity at its core is an integral aspect of our existence as Hashem's Chosen People. In this week's parsha, we discover yet another important benefit of maintaining close connection with our co-religionists – helping win the fight against temptation.

The Torah discusses the case of a false prophet, an individual who claims to be a prophet and backs up his claims with a miracle, fulfilling the criteria necessary to verify that he is what he claims to be. Things go awry, though, when he then says that Hashem has commanded that people should serve other gods. The Torah continues that you must not listen to this prophet, for Hashem is testing you to see if truly love Hashem with all your heart and soul. The next verse continues, "After Hashem, your G-d, you shall go, and Him you shall fear, and His mitzvos you shall observe, and to His voice you shall hearken, and Him you shall serve and to Him you shall cleave" (Re'eh 13:5).

Rabbi Avraham Mordechai Alter, the Gerrer Rebbe (1866-1948), notes that this final verse echoes a verse in the previous week's parsha of Eikev, where the Torah states, "Hashem, Your G-d, shall you fear, Him shall

you serve, to Him shall you cleave" (Devarim 10:20). There is a major discrepancy between the two verses, says Rabbi Alter; the earlier verse is expressed in the singular, while this verse is stated in the plural form.

To take this oddity further, this shift actually occurs within the very verses of the false prophet narrative. The first section, which describes the events that will take place and the injunction to not listen to the prophet, speaks in the singular, while the latter section, which informs us that Hashem is testing us and that we must love, fear and obey Hashem, speaks in the plural; the switch actually occurs mid-verse!

Rabbi Alter explains that in Parshas Eikev, the Torah is giving us a general commandment, applicable at all times, to love and fear Hashem. Here, however, the mitzvah applies in a state of crisis; there is a false prophet who, just moments earlier, seemed to be the real deal, a person who performed a miracle and met the criteria for being a genuine spokesperson of G-d. That same person is now claiming that G-d wants us to worship idols! We are torn, unsure of how to react, as this individual seems to truly represent Hashem, yet he is instructing something completely untenable! What are we to do? How are we to make a decision and overcome this temptation? The Torah provides the answer, instructing, in the singular, "Do not listen to the words of that prophet! (Re'eh 13:4)." Now, all we need to do is carry out the instructions.

Stories for the Soul

A Kosher Attitude

I attended a large Iowa university with a minuscule Jewish population, where, during my freshman year of 1963-64, I was the only undergraduate female who identified herself as Jewish. And that was where I met Janet.

Janet was a Southern Baptist from a small town in Iowa. She came from a very religious family where church was a major focus.

Janet informed me that she had chosen to write a paper about Jewish culture so she could learn of her religion's roots, and she wanted to know if I could take her along to synagogue. There was a small local Reform congregation that met Friday nights, and I agreed to take her.

As we walked to services that Friday evening, Janet suddenly asked me, "Where do you eat?"

Surprised, I told her the name of one of the campus dining halls.

"But how do you keep kosher?" she persisted.

"Oh, I'm Reform," I explained, "and we don't keep kosher."

"But from everything I've read, kosher is one of the most important aspects of Judaism; what do you mean, you don't keep kosher!?"

"I don't know; we just don't."

Janet stopped and turned to face me, hands on her hips. I can still picture her standing there in the light of a street lamp, dressed the way she would for church, in a navy suit, a small white hat and white gloves. She looked me up and down

continued on back

Kollel Happenings

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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 on Zoom, 8:15-9 pm, for men and women.

Halacha Riddles

Last week we asked: How does standing straight affect the validity of *netilas yadayim*?

Answer: To be a valid vessel for *netilas yadayim*, a *kli* (vessel) must be able to hold a *revi'is*. If a vessel has an uneven or pointed bottom, so that it cannot stand on its own, or it cannot stand straight but tilts and then loses so much liquid that there is not a *revi'is* remaining when left to stand on its own, it is not valid even when one is holding it straight (Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 159:3).

This ruling is limited to a vessel that was not made originally to function in this way, such as where the vessel was damaged and no longer stands straight, or when it was not originally made to serve as a receptacle at all (such as a lid with a receptacle on top and a pointed bottom). However, a vessel originally made as a receptacle and with a pointed bottom is valid (*ibid.*:5; see also Mishna Berura ad loc.:14).

This week's question: What connection does a yeshiva-style "black hat" have to *netilas yadayim*?

Lives of Our Torah Leaders

Rabbi Avraham ibn Ezra - Part III

There is very little information available about Rabbi Avraham ibn Ezra's family. He writes that he had a wife and had five children with her. Some say that Rabbi Avraham was married to the daughter of Rabbi Yehuda Halevi (1075-1141), author of the famed work *Kuzari* and many

piyutim (liturgical poems). While Rabbi Avraham was certainly close to Rabbi Yehuda Halevi - when Rabbi Avraham moved to Cordoba as a young man, Rabbi Yehuda Halevi, who was much older, followed him there - it is unclear if Rabbi Avraham was also his son-in-law.

A Taste of Torah

continued from front

It is at this very moment that the Torah shifts from the singular to the plural. The same verse continues in the plural, "For Hashem, your G-d, is testing you..." This test, this trial that you now face, is not meant to be confronted alone. Rather, you must connect with your fellow Jews, and together, united in your faith and conviction, you will be able to withstand the pressure and succeed in

doing what is right. Together, you will follow after Hashem, and fear Him, and cleave to Him. When the waters are calm, an individual can perhaps manage on his own and forge his own path toward righteousness. In times of crisis, it cannot be every man for himself; rather, we must unite together to face and overcome the challenges we face.

Stories for the Soul

continued from front

as though I were a bug on a pin. Then she said words that still reverberate through my mind: "If my church told me to do something, I'd do it."

In the long silence that followed, I rolled the words over and over through my mind. And while my complete transformation from a secular Jew to a Torah-observant one took many years, my first big step began that Friday night,

when a Christian girl challenged me to stand up and act like a Jew.

The Torah details the laws of which animals, birds and fish are kosher in this week's parsha. While there are 613 mitzvos in the Torah, one of the most basic foundations of Torah-observant life is observing the mitzvos related to kosher food.

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