

A Taste of Torah Effort-Less

By Rabbi Yaakov Zions

The conclusion of our parsha describes how Yosef correctly interprets the dreams of Pharaoh's ministers. Yosef then implores the *Sar Hamashkim* (Minister of the Cupbearers) to remember Yosef's plight and mention his situation to Pharaoh for a presidential pardon. The Medrash tells us that this effort on Yosef's part caused him to remain in prison for another two years; he should have trusted Hashem to grant him freedom. He mentioned his request twice and, therefore, had to endure another two years of incarceration.

This Medrash needs explanation, as it seems to fly in the face of the idea of *hishtadlus*, one's obligation to put in effort and not rely on Hashem to provide one's needs without doing his or her part. An incident from the life of Rabbi Shimon Shkop (1860-1939), one of the great pre-WWII Lithuanian Roshei Yeshiva, sheds light on this matter.

Some of the students in Rabbi Shkop's yeshiva in Grodno, appalled by the scarcity of food and other basic necessities provided to them, staged a strike by leaving the yeshiva building and holding their studies elsewhere. After two days, Rabbi Shkop called the students back and admonished their behavior. Opening a *chumash* and reading the above-mentioned verses aloud, he asked the students, "What

would have occurred if Yosef would have only asked once for the minister's help? Would he have had to endure just one extra year in jail?" After giving the students a chance to think, he answered his own question. "No," he said emphatically, "asking for assistance from others is a necessary part of life, and had Yosef done so, he would have been freed when his initial sentence was over. However, asking twice exceeded normal, permissible effort, and put his entire request into the category of reliance on human effort. Thus, his two requests cost him two extra years." Addressing his students, he continued, "Had you staged a one-day strike, that would have been a necessary effort in the context of showing your frustration. Two days of striking made the entire operation one of extra, unnecessary protest."

Many times we are faced with the challenge of making our efforts in business, relationships or other areas of life, while trying to keep in mind that it is ultimately Hashem Who is doing the work. Keeping this lesson in mind; remembering that all efforts that we do are just to fulfill the obligation of putting in the effort, and that excess effort is not only unnecessary, but unwarranted, can help us maintain our ultimate focus.

Stories For The Soul

What's the Magic Word?

A man once came to his rabbi, complaining that he was beset with temptations. "Rabbi, please give me some advice as to how I can overcome these temptations," pleaded the poor fellow.

"Overcoming your temptations is not as difficult as you think," said the rabbi. "There is one magical word and when you say it, you beat back the temptation. Not that the desire will completely go away, but, with this word, the desire can be overpowered."

"A magical word that will save me from temptation! Wow, that sounds wonderful! Please, please, can you tell me what this word is?" The rabbi smiled and firmly replied, "No."

"Why not? Please, I beg you."

"No," repeated the rabbi. The man, deeply disappointed, turned to leave. The rabbi called him back, and explained, "My friend, the magic word is 'no'."

In this week's parsha, Yosef is put to the test with Potiphar's wife, but ultimately prevails and overcomes temptation. Yosef is called a *tzaddik* because he knew how to say no to his Evil Inclination.

Kollel Happenings

FAMILY FUN AT JEWISH FAMILY EXTRAVAGANZA ON DEC. 25TH

Join the Kollel for family fun at the annual Jewish Children's Extravaganza on Thursday, Dec. 25th, from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. The event will be held at South Suburban Family Sports Center, 6901 S. Peoria. Cost: \$13; discounted group rates are available before 12/21. Admission includes unlimited rides. Visit www.mazeltot.org to find out how to join for free until 12/24. For general information, call 303-820-2855 or email info@denverkollel.org.

A DEEPER LOOK AT THE PARSHA WITH RABBI SHACHNE 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. Sunday nights, 7:40-8:30 pm, at the Kollel for men, 1516 Xavier, and Tuesday nights at the Southeast Kollel Torah center, 8-9 pm, for men and women.

INSIDE THE ALEPH-BAIS

There is a unique fascination with the Hebrew language and the aleph-bet. Mystical sources explain that the letters of the aleph-bet are the building blocks of the whole world. Discover the world of the aleph-bet with Rabbi Heyman in this informative, dynamic class. For time and location, contact rmh@denverkollel.org.

Increase Your Jewish IQ

By: Rabbi Yaakov Zions

Last week we asked:

Q: Browsing through used sefarim at a fair, I picked up an old, yellowed siddur. A note attached to the cover read, "Beware, the instructions in this siddur are outdated."

What does this label mean? Should I refrain from purchasing it?

A: During the 19th century, the insertion of the words *v'sain tal u'matar livracha* (which are a request for rain) in Shemoneh Esrei began on December 3rd, not December 4th as we do today. This is due to the fact that the insertion of these words depends on the solar calendar, and Halacha relies on the Julian solar calendar to stay in line. But three times every four hundred years, the Gregorian calendar (the one in use today) skips a leap year, while the

Julian calendar doesn't, thus pushing the proper date for the insertion ahead one day. Theoretically, in the year 2100, when the Gregorian calendar again skips a leap year, the proper date will become December 5th. (It is also worthwhile to note that on a regular solar leap year, the insertion begins on December 5th.)

This week's question: The prayer of *aleinu* is recited at the conclusion of every prayer, with the exception of *shacharis* when followed by *mussaf*, as *mussaf* is regarded as the conclusion of the prayers. The Mishna Berurah (132:7) notes that some congregations have the custom to omit *aleinu* following *mincha* when it is followed immediately by *maariv*. Can you name one other time that *aleinu* is omitted for the same reason?

Ask the Rabbi

Angelic Names

David Levy wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

Our group was chatting about angels, their names and their functions or duties. Where can I find out the names of angels and what they do? Could you tell me some of their names? Thank you.

Dear David Levy,

The Hebrew word for angel is *malach*, which means messenger, *angelos* in Greek. According to traditional Jewish sources, angels are the powers which fulfill the will of G-d.

Our Sages say there are four angels who allegorically accompany man and protect him. Michael on his right, Gabriel on his left, Oriel in front of him, and Rafael from behind. The idea is that

there are four "fields" in which one needs continuous help, and man receives this help via certain channels by which G-d conducts the occurrences in this world.

Michael, "Mi Cae-l - who is like the merciful G-d?" is the representative of the attribute of mercy. Gabriel - "my strength is G-d" - represents the attribute of power and judgment; they are therefore on the right and left respectively. Oriel - "my light is G-d," represents the attribute of knowledge by which man wishes to know what lies ahead and how to act accordingly; thus, Oriel "stands before" a man to show him the way. Rafael - "my healer is G-d" - is the attribute by which G-d heals any ill which befalls a man; that is why he "stands behind" man.

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