

Mikeitz 5776

December 11, 2015

A Taste of Torah

Staying on Top

By Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher

If someone is talking about cows and grain, there's a good chance he's discussing a dinner menu. But in this week's parsha, they serve in a very different capacity. Our parsha opens with Pharaoh having two strange dreams. In the first, he sees seven healthy, robust cows emerge from the river. These are followed by seven thin, scruffy bovines, which proceed to swallow the fat cows. Yet, despite their large meal, the skinny cows are in no need of a diet; they are just as emaciated as before.

In dream number two, seven full, plump ears of grain sprout on a stalk. These are followed by seven withered, sickly ears of grain. The sickly ears of grain swallow the healthy ears, yet there is no sign of the fat ears on the shrunken ones.

Pharaoh is quite agitated by these dreams, and Yosef is eventually summoned to interpret them. Yosef explains that Egypt will experience seven years of satiety and plenty, followed by seven years of terrible famine and hunger. The lack of food will be so severe, says Yosef, that nobody will even recall the seven years of goodness that preceded them. Yosef proceeds to advise Pharaoh to appoint a capable individual who will collect food for the difficult years that lay ahead. Pharaoh enthusiastically exclaims that Yosef is the perfect man for the job, and Yosef becomes viceroy, and, eventually, sustainer, of Egypt and the surrounding lands.

The Nesivos Shalom (Rabbi Sholom Noach Berezovsky, the Slonimer Rebbe; 1911-2000), reveals a deeper understanding of these dreams. He quotes an oft-repeated verse in Psalms (24:3): "Who will ascend the mountain of Hashem, who will stand in His place of Holiness?" There are two areas of spiritual work, explains the Nesivos Shalom. The first is ascending the mountain, growing and becoming the person one is supposed to be. The second part is maintaining the greatness one has achieved. Often, the second part is more difficult than the first, for once a person has "peaked," enthusiasm wanes, and spiritual decay sets in. The *Yetzer Hara* (Evil Inclination) finds fertile ground to seduce one to sin and fall from the apex of the mountain

once it has been scaled. In fact, the greater one becomes, the more his *Yetzer Hara* will try to topple him. And sometimes, continues the Nesivos Shalom, the *Yetzer Hara* is so wildly successful that he succeeds in erasing any vestige of the previous accomplishments the individual had achieved earlier.

Egypt was one of the most morally depraved places on the face of the planet. Evil was rampant, and spiritual growth was the last thing on the mind of your average Egyptian. Even if, here and there, there was an individual who did achieve some degree of personal growth and achievement, it was quickly and completely snuffed out as he soon fell back into the quagmire that was Egyptian society.

This sad situation was expressed in Pharaoh's dreams. The healthy cows and grain are an allusion not just to physical abundance, but also to spiritual richness. The subsequent emergence of their shrunken counterparts alludes to the *Yetzer Hara* and its attempts to remove that spiritual success. And in Egypt, where the *Yetzer Hara* ruled supreme, the initial achievement was lost completely, with no sign that it ever existed. Into this morass steps Yosef the Tzaddik, a supremely righteous individual who has overcome his *Yetzer Hara* in the most trying circumstances. Who is capable of preserving spiritual heights if not he? And so, in both a physical and spiritual sense, Yosef becomes the person to preserve the abundance of the seven years of plenty – both the spiritual mountains that would be scaled during that time, as well as the food that would be stored away for the rough times. And indeed, Yosef strove mightily to inculcate a sense of G-dliness into Egyptian society.

The Nesivos Shalom applies this idea to Chanukah, as well. The name Chanukah is based on the word *chinuch*, or inauguration, as the Temple and the Altar were reinaugurated after the Syrian-Greeks had wrecked the Temple. It is for this reason that we read the Torah portion that discusses the offerings brought during the inauguration of the Tabernacle. The Nesivos Shalom points out that there is a discrepancy in the language

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Stories For The Soul

Broken but Whole

In Milan, Italy, about 100 years ago, there lived a wealthy Jew who would often host guests in his opulent home. In his glass display case, among the silver, gold and crystal, stood a broken glass flask. When asked by his guests about the flask, he would relate the following tale:

I moved here from Amsterdam at the age of eighteen to help my ailing grandfather run his business. After my grandfather's passing, my parents wanted me to liquidate the business and return home, but I decided to stay, as I found I had a knack for success. Unfortunately, as time wore on, my success caused me to begin to neglect my Jewish obligations. I began shirking my prayers, then stopped putting on tefillin. Soon after, kashrus fell by the wayside, followed by Shabbos observance; I completely abandoned my Judaism. In the meantime, I married a wonderful Jewish woman, and we had several children.

One day, as I was walking down the street, I heard a child wailing disconsolately. He kept screaming, "What will I tell my father? What will I tell my father?" I inquired as to the cause of the boy's distress, and I was informed that his father had sent him to the store to purchase some olive oil for Chanukah. The boy's father had warned him to come straight home, as dawdling would increase the likelihood that the glass flask of oil would break. The family was quite poor, and it was a sacrifice to purchase even this small amount of oil. The boy, though, had stopped to play, and, sure enough, the flask had fallen and shattered. The boy realized he had no excuse before his father, and was beside himself.

I bought the boy a large flask of oil and sent him straight home with the precious oil. But as I walked home, the boy's words rang in my ears. "What will I tell my father? What will I tell my father?" And then I thought to myself, indeed, what will I tell my Father in Heaven, after I depart from this world? I had drifted so far from Judaism that I had forgotten it was almost Chanukah. What excuse would I have

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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 Friday, Dec. 25th, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. The event will be held at South Suburban Family Sports Center, 6901 S. Peoria. Cost: \$15. Admission includes unlimited rides. Visit www.mazeltot.org to find out how to get free or discounted tickets until 12/23. For general information, call 303-820-2855 or email info@denverkollel.org.

THE ISSUES OF CLONING AND CLONES AT JAN. 6 TORAH FOR TYCOONS

Join Marc Cooper, President, Cooper Developmnet and Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher, Senior Educator for the Denver Community Kollel, as they delve into the ethical issues of cloning. January 6, 12-1:15 p.m. at the East Side Kosher Deli. Cost: \$25. RSVP info@denverkollel.org.

WINTER GARDENS WOMEN'S NIGHT OUT JAN. 12

The Kollel Women's Division is excited to announce that its 4th annual Women's Wellness Workshop will be held on Jan. 12, 2016. *Winter Gardens Women's Night Out* will feature bestselling author and keynote speaker Debra Fine, *Sense-ational: An Exhilarating Experience Engaging Each of the Five Senses*, great food and camaraderie, and other delights to help you achieve health in mind, body and soul. For more info, contact info@denverkollel.org or call 303-820-2855.

Increase Your Jewish IQ

By Rabbi Yaakov Zions

Last week we asked: When is *kaddish* recited after the entire Torah reading, but before the reading of the *haftarah*?

A: On Tisha B'Av morning. Since the basic Torah reading is only completed after the three *aliyos* the reading is comprised of, *kaddish* is only recited then, followed by the *haftarah*. On all other fast days, there is no *haftarah* read at *shacharis*, and at *mincha*, when the *haftarah* is recited, *kaddish* is recited after the entire Torah

reading, including the *haftarah*, is completed, just before *Shemone Esrei*, similar to *mincha* on Shabbos. (Based on glosses of Chasam Sofer to Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 284. See, however, glosses of Rabbi Akiva Eiger to Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 559)

This week's question: On *Rosh Chodesh Teves*, which two halachic controversies are avoided due to the fact that it's also Chanukah?

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

Lives of Our Torah Leaders

Rashi Part I

"I will place for the illumination of my face the lights of a pure candelabrum - the commentaries of Rabbi Shlomo, crown of beauty and glory... in Scripture, Mishnah, and Talmud, to him belong the rights of the firstborn!"

These are the words penned by the great Ramban (Nachmanides; Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman, 1194-1270) in his introduction to his commentary on the Torah, regarding Rabbi Shlomo ben Yitzchak, commonly known as Rashi, which

is the acronym of the name Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki (son of Yitzchak). Rashi's commentary on Torah and the other books of Tanach, as well as his commentary on the Talmud, are studied by all those who learn Torah, be they beginners or experienced, advanced scholars. His concise language and ability to give over information in a few terse words means that his commentaries can be understood at a very basic level or plumbed for great depths and meaning.

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used in two otherwise similar verses in this reading. At the start of the section, the Torah states, "This is the inauguration of the Altar on the day it was anointed." At the end of the description of all the offerings, a verse states, "This is the inauguration of the Altar after it was anointed." The Nesivos Shalom explains that the anointing and inauguration of the Altar served two purposes: One, to raise the Altar to the level of sanctity needed for it to serve as a place of offerings brought to Hashem. The second purpose was that the Altar maintain that degree of sanctity even after the inauguration period ended. Following the inauguration, the anointing of the Altar served to ensure that it not lose the rarefied level it had been brought to.

With this in mind, I believe we can also

understand a puzzling passage in the Talmudic discussion of Chanukah. The gemara (Shabbos 21b), when discussing the miracle of Chanukah, states, "the next year, they [the Sages] established it as a time of praise and thanksgiving." The oft-asked question is, why did they wait until next year? Based on the above discussion, it can be said that the victory of Chanukah was not just preserving the light of Torah from the dire threat presented by the Syrian-Greeks. It is the preservation of that light for all future generations; even in the darkest times, the light of the Menorah still burns brightly. The Sages therefore deliberately waited until the following year to ensure that the Jewish People had indeed preserved the power of Chanukah, and, at that point, they were able to institute it as a permanent holiday.

Stories For The Soul

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when I stood before my Father in Heaven on that final Judgement Day?

I walked back to where the children had been playing and picked up the broken pieces of glass from the flask and took them home. That night, to the surprise of my wife and children, I lit one light for the first night of Chanukah. And I continued to light for the remainder of Chanukah. That was the beginning of my return - along with my

family - to Torah-observant Judaism. And I keep the shards of that flask in my display case, for it was the catalyst of our return to Judaism.

Chanukah is not a celebration of military might. Rather, it is a time to give thanks to Hashem for the miracles He performed for us - both outright, supernatural miracles, as well as the more subtle ones - that allow us to remain true and devoted to Him and His Torah.

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