

THE HARRY H. BEREN TORAH WEEKLY

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Parshas Va'eschanan

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A Taste of Torah

Moving Heaven and Earth

by Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher

Ask any kid who's ever listened to the ubiquitous children's singer Uncle Moishy, and you will be informed in no uncertain terms that Hashem is truly everywhere - up, down, right, left, and all around. (I have abridged the lyrics for the adult audience.)

Apparently, it's not that simple to comprehend the depths of this deceptively childish-sounding statement. In this week's parsha, Moshe tells the Jewish People (Va'eschanan 4:35), "You have been shown in order to know that Hashem, He is the G-d. There is none beside him!" Rashi (ibid.) explains that at the Giving of the Torah at Sinai, G-d tore open the seven levels of Heaven and, correspondingly, also ripped open the seven levels of the nether regions for the Jewish People. They were able to perceive that at all levels of Creation, there is no other power but G-d Himself.

While we can recite the words of Rashi and it sounds exciting and revealing, it is also rather vague. What exactly does one see when all heights and depths of Creation are torn asunder? What was revealed to the Jewish People at Sinai that I wouldn't know from the popular jingle of aforementioned parental sibling?

Rabbi Gedalia Schorr (1910-1979) reveals just what was revealed at Sinai. When G-d created the Universe, He provided a perfect balance between revelation and hiddenness of His presence within it. This balance is a prerequisite for the success of Creation, essential so as to provide humanity with free will. Too much revelation, and choosing bad becomes a near-impossibility; too little, and it becomes increasingly difficult to

choose good. By creating a middle ground that is just right, we humans have the opportunity to decide if we wish to recognize G-d's presence in the world and act accordingly or to look the other way.

The great revelation we are not privy to in this world is reserved for the World-to-Come; those who scale the heights of human spiritual achievement in this lifetime are, in that world, able to come closer and closer to G-d and experience an ever-growing perception of His presence. The Jewish Nation was privy to experience those levels of perception at Mt. Sinai.

Conversely, when one sins, one moves lower and further from G-d. The depths a person falls to through moral failings seem devoid of G-d's presence. Yet, G-d is still there; there is a spark to grab hold of and nurture, even in the deepest depths of depravity. It is that G-dliness, present even in the darkest of places, that the Jewish People beheld when He displayed the seven levels of the nether regions.

G-d allowed the Jewish People to perceive His presence at all levels, beyond the normal human capacity. While they would not live at that level, the reality that they beheld was seared into their souls, became a part of their persona, and was an intrinsic part of their lives that could guide and inspire them. That spiritual heritage has been passed down to their descendants - you and me! Deep down, we recognize that in every situation and setting, Hashem is there, even if we don't perceive Him. It is up to us to connect to His presence, to make Him a part of our lives, to reveal His presence in places that seem devoid of it.



Because Torah Is for Every Jew

Stories For The Soul

Rite of Passage

Rabbi Elazar Menachem Shach (1898-2001) was the Rosh Yeshiva of the Ponovezh Yeshiva, where he taught, guided and molded several generations of students. Countless stories of his love and devotion to his students during his more than half-century as Rosh Yeshiva have been recounted. Here is one of them.

Rabbi Shach approached a student one day and asked, "Perhaps you can help me. You see, I am looking for a particular insight from Rabbi Akiva Eiger (a great 19th-century Talmudic commentator) on the material we are currently studying, but I am not finding it in the usual places. Perhaps you have come across it?"

The student smiled and responded that he had, in fact, seen Rabbi Eiger's comments in an out-of-the-way place, and he hurried to show his rebbi the relevant passage. Rabbi Shach studied Rabbi Eiger's words for several moments, then excitedly exclaimed, "Yes, yes! This is exactly what I was looking for! I plan on using this passage in my weekly lecture. Thank you so much for helping me locate it!"

Many years later, the student discovered the background to Rabbi Shach's plea for help. This particular student had, at that time, been on the verge of becoming engaged, but it had fallen through at the last minute. Rabbi Shach was aware of his student's unfortunate situation, so he approached his *chavrusah* (study partner) and asked him if the two of them had seen any important commentaries that were not found in the usual places. The *chavrusah* had replied in the affirmative, and

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Kollel Happenings

MOTZOEI SHABBOS NACHAMU KUMZITZ

Join the Kollel for an evening of inspirational singing this Motzoei Shabbos Nachamu, August 5th. The event will feature live music, refreshments and divrei Torah. The kumzitz will be held at approximately 9:45 pm. For more information, please contact rmf@denverkollel.org.

SUMMER NIGHT SEDER FOR BACHURIM

Attention bachurim in Denver! The Kollel is once again holding its Summer Night Seder for Bachurim at the Kollel West Side Bais Medrash. Sunday-Thursday. Night seder begins at 8 pm, with ma'ariv at 9:10 pm. Stipends available for boys who maintain the sederim. For further details, info or sponsorship opportunities, please contact rmf@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: When is *kaddish* officially recited on behalf of those deceased who did not merit having someone recite it for their soul's merit?

A: Communal torah readings are followed by *Chatzi Kaddish* (literally: half-kaddish), with the exception of Torah readings at *mincha*. According to Sephardic custom, this *kaddish* can be recited by a mourner if he read the final *aliyah* (portion). Some Ashkenazic communities today have adopted this custom as well. The Ashkenazic custom, however, is for this *kaddish* to be recited by the *ba'al koreh* (reader) only, not by mourners, even if

the final *aliyah* was read by a mourner. Many sources indicate that this *kaddish* is dedicated as a merit for those souls who don't have someone reciting it for them.

(Sources: *Piskei Teshuvos* 147:9 and *Yerushaseinu* Vol. 1, pg. 113)

This week's question: Most communities recite eight chapters of *Tehillim* (Psalms) for *Kabbalas Shabbos*, six before *Lecha Dodi* and two afterwards. There is a beautiful connection based on the amount of words recited in these chapters. What is it?

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

Lives of Our Torah Leaders

Rabbi Mordechai ben Hillel – the Mordechai, Part I

Mordechai ben Hillel was born circa 1250 somewhere in Germany. His family was one of the most prestigious Jewish families in Germany. His grandfather Hillel (his grandfather and father bore the same name) was a grandson of Rabbi Eliezer ben Yoel HaLevi, known as the *Ra'avyah*, a very prominent German Talmudic and halachic authority. The *Ra'avyah* himself was a grandson of another great authority, Rabbi Eliezer ben Nasan, known as the *Ra'avan*. Rabbi Mordechai was also related to the great German Talmudic and halachic authority Rabbi Asher ben Yechiel, known as the Rosh.

Little else is known about Rabbi Mordechai's early years. He married a woman by the name of Zelda, and they had five children.

Rabbi Mordechai learned under many teachers, including Rabbi Peretz ben Eliyahu of Corbeil, author of what is known today as *Tosafos Rabbeinu Peretz*, a commentary on the Talmud.

After years of travelling to various locales in Germany and France to study under different Torah authorities, Rabbi Mordechai joined a group of scholars who studied under the great Rabbi Meir of Rothenburg, known as the Maharam MiRuttenburg (c. 1215-1293). The Maharam was one of the greatest Torah authorities and leaders of his time; his disciples included the Rosh. Rabbi Mordechai had the distinction of rendering halachic decisions in the presence of his rebbi the Maharam, a privilege which only a select few of the Maharam's disciples were given.

Stories For The Soul

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provided the passage from Rabbi Eiger.

While Rabbi Shach knew of this passage, he wanted to raise the spirits of his student, so he had made it seem as if the young man had helped him locate that which he could not locate on his own.

In this week's parsha, we discover that it

is not enough to study Torah; one must teach it to his children. Our Sages teach us that students are like children, and it is the responsibility of the teacher to ensure his students are not just educated, but cared for so that they will carry the Torah they learn and incorporate it into their lives.

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