

# A Taste of Torah

## More or Less

By: Rabbi Yossi Kaplan

Bigger is better. Or is it? In the Denver Art Museum, there's a display of solid gold crowns, platters and goblets from various time periods. Seemingly, the larger the crown is... the more the gold... and the more precious.

In one of the nearly dozen study halls that comprise the great Yeshiva Beth Medrash Govoha of Lakewood, NJ, hangs a beautiful mahogany clock about three feet in diameter. Now, had its handles protruded several inches past its numerals, how beautiful would that awkward, disproportionate device still be? Clearly not all things bigger are better. Beauty in the composite vessel is the harmonious blend of its various components in exact proportion.

It is for this reason that the Torah teaches in this week's parsha (Devarim 4:2), "You shall not add to the word that I command you, nor shall you subtract from it..." The laws of the Torah form an intricate tapestry, woven by the one eternal G-d. Were we to tamper with one color, or add just a few threads, we could reduce a cascading waterfall to a simple puddle. More is not always merrier.

Yet what are we to say to he whose spirit burns within him; whose love for Torah and G-d drive him to create commandments he hasn't been asked to observe?

Margaret DaVinci was hosting a rooftop garden party in her NYC high-rise, and she knew that her party-planner neighbor, Nancy, had the perfect martini glasses to complement her spread. They had known each other for several years, and so Nancy happily agreed to lend her two dozen glasses.

After a fabulous evening, Margaret approached Nancy with three dozen glasses. "I gave you two dozen glasses," Nancy said raising an eyebrow, "not three." "Oh, yeah, that... well some of your glasses gave birth... so here are the new additions. Congrats!"

Notwithstanding the bizarre circumstances and sheer ludicrousness of subjecting glasses to lifecycle events, and given the fact that New Yorkers are largely left unfazed, Nancy accepted the gift graciously and happily.

A pattern developed where Margaret

would borrow an item and return more of what she borrowed, each time insisting that the china and flatware, candelabras and faux-glass chairs had all given birth. Eventually it was Nancy who entreated Margaret to borrow her stuff, knowing it would always be returned with extras.

Until the time the DaVincis hosted a poolside cocktail party for the local community center where they held membership. Margaret DaVinci, together with the entire sisterhood, planned a splendid event to rival all sisterhood events held to date, from the city all the way out to Connecticut. Understandably, Nancy was right on cue.

"Listen, Margaret," Nancy said in a low voice. "As you well know, this is an important event. I want you to use the crown of my collection for this occasion... an antique golden urn worth \$50,000."

At the close of the event, Margaret turned toward a beaming Nancy, who was anxious with eager expectation. "Well, was it twins this time?" asked Nancy finally. But this time she was in for a disappointment. "I'm so sorry," said Margaret, looking down. "But your urn died."

Nancy was livid. "What nonsense you spew! Give me back my urn, y-y-you thief!" But Margaret just stared at her calmly. "You believed me when numerous items of yours gave birth. Now believe me that your urn died..."

There are times when we feel the need to serve G-d through our own finite, human lens, even when that performance of G-d's word is different than what He Himself expressly handed down at Sinai.

But we have to remember: Even if at times we feel that through changing a law of Torah "it speaks to us" more, subjugating the Torah to the realm of "lifecycles" is dangerous. For if we can allow ourselves to breed mitzvos, then, at times, we allow for the death of mitzvos, as well.

The Torah is best left the way G-d created it, and freedom of expression must be limited to that framework. Less is more. And more is less.

## Stories For The Soul

### Out on A Limb

Yankel was desperate for a job, and so, when he saw an ad for an actor to play an ape, he decided to check it out.

The employer turned out to be the local zoo, which, due to a shortage of funds, was unable to acquire an actual animal. Yankel agreed to stand in as an ape, and, after a few days on the job, became quite good at swinging on the trees, beating his chest, and making monkey noises.

One day, as he was swinging from branch to branch, he overswung - and landed in the lion cage right next door! The lion approached him menacingly, and Yankel realized his end was near. He placed his hand on his eyes and screamed, "*Shema Yisrael, Hashem Elokeinu, Hashem echad!*"

The lion opened its jaws wide and roared, "*Baruch Shem kevod malchuso le'olam va'ed!*"

Suddenly, from the panda cage, a voice came. "Quit praying, you two, or you'll get us all fired!"

This week's parsha contains the first section of Shema. The call of Jews worldwide and throughout the ages, it is our declaration of G-d's Oneness that binds us together as a nation.

## Kollel Happenings

### INSIDE THE NUMBERS

In Judaism, numbers are not simply a way to count things. Every number has a special significance. From gematria to Who Knows One? recited at the end of the Passover Seder, discover the world of numbers with Rabbi Moshe Heyman of the Denver Community Kollel. Every other Thursday from 2-3 pm Marathon Investments, 6565 South Dayton St., #1200. For more info, contact [rmh@denverkollel.org](mailto:rmh@denverkollel.org). Class will resume on August 17th following summer break.

### THE M.B. GLASSMAN FOUNDATION GOLD LUNCH & LEARN PROGRAM

The M.B. Glassman Foundation GOLD Program is a division of the Denver Community Kollel dedicated to bringing Torah study to seniors in the community. Don't miss a great Lunch and Learn class on the weekly parsha at the East Side Kosher Deli, 499 S. Elm St. at 12:00 am. There is no charge for the lunch or the learning! Transportation can be arranged. For more information, contact [rmf@denverkollel.org](mailto:rmf@denverkollel.org) or call 303-820-2855. Class will resume on August 17th following summer break.

### THE FAR SIDE OF THE TALMUD

Aggadah, the passages of the Talmud that focuses on Jewish thought and outlook, provides keen insights into human nature, and offers advice on how to live our lives, can be difficult to understand, but the knowledge and wisdom hiding beneath the surface is ample reason to make the effort. Be fascinated and inspired as Rabbi Moshe Heyman presents a whole new dimension in Torah learning based on the classic work *Ain Yaakov*. Tuesdays, 1:45-2:45 pm at the Kollel Torah Center, 9550 Belview Ave. For more info, contact [rmh@denverkollel.org](mailto:rmh@denverkollel.org). Class will resume on August 17th following summer break.

## Increase Your Jewish IQ

By: Rabbi Yaakov Zions

**Last week we asked:** In addition to the bows done during the *shemone esrei*, there are several other points where we fully bow (to the point of having the "knots" protrude from the back). What are they, and why is there no issue of adding to the original order of bows during *shemone esrei*?

**A:** When reciting *barchu*, the custom is to bow. According to the Mishna Berurah (113:3), it is permitted, as it is based on a verse (Chronicles II 29:20). The Aruch Hashulchan (113:6) says that one should

bow slightly, and it is therefore permitted. 2) During the thrice-daily recitation of *Aleinu*, we bow upon saying *va'anachnu kor'im...* (According to the aforementioned Aruch Hashulchan, one should bow slightly here, as well.)

**This week's question:** When do we prostrate ourselves during prayer, and why is it not considered adding bows?

To submit an answer to Rabbi Zions, email [ryz@denverkollel.org](mailto:ryz@denverkollel.org)

## Ask the Rabbi

### Bedtime Shema

R. Berzack wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

I'd like to know the details of the commandment of the bedtime shema regarding women's obligation. I've heard that you are not allowed to talk after you have said it, is this true? And what about reading a book afterwards?

Dear R. Berzack,

Women should recite *shema* and the *hamapil* blessing immediately before retiring at night. Married women customarily say the blessing with their hair covered.

One shouldn't interrupt between the *hamapil* blessing and sleeping. Therefore, one should not eat, drink, or talk after saying *hamapil*. Some even have the custom to omit *hamapil* altogether, or they say it but omit G-d's Name and the phrase "King of the universe," out of concern that they will converse afterwards.

If one says the bedtime *shema* and then

has difficulty sleeping, he should keep repeating the first paragraph of the *shema* or other supplicatory verses until sleep overtakes him. Thinking Torah thoughts is also permitted, so reading a *sefer*, a book of Torah thoughts, is okay.

Rav Yehuda Segal, the late Rosh Yeshiva in Manchester, used to actually fall asleep while reciting the bedtime shema, and he would wake from time to time and carry on exactly from the place he left off!

Sources:

-Shulchan Aruch 239:1

-Mishna Berura, *ibid.* 4,7

-Halichos Bas Yisrael 2:40, Rabbi Y.Y. Fuchs

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