

Vayechi 5776

December 25, 2015

# A Taste of Torah

## A Loaded Question

By Rabbi Akiva Stern

The Sages talk of Torah study as the greatest mitzvah of all, but sometimes it seems too difficult. People often feel that they are not cut out for it, that they lack the background, reading skills, or plain old intellect to study Torah meaningfully. It seems to me that our parsha questions this premise.

In this week's Torah portion, our forefather Yaakov gives blessings to his children as his end draws near. Those blessings not only contained telling prophecies of the future of the Jewish People, but also keen insights into the tribes' special strengths and weaknesses. Let's zero in on what Yaakov has to say about his son Yissochor.

Yaakov likens Yissochor to a strong donkey willingly bearing a heavy load. He is so focused on his job that the only rest he allows himself is quick cat naps between jobs, without unloading. The load symbolizes the responsibility of Torah study. The donkey's work ethic symbolizes Yissochor's approach to Torah. He makes it his primary focus, studying both day and night. He is like a diligent donkey never buckling nor swaying, proudly carrying his load, ever marching on.

Had Yaakov stopped here and moved on to the next son, we would be left with the impression that Yissochor is the quintessential Torah scholar, but that is not all Yaakov has to say. Yaakov continues and provides us an insight into Yissochor's personality. He tells us that Yissochor perceives

rest as a goal and comfort as sweet, yet he bends his shoulder to bear the load. Essentially, Yaakov is stating that if Yissochor had his druthers, he would love to lounge on a beach chair, to rest and relax, yet, nonetheless, he chooses to accept the yoke of a life of toil. This addendum is puzzling; why is it necessary to mention this at all? Laziness doesn't seem to be a quality related to becoming a Torah scholar. The usual suspects would be alacrity (best portrayed by his brother Naftali) or a cutting, decisive intellect (best portrayed by his brother Yehuda). This apparent character flaw of Yissochor would seem to render him less fit as the epitome of a Torah scholar.

I believe the answer to this question can be found in the motto printed on the top right corner of the page you are reading, "...because Torah is for every Jew." Yaakov Avinu was teaching us that one need not be brilliant or insightful to study Torah. Regardless of one's background, intellectual capacity, or character flaws, one can thrive and grow in Torah and, in fact, become a true Torah scholar. He needs but one thing: determination! The determination to make his learning a priority, the determination to get off the couch and go study. This is the ideal that Yissochor most clearly represented, and one we can still relate to today. If we follow the guidance of this great tribe, Yissochor, and truly commit to the process, each of us can ascend to Torah greatness.

## Stories For The Soul

### Final Instructions

In the final days of his life, the Chasam Sofer (Rabbi Moshe Sofer; 1762-1839) reviewed all of the Torah he learned during his lifetime so as to come to Heaven with his Torah knowledge intact. In the last few hours of his life, he realized that three novella of his were no longer clear in his mind. He quickly called for his close student, Rabbi Menachem Katz, who lived nearby.

Rabbi Katz hurried over, and, upon arrival, helped his teacher review and organize the Torah thoughts. The Chasam Sofer's face lit up with contentment as he clarified his Torah thoughts.

As soon as they finished reviewing, the Chasam Sofer screamed to Rabbi Katz, who was a Kohen and not allowed to be in the same room as a dead body, "Run out, I am dying!" As soon as Rabbi Katz exited the room, he heard the Chasam Sofer say Shema Yisroel and his holy soul departed for the heavens.

Rabbi Katz later commented that his great teacher had delayed the departure of his soul from his body due to his tremendous concern for others.

In this week's Torah portion, Yaakov imparts his final wishes and blessings. One of his greatest wishes, our Sages tell us, was to ensure that his children would remain true to G-d and His commandments.

## Kollel Happenings

### 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<sup>TH</sup>

The Kollel Women's Division is excited to announce that its 4<sup>th</sup> 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.

### LEGAL HOLIDAY LEARNING ON JAN 1<sup>ST</sup>

Start your day off on the right foot with Torah study! The Kollel is offering learning at three locations: at the Kollel West Side Bais Medrash and at the Southeast Kollel Torah Center, shacharis at 8 am followed by breakfast and learning at approximately 9, and at EDOS, shacharis at 7:30 am followed by breakfast and shuir at approximately 8:15. The topic will be *High Resolution: Is One Obligated to Keep a Resolution?* For more information or sponsorship opportunities, please contact info@denverkollel.org or call 303-820-2855.

## Increase Your Jewish IQ

By Rabbi Yaakov Zions

Last week we asked: Which verse is read from the Torah with the most frequency?

A: For the Torah reading of *Rosh Chodesh*, some of the reading is repeated - there is a dispute which verse or verses are repeated (see last week's discussion). Due to this phenomenon, and with *Rosh Chodesh* between one and two days, the verse or verses are read between 27 and 35 times yearly.

It should be noted that when *Rosh Chodesh* is on Shabbos, this part of the reading is not read at all, and on *Rosh Chodesh Teves* (which is on Chanukah) it is read but not repeated.

**This week's question:** When did the custom of having multiple mourners recite *kaddish* in unison begin?

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

## Lives of Our Torah Leaders

### Rashi - Part III

When Rashi was yet quite young, he went to the yeshiva of Rabbi Yaakov ben Yakar in Worms. When Rabbi Yaakov's passing in 1064, Rashi's uncle, Rabbi Yitzchak HaLevi, assumed the helm of the yeshiva. Later, Rashi travelled to the great yeshiva in Mainz, previously headed by Rabbeinu Gershom, and studied under Rabbi Yitzchak ben Yehudah Hazakein (the Elder). All three of Rashi's primary teachers were disciples of Rabbeinu Gershom, and Rashi quotes them in his commentaries. While in Mainz, Rashi married, and it was there that his daughters were born. He was quite poor, and struggled to take care of his family while remaining fully devoted to Torah study.

At this time, there was no recorded commentary on the Talmud; teachers would instruct their students in the Talmud and explain and elucidate its passages. In the yeshiva of Mainz, which, at the time of Rashi's arrival, had existed for around 65 years, a notebook, or *kuntres*, had been compiled during the course of three generations of students; it was known as the *Kuntres Mainz*, or Mainz Notebook. Rashi took his own copious notes based on his teachers' lectures, and merged them with the *Kuntres Mainz*, constantly refining and

clarifying the contents. These notes became the basis for his commentary on the Talmud.

Initially, Rashi distributed copies of his commentary anonymously, with the simple title of *Kuntres*. In fact, Rashi's Talmudic commentary is often referred to by later Talmudic commentators as *Kuntres*. Throughout his life, Rashi was constantly improving his *Kuntres*; there were several versions of Rashi's commentary, and, even today, there exist earlier and later versions of parts of Rashi's commentary to the Talmud.

In 1065, at the age of 25, Rashi returned to Troyes, where he was invited to join the *bais din* (Jewish court). Upon the passing of the head of the *bais din*, Rashi assumed the leadership of the court and became the primary address for answering halachic questions in the city. Around 1170, he founded a yeshiva in Troyes, which attracted many disciples.

Troyes was a center for wine-making, and Rashi himself engaged in the wine trade, though its unclear whether he grew grapes, made wine, or simply engaged in the trade. Despite his Rabbinic prestige, the wine business was his means of support.

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