

Shoftim 5776

September 9, 2016

# A Taste of Torah

## Personal Bodyguards

By Rabbi Akiva Stern

We live in a world where young children are regularly exposed to moral depravity, violence and murder by way of the glowing screens on the walls and in their backpacks and pockets. A world where internet censorship is most associated with totalitarian governments and a certain North Korean dictator. Tragically, this laissez-faire attitude is not only relegated to children, but to what we as adults experience, as well. The smut that is liberally sprinkled into the seemingly most innocuous books and movies is truly mind-boggling. Let us take a look at what the Torah prescribes for this predicament.

The parsha begins with the commandment to establish courts of law. The verse states (Shoftim 16:18), "Judges and officers shall you place for yourself in all of your gates." It is notable that although this commandment is one which rests upon the entire Jewish community, the language of the verse is in the singular. The Chida (Rabbi Chaim Yosef David Azulai; 1724-1806) explains in the name of Rabbi Chaim Vital (1542-1620) that besides for the communal responsibility, there is another commandment contained

in this verse that pertains to each and every individual.

Every person has "gateways" through which he or she experiences the outside world. They are our five senses: sight, smell, touch, sound and taste. The Torah adjures us to place a "judge" at the opening of each of our gateways. A moment of reflection. We should ask ourselves: What are the ramifications of this touch? Do I really want to eat this? See that billboard? Or hear this song?

While this internal judgement is imperative, alone it is still insufficient. We must also provide officers at the sites of our gateways. Officers who enforce our convictions of right and wrong. We must have a system in place that not only recognizes the threats, but actually keeps destructive forces at bay. When we weed out the pernicious scourge that is so well camouflaged as entertainment, we will retain a modicum of purity of heart and mind. This will allow us to truly feel spirituality and no longer remain numbed by the cultural blandishments of the media.

## Stories For The Soul

### You Can't Come In

A chassid once came to Rabbi Dov Ber, the Maggid of Mezeritch (d. 1772), with a conundrum.

"I can understand that G-d expects us to control our actions," said the chassid. "And though more difficult, I can see that speech is manageable, as well. But how can G-d demand that we control our thoughts? How can one keep thoughts out?!"

The Maggid replied that the only person who could answer this question was his student, Reb Zev, who lived far away. The chassid set off and, after travelling for several days, arrived at the home of Reb Zev.

The chassid saw Reb Zev sitting at his table, studying from an open *sefer*. He knocked on the door, but Reb Zev continued to learn. After waiting a few moments, the man knocked again, a bit louder. Observing that Reb Zev did not even lift his head, he began pounding on the door. Still no reaction.

The poor fellow waited at the door for several hours, intermittently knocking on the door. Finally, Reb Zev closed his *sefer*, rose and opened the door. He joyfully greeted the man as if nothing had occurred. He invited him in, offered him a warm meal, and gave him a room to stay in. The chassid, still in shock from the whole experience, said nothing.

After a couple of days of Reb Zev's warm hospitality, the chassid finally got around to informing him of the purpose of his visit.

Reb Zev replied, "My friend, I answered you upon your arrival! Is a man any less master of himself than of his home? I am the master of my home! Whomever I wish to allow in, I welcome, and those whom I do not are not admitted!"

In this week's parsha, the Torah tells us to appoint judges and officers in all gates of the cities of Eretz Yisrael. Many commentators explain (see *A Taste of Torah*) that this is also an allusion to a person's obligation to appoint "judges and officers" over one's personal "gates" - the senses - to ensure that all that crosses through them is appropriate.

## Kollel Happenings

### SYMBOLIC FOODS PLATTER FOR ROSH HASHANA

There is a widespread Rosh Hashana custom to eat simanim, foods that symbolize a good year. The Denver Community Kollel is proud to offer a simanim platter containing 10 items presaging a sweet, new year. For more info, or to order yours for just \$25, email [info@denverkollel.org](mailto:info@denverkollel.org), visit the Kollel website at [www.denverkollel.org](http://www.denverkollel.org), or call 303-820-2855. Be sure to leave method of payment and contact information. Order deadline is September 20<sup>th</sup>.

### KOLLEL ANNUAL DONOR APPRECIATION EVENT SUNDAY, OCT. 9<sup>TH</sup>

The Kollel will hold its annual Donor Appreciation Event on Sunday, October 9<sup>th</sup>, 6:45 pm at the offices of Altura Periodontics, 3690 S. Yosemite St., Denver, CO 80237. For more info or to reserve, email [info@denverkollel.org](mailto:info@denverkollel.org) or call 303-820-2855.

### 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.

## Increase Your Jewish IQ

By Rabbi Yaakov Zions

**Last week we asked:** While the Sephardic custom is to recite *selichos* prayers during the entire month of Elul, the majority of Ashkenazim have two other Elul customs. They are the blowing of the *shofar* each weekday and the recital of Chapter 27 of Tehillim (Psalms), which begins “*L'Dovid, Hashem Ori.*” Which of these two Ashkenazic customs is of older origin?

**A:** The custom of *shofar*-blowing predates the custom of reciting *L'Dovid* by many centuries! The former is mentioned as an established custom by the Tur (authored by Rabbi Yaakov ben Asher, 1270-c. 1343), and

may have been practiced since the times of the Tanna Rabbi Elazar ben Hurkenos (c. 100 C.E.) who, according to some versions, mentions blowing *shofar* during the entire Elul. The custom of reciting *L'Dovid* is of relatively recent origin, only formally appearing in a printed siddur in 1701! (Sources: Tur Orach Chaim 581, Pirkei D'Rabi Eliezer Ch. 46 and Siddur Aizor Eliyahu)

**This week's question:** Which mitzvah can ideally be performed on a Wednesday or Thursday only?

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

## Lives of Our Torah Leaders

### The Maharil - Rabbi Yaakov HaLevi Moelin - Part IV

As mentioned in a past article, the Maharil strongly advocated maintaining the customs of the Ashkenazic Jewish communities that had been in place until that time. To that end, the Maharil meticulously recorded the halachic opinions and customs followed by Ashkenazic Jewry. This work, called *Minhagei Maharil* (Customs of the Maharil) became a vital resource for future generations, especially as the German Jewish communities declined and Ashkenazic Jewry shifted toward Eastern Europe.

In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Rabbi Yosef Karo published his halachic compendium *Shulchan Aruch* (lit., “Set Table;” also known as the *Code of Jewish Law*); it became the standard of practical Jewish law. However, Rabbi Karo followed the halachic positions and customs of Sephardic Jewry. Rabbi Moshe Isserles of Cracow, Poland, better known as the Rema, wrote glosses on the *Shulchan Aruch* and called it *Hamapa* (lit., “the Tablecloth”), wherein he noted where the Ashkenazic approach diverged from the Sephardic one in matters of practical halacha. In all contemporary editions of the *Shulchan Aruch*, the Rema's comments are intermingled with the words of the *Shulchan Aruch* itself, and they are studied as one work. A major source of the Rema's glosses was the Maharil's work. *Minhagei*

*Maharil* was thus immortalized as part of what is arguably the most important work of Jewish law used until today.

With the advent of the printing press, *Minhagei Maharil* was published in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and it is widely available and studied today. The Maharil left behind a collection of his responsa, which were also published during the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Many of his responsa deal with inquiries that arose from the difficult times during which he lived, such as *agunah* issues, questions regarding inheritance, and laws of mourning.

The Maharil was a very humble individual; he carried a small *chumash* with him so that when people would rise out of respect for him, he would tell himself they were standing for the *chumash*. At the same time, he was very particular that people accord proper respect to his students, who were Torah scholars in their own right.

The Maharil passed away on Motzoei Shabbos, 22 Elul, in the year 5187 on the Jewish calendar (1427 C.E.). The Maharil's most prominent student, Rabbi Yaakov Weil (known as the Mahariv), succeeded his teacher as the greatest Torah authority in Germany, and his halachic opinions also carry great weight in determining practical Jewish law.