

A Taste of Torah Limited Holiness

By Rabbi Shachne Sommers

Close your eyes and think of a holy person. Who do you think of? Perhaps our teacher Moshe or one of our Patriarchs or Matriarchs? Maybe one of our more recent sages such as the Chofetz Chaim? I may not be able to guess the identity of your “holy person”, but one thing seems certain. You were not thinking of yourself.

“Speak to the entire assembly of the Children of Israel and say to them: You shall be holy...” This sentence is astounding. The Torah is commanding the entire assembly of the Children of Israel, every man, woman, and child, in every generation, to be holy. How is this possible? How can people like you and me aspire to, and eventually achieve, holiness?

The Ramban (Nachmanides) explains that the commandment to achieve holiness is referring to something very specific. He explains that it is possible

for someone to totally fulfill the letter of the law of the Torah’s commandments but still be missing a part of their essence. One who consistently indulges in every available material pleasure, even if those pleasures involve no Torah prohibitions, is missing something vital. Those pleasures may be totally kosher, but the person whose life is permeated by physical indulgence is missing the Torah value of being a spiritual person.

This is what the Torah is teaching us with the commandment to be holy. Every time a Jew decides to limit his or her attachment to the material and the physical, in the pursuit of something higher and greater, he or she is taking a step towards holiness. Each and every Jew, in every generation, has the ability and the responsibility to place some limits even on permissible indulgence. So holiness is not just for the “holy” people. It’s for each and every one of us.

Ask the Rabbi Nile Denial

Shana from Daytona Beach, FL wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

I have a couple questions concerning the angle my humanities teacher takes. He states that there was no great Exodus out of Egypt for the Jews because archaeologists could not find trash in the desert enough for the “supposed” thousands of Jews migrating out from Egypt. He also states that the Jews were not slaves in Egypt. He admits to there being a small caste of Jews that were

slaves, but not on the popular belief scale. I am the only Jew in class, so I stand alone when I ask him and question him. If you could give me any information about this I would feel better about the subject. Thank you.

Dear Shana,

Your teacher is mistaken on two counts. First of all, he is simply ignorant of the overwhelming amount of historical evidence, archeological and otherwise, that there is for the Exodus.

Stories For The Soul

A Holy Nation

In 1945, a group of young men who had survived the Holocaust met the renowned Vizhnitzer Rebbe.

With great sincerity and heartache, the men told the Rebbe that they felt guilty for having eaten non-kosher food throughout their time in the camps. “What should we do to repent for our sins?”, one asked.

The Rebbe began to cry. “The only reason you and your friends ate the treif food was so that you should survive; is that not so?” he asked. The young man nodded yes.

“Surely the reason you felt you had to eat the food was because of the commandment “And you shall live by them [the commandments] (Leviticus 18:5),” said the Rebbe. Again the young man nodded. (The Torah commands us to violate all but three types of mitzvos in order to save a life.)

“The Germans did not give anyone a morsel of food more than what they needed for survival,” said the Rebbe. “In fulfilling the commandment [of saving your lives], you fulfilled it to the exact specifications required in halacha. In Heaven you will be rewarded in full measure for your observance of this sacred mitzva.

“I only wish,” cried the Rebbe, “that the eating and drinking that I do for the purposes of a mitzva (such as eating matza on Pesach,) should be as perfect and as holy as your eating was!”

“Holy shall you be, for I am holy.” (Leviticus 19:2). We are a people of unparalleled holiness and purity.

Adapted with permission from Shul-Week by Rabbi Boruch Lederman.

Kollel Happenings

The Kollel is on Pesach break. Programs resume May 5.

'PARSHA AT DENVER TECH CENTER' MAY 5

Want to add meaning to your workweek - and Shabbos? Rabbi Yehuda Amsel's 'Parsha at the Denver Tech Center' for men will be held on Wed., May 5. The biweekly class is held at 2:30 p.m. at 6565 S. Dayton, Suite 1200. For information, call 303-820-2855 or email rya@denverkollel.org



FATHERS-AND-SONS PROGRAM SUN., MAY 8 AT EDOS

The next Fathers-and-Sons learning program will be held on May 8 at EDOS. Breakfast begins at 9 a.m. with learning following. For information, contact Rabbi Yehuda Amsel at 303-820-2855 or email rya@denverkollel.org



CHERRY CREEK MUNCH AND LEARN, MON., MAY 9

The next Cherry Creek Munch and Learn for men, led by Rabbi Yehuda Amsel, will be held on Mon., May 9 at 12:30 p.m. at Colorado Capital Bank, 55 Madison Ave. The class focuses on Pirkei Avos. For information, contact Rabbi Amsel at 303-820-2855 or at rya@denverkollel.org

Interpersonal Issues Returning Stolen Property

There is a positive commandment to return stolen property. This includes returning stolen goods, paying for merchandise or services that weren't paid for, repaying defaulted loans, paying wages that were earned but not paid, returning goods, money, or

deposits being held for others, and returning money or goods obtained through deception.

Adapted with permission from "The Halachos of Other People's Money" by Rabbi Pinchas Bodner (Feldheim Publishers)

Ask the Rabbi

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Secondly, even if there were no archeological evidence to prove the Exodus, that would not necessarily disprove it. The only way to disprove something is either to find evidence against it, or to find a lack of evidence that should be present and for which there is no plausible explanation for its absence.

But simply to say that something was not proved is a meaningless statement. For instance, the fact that they didn't find a harp with David's name on it does not disprove his existence.

Now, not finding trash could be "evidence against" the Exodus if the archeologists knew exactly where such trash should be. But how would they know that? Do they know the exact route that we traveled in the desert?

And exactly what kind of trash were they looking for? Candy wrappers? The manna that fell from Heaven wasn't wrapped in candy wrappers. Human waste? The Talmud says that the manna was miraculous food that was totally absorbed by the body; a person didn't have to go the bathroom after eating the manna. Perhaps, then, they expected to find worn-out clothing? G-d performed a miracle that the clothing of the generation of the desert remained intact and grew with its wearers.

Now, an archeologist may say, "But I don't believe in these miracles; I'm

looking for evidence of a purely natural Exodus."

In other words, the Jewish version of the Exodus is rejected at the outset; instead, evidence is sought for a different event, which we never said happened.

This is like saying: "If the Jews crossed the Red Sea, they must have had boats. If we don't find these boats, it disproves their story." But this won't disprove our story; we never claimed we crossed the Red Sea in boats! So, too, the story of Exodus does not imply that we would have littered the desert with artifacts.

As I said in the beginning, there is overwhelming historical evidence, archeological and otherwise, for the Exodus. For one, we have an unbroken historical record of these events. Our record is both written, recorded in our Torah, and oral, passed on by word-of-mouth from parents to their children.

I'll mention here just one piece of archeological evidence, the Ipuwer papyrus. Found in the early 19th Century in Egypt, this document describes events which parallel remarkably events described in the Book of Exodus: Violent upheavals in Egypt, starvation, drought, escape of slaves with the wealth of the Egyptians, and death throughout the land.

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