

A Taste of Torah

A Humble Opinion

By Rabbi Levi Lebovits

There is an age-old custom brought by the Shach (1622-1663), one of the central commentaries on the Shulchan Aruch (Code of Jewish Law), in the section of laws pertaining to Torah teachers, that the first portion of the Torah to be taught to a young child is this week's parshah, Vayikra. The commentaries discuss what significance Vayikra has over all of the other sections of the Torah. I would like to offer my own explanation as follows: Rabbeinu Bachya (mid-14th-century), early commentator on the Torah, in his introduction to the Book of Vayikra, expounds upon the virtue of humility and points out that this was the central attribute for which Moshe Rabbeinu is praised. He explains that Moshe's humility is evident in the beginning of our parshah as well. The parshah begins by saying "And He (Hashem) called to Moshe and He spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting saying...." Due to his

tremendous level of humility, Moshe was not willing to enter into the Tent of Meeting without Hashem's permission (through calling Moshe), even though Hashem had already told him that it would be their personal meeting place (Shemos 25:22).

One who enters the world of Torah must understand that THE prerequisite to Torah study is humility. Humility means understanding that I am smaller than others and incomplete. In order to properly cull the life lessons contained within the holy words of the Torah, we must approach it with the understanding that we are smaller than the Torah and that it has what to teach us; not vice-versa. Once we are willing to open our ears to hear the true lesson which the Torah has to teach us, we will see that the Torah's understanding is much deeper than our own. This may be the reason that a young child begins his/her lifelong endeavor of Torah study with Parshas Vayikra, being that it teaches us the imperative lesson of humility.

Ask the Rabbi

Holey Heart

Alan L. wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

I am a 49-year old Jewish man with a very large hole in his heart. I was raised a Jew and , but I really don't know what it is to be a Jew.

My entire family has walked the path laid down for us by my deceased father. But for some reason, I am having a lot of trouble accepting faith in our religion. The non-Jews seem to have

someplace to turn to when all seems lost or the burden of life becomes too heavy to bear. It seems so simple to turn to a priest and ask for an answer. Why do we turn to a rabbi or other scholar and receive no answers?

Where do I turn when the bottom drops out? Who do I talk to for answers that will sooth my soul? This seems to be a great failing in our religion. Can you offer suggestions? Are there any prayers that address such a dilemma?

Stories For The Soul

A Greater Merit

Reb Yisroel Salanter (1810-1883) was the founder and spiritual leader of the *Mussar* movement, which emphasized spiritual development and character growth.

One day, Reb Yisroel was in shul waiting to recite Kaddish for his father.

In those days, only one mourner would recite the Kaddish, and it was now Reb Yisroel's turn.

Another man was extremely agitated and he wanted to say the Kaddish even though it wasn't his turn. Reb Yisroel gave up his spot for this man.

Reb Yisroel later explained, "I very much wanted to say the Kaddish for my beloved father and did not want to give up my turn.

"However, I considered the matter for a few moments and realized that it would be a greater merit for my father if I would do this *chesed* in his honor, and allow an anguished fellow Jew a chance to find some serenity."

The word "Vayikra," the first word in this week's Parsha, is spelled with a small *aleph*. This teaches us that every person should make himself small. At the same time that we are humble concerning ourselves, we must be aware that every other person is full of greatness. When we look at another human being, we often don't realize the depth and complexity of that person.

It's our duty to recognize the greatness inherent in each and every Jew and treat him accordingly.

Adapted with permission from Shul Week by Rabbi Boruch Lederman.

Kollel Happenings

LAST CALL FOR RSVPs FOR MARCH 15 BENEFIT EVENT

The Kollel is accepting final RSVPs for its Benefit Event, to be held Tues., March 15, at 7 p.m., at District 475. Honorees are Dr. Marc and Dale Sievers. The event will feature an address by Rabbi Ephraim Eliyahu Shapiro on "Joy: Awakening the Power Within." To RSVP, call 303-820-2855 or visit www.denverkollel.org



CHERRY CREEK MUNCH AND LEARN, MON., MARCH 14

The next Cherry Creek Munch and Learn for men, led by Rabbi Yehuda Amsel, will be held on Mon., March 14, 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



TUESDAY NIGHT TORAH AT AISH KODESH IN BOULDER

Join the Kollel for a dynamic one-on-one and small groups Torah encounter. Maariv will be held at 8:15 followed by Torah study at 8:30. Program will be held at Aish Kodesh, 1805 Balsam Ave. For information, contact Rabbi Moshe Heyman at 303-820-2855 or rmh@denverkollel.org or Charles Fried at 917-499-4307 or charlesfried@gmail.com.

Interpersonal Issues Pay, No Gain

Taking an item against the owner's will and paying for it is a form of stealing known as *chomos*. For example, a customer tried to bargain with a storekeeper on a particular price. Despite the storeowner's refusal to acquiesce to the offer, the customer takes the item and leaves the money on the counter.

This is forbidden.

However, if the storeowner eventually indicated that he was agreeable to the price, the customer has not transgressed.

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

Ask the Rabbi

continued from front

Dear Alan,

My heart goes out to you in your pain.

However, your spiritual sorrow can be a source of inspiration for you. What you describe as a hole in your heart is not necessarily a bad thing.

Remember the story of Akiva and Rachel? At the age of 40, unable to read alef-beis, Akiva gave up hope of ever coming close to G-d. One day Rachel led him to a stream with a waterfall underneath it. She asked what he saw under the fall. He replied, "The water has carved a hole in the rock beneath it". She exclaimed, "If something as soft as water can bore a hole in something as hard as rock, surely something as strong as Torah can bore a hole in something as soft as your heart!" Encouraged, he eventually became the great Rabbi Akiva.

There are so many admonitions in the Torah warning against 'a heart of stone', that the hole you feel should be taken as a very good sign that your heart is still soft and sensitive. Sometimes G-d brings suffering to very special individuals in order to spare them the spiritual callousness of which so many people suffer.

At this point in your life, despite the path that your father laid down for you, I think you should start from scratch. At the age of 49 with a gaping hole in your heart, you should start over from alef-

beis and begin filling the gap with the soothing waters of Torah. Read Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzatto's classic work "The Way of G-d" for a re-introduction to the fundamentals of Jewish belief. Read with fervor the Psalms of David in which you can experience his longing for, search of and discovery of G-d.

Sometimes we feel like the 'bottom drops out' as we sink to the dark murky depths. When this happens, one must realize that there are Divine sparks everywhere, and sometimes we are plunged to those depths to redeem those exiled, captive sparks and elevate them as we resurface. This can be compared to pearl divers who plunge to the murky depths of the sea in search of impure oysters, only to resurface and pry out of their grasp lustrous white pearls.

Over the years of working with Jews returning to their faith, I have met many Christians, including students and clergy, who have become interested in Judaism precisely because they felt that their questions were not only not answered, but they were not even tolerated. There are many exceptional, knowledgeable and sensitive rabbis who can help you. Open your heart, search sincerely and have finding a rabbi in mind as you request in the 11th blessing of the amida: "Restore our judges and counselors as at first, remove from us sorrow and despair..."

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