

A Taste of Torah A Bribe by Any Other Name...

By Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher

Everyone has their price, the saying goes. The common understanding of this oft-used adage is that even the most scrupulous, honest, conscientious individual will eventually cave in and do the wrong thing if he has enough to gain – or lose – because of it.

The Torah, though, tells us that the price may be right at a far lower threshold than we think. In this week's Torah portion, we are told that a judge is forbidden to accept a bribe. Well, you say, that's pretty straightforward, isn't it? It isn't proper for a judge to sell his ruling, is it?

Ah, but we think a bribe is defined merely as an outright gift to a judge in exchange for a favorable outcome. Nothing could be farther from the truth. A person may not judge a case if he receives even a minute sum – even a favor – from one of the litigants. The Talmud records an incident where a Sage recused himself from a case involving a sharecropper who worked his land due to the fact that the sharecropper had delivered the produce a bit earlier than scheduled. An insignificant benefit, to be sure, but a bribe nonetheless. The reality is that even a slight gain instantly impairs an individual's impartiality – even if he himself is unaware of the subtle change of attitude.

Rabbi Elchonon Wasserman (1874-1941) resolves a thorny philosophical issue based on this idea. The Torah requires us to believe in G-d. How, asks Rabbi Wasserman, can we expect an individual – a twelve-year old girl or thirteen-year old boy, who are Halachically regarded as adults responsible for the commandments – to believe in G-d, when some of the greatest minds in history have been unable to reach such a conclusion?

In truth, explains Rabbi Wasserman, the logical conclusion – even after spending much time working through the philosophical and scientific issues – is that there must be a G-d who created and runs the universe. However, this conclusion is reached only after an objective review of the evidence. But here's the shocking problem: humanity is being bribed en masse. That's right. Bribed by their desires, lusts, and wants. After all, if there's a G-d, we have to listen to Him. So it's a lot more convenient to conclude that there is nobody in charge, and everyone's free to live their lives as they see fit. Of course, people don't deliberately ignore the evidence that stares them in the face. It's subtle – just like the bribe forbidden by the Torah, which, no matter how slight, subconsciously influences an individual's reasoning.

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Ask the Rabbi Elul

B. Ungar wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

We find that several acronyms are quoted from verses in reference to the month of Elul. For example, the first

letters of the words “Ani L'dodi V'dodi Li - I am my Beloved's and my Beloved is mine” (Song of Songs 6:3) - spell “Elul” and are seen as a reference to G-d's closeness to us during the month of Elul. But isn't “Elul” a Babylonian word? Is it authentic that verses in the

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Stories For The Soul

A Change of Heart

Mort Blumberg (not his real name) once called his rabbi concerning his upcoming heart bypass surgery. He asked what religious things he could do for a successful operation. After “prescribing” the standard regimen of prayer, recitation of Psalms, etc., the rabbi told him that someone with a heart condition had posed the same question to the great Vilna Gaon.

The Gaon told him that if he had a problem with his heart, he should “correct” his heart, meaning that if he fixed his heart in a spiritual sense, it would help his heart physically.

After some thought, Mort asked if this meant that he would have to make amends with his sister. Though the rabbi didn't know anything about his sister, he said, “Yes, of course.”

Mort called the rabbi the next day and said, “I have been grappling with this and it is too difficult for me to forgive my sister for what she did to me. Are you sure I need to?”

The rabbi said yes.

Mort said he would think about it.

Mort called the rabbi the next week and said, “Rabbi, when my mother died fifteen years ago, my sister railroaded me out of my rightful inheritance. True, it wasn't a lot of money, but there was a lot of sentimental value.”

The rabbi replied that he still had to make peace with her.

“But Rabbi, I was so deeply hurt, and she had such joy in her heart at my pain,” said Mort.

The rabbi reminded him that it was his heart they were worried about

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Kollel Happenings

DERECH HASHEM

Join Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher for a philosophical series on "Derech Hashem", a sefer by Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto. Discover and delve into the vital understanding of Hashem's world. The women's class will resume on Monday, August 27th, 7:45 p.m., at EDOS. For info, email info@denverkollel.org or call 303-820-2855.



DONOR APPRECIATION EVENT

The Denver Community Kollel celebrate its 15th year of bringing Torah to Denver at its annual Donor Appreciation Event. The event will take place at the home of Brad and Dana Licht, 6156 East Powers Ave on September 24 at 7:00 p.m. For more information or to donate, please visit www.denverkollel.org Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher Denver Community Kollel denverkollel.org



TRUST THY FATHER

Join Rabbi Shachne Sommers for "Trust Thy Father", a series based on Chovos Ha'Levavos/Duties of the Heart. Discover and delve into vital Jewish concept of Bitachon. The classes take place on Tuesdays, from 7:55-8:25 a.m., at Aish. For info, email info@denverkollel.org or call 303-820-2855.

Interpersonal Issues Safeguarding a Lost Object

While in possession of the lost item, the finder is responsible for negligence. If, due to negligence, the item was lost, stolen, or damaged, he is responsible to pay for the item.

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

Ask the Rabbi

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Torah would be alluding to words that aren't Hebrew?

Dear B. Ungar,

A good point. The names of the Jewish months came into use when the exiled Jews of Babylon, who spoke Aramaic, returned to the Land of Israel in the time of Ezra. Previously the months had no names, but were referred to by number.

Nachmanides says these names are of Persian origin, but that doesn't preclude their also having Aramaic roots, as the Persian Empire succeeded the

Babylonian Empire, and the language of Babylon was Aramaic.

So, how can the verses in the Hebrew Torah hint to Aramaic words? Actually, Aramaic is a sister language of Hebrew. According to the Kabbala it is actually a dialect of Hebrew. That is why most of the Oral Law is written in Aramaic, or in Mishnaic Hebrew which is a mixture of Aramaic and Biblical Hebrew.

The word Elul means "search," because during the month of Elul we search our hearts for evil and repent in preparation for Rosh Hashana.

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A Taste of Torah

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It is indeed within the grasp of every human to reach the correct conclusion, if we are able to see past the enticements our Evil Inclination has thrown in our way. And, if a person merits to see past

the blandishments of the world and conclude that he must adhere to G-d's Will, he possesses the ability to rise above any price that will be offered him.

Stories for the Soul

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here, not hers. Mort said that he got the point. That was the last time he brought up that topic.

The next time Mort called the rabbi was when he was in the hospital recovering from the operation.

"Rabbi, I am so happy I called my sister," said Mort. "Though it was hard at first, we made amends. She even flew out to San Diego to be with me in the hospital during the entire process. The

support she gave me was tremendous. I don't know how I would have gotten through this whole ordeal without her."

His sister added, "After we made up, it was like nothing ever happened. It's as if we took up from where we left off fifteen years ago."

Mort's heart made a wonderful recovery in every sense of the word.

Adapted with permission from ShulWeek by Rabbi Boruch Lederman.

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