

Parshas Vayigash

December 22, 2017

# A Taste of Torah

## Heavenly Connection

by Rabbi Yaakov Zions

The human mind is an incredible tool, and its ability to associate items with each other is just one of its amazing capabilities. How many times do we have a déjà vu moment, only to realize that it was actually a different, yet similar, item which we were mentally connecting it to? After the Egyptian viceroy reveals his true identity as Yosef, he sends his brothers back to their father Yaakov. He instructs them to bring Yaakov and the extended family to Egypt to wait out the hunger which has ravaged the populace in Canaan. Yosef also sent provisions for the trip. When they relate the incredible news to Yaakov, he is hesitant to truly believe them. Only when they relate "the words of Yosef... and [Yaakov] saw the wagons Yosef sent for him" (Vayigash 45:27) did he truly believe the good tidings. Why did seeing the wagons convince Yaakov that Yosef was alive and well? Rashi, quoting the Medrash, notes that Yosef sent a hidden message in the form of wagons. The Hebrew word for wagon is *agala* (or *agalos* in plural), similar to the last item of Torah that Yaakov had studied with Yosef prior to their 22-year separation, *eglah arufah* (see Devarim 21:1-9). Yosef indicated to Yaakov that he was truly the same Yosef!

This idea seems rather strange. How was Yaakov expected to connect these *agalos* with the similar-sounding *eglah arufah*, studied over two decades earlier? More so, how was Yosef sure that such a weak sign would work?

I'd like to suggest an explanation based on an insight in another topic which was related to me in the name of one of the Mussar greats. Our Sages tell us (Sotah 17a) that the *techeiles* (colored section of tzitzis; see Bamidbar 15:38) is similar in color to the sea, which is similar to the heavens, which is similar to Hashem's Throne of Glory. This should remind us of our mission in life and prevent us

from sinning. Another passage in the Talmud (Avoda Zara 20a) states that a man may not stare at colorful clothes of women, as it may lead to sin.

For some reason, the *techeiles* connection seems far-fetched, while the latter Gemara is understandable to most of us. Why is this so? The explanation given is that similarities are only useful for one who is tuned in to the correct frequency. There is a well-known parable of a peasant who sees train tracks for the first time in his life. He stands on them, bewildered, until he hears a loud whistle of an oncoming train. Instead of running to safety, he begins dancing, as he assumes it to be the music accompanying an arriving bride or groom. The closer the train gets and the louder and more intensely the whistle, the more lively he dances! Only one who knows the power and speed of a mechanical engine would connect the dots; the whistle of an approaching train must mean to beware! So, too, if spiritual matters would be our primary focus, we would likely connect the color of *techeiles* strings to a spiritual entity, Hashem's Throne of Glory. Since most of us are quite distant from that level, we are quicker to associate a seen object with physical, worldly ideas.

This concept should help resolve our original difficulty, as well. Yaakov's sensitivity for spiritual matters was so ingrained and hard-wired into the fabric of his being that the connection between wagons and *eglah arufah* was an obvious one. Additionally, Yosef was entirely confident his father would connect the dots, even though more than two decades had passed since they had studied the matter together. May we learn from our great ancestors and try not only to be Torah studiers, but to burn its messages into our hard drive and live Torah-oriented lives.

## Stories for the Soul

### A Wake-Up Call

based on a story on revach.net

When Rabbi Aharon Cohen, the son-in-law of the Chofetz Chaim (Rabbi Yisrael Meir HaKohen Kagan; 1839-1933), was a young man, he searched for a position in the rabbinate. An opportunity for a position in a nearby town arose, but despite his efforts, he was not chosen, and he was disappointed.

The Chofetz Chaim sensed his son-in-law's distress, and he comforted him. "If you weren't appointed as a rav, it's a sign that you don't need to serve in the rabbinate. When I was a young man, I had a position as a rav, and I resigned. I'll tell you why.

"In the town where I served as a rav, one of the butchers was caught selling non-kosher meat. I summoned him and rebuked him, and I forbade him from continuing to serve as a butcher. A few days later, the butcher's wife and relatives came to me crying, and promised that the butcher had repented and would not repeat his mistakes. They begged me to let him continue serving as a butcher so he would have a means of earning a living. I called in the butcher and saw that he regretted his actions. I fined him and I restored him to his position, as mandated by halacha."

"A few years passed, and the butcher passed away. One night, I was sitting and learning, and I fell asleep. I had a dream, and I saw three men whose faces shone like the sun. 'We have come from Heaven and we want to ask you a question. When you fined the butcher for selling non-kosher, was the fine a means of repentance or did you simply fine him without

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## Kollel Happenings

### RABBI REISMAN WEEKLY IN DENVER

Join thousands around the globe in listening to the renowned weekly Navi shiur of Rabbi Yisroel Reisman! Rabbi Reisman's weekly Motzoei Shabbos class is shown at Beth Jacob High School, 5100 W. 14<sup>th</sup> Ave., this week at 8:30 pm. For sponsorships and info, contact [info@denverkollel.org](mailto:info@denverkollel.org).

### DATE CHANGE: THIS YEAR'S JEWISH FAMILY EXTRAVAGANZA ON DEC. 24TH

Join the Kollel for family fun at the annual Jewish Children's Extravaganza on Sunday, Dec. 24<sup>th</sup>, from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. The event will be held at South Suburban Family Sports Center, 6901 S. Peoria. Cost: \$15 per child and \$7.50 per adult. Admission includes entire facility. For general information, call 303-820-2855 or email [info@denverkollel.org](mailto:info@denverkollel.org).

### LEGAL HOLIDAY LEARNING ON DEC. 25 AND JAN. 1

Start your day off on the right foot with Torah study! Join the Kollel for learning at three locations around Denver: At the Kollel West Denver Bais Medrash and Aish Denver, shacharis at 8 am followed by breakfast and learning, and at EDOS, shacharis at 7:30 followed by breakfast and learning.

## Increase Your Jewish IQ

By Rabbi Yaakov Zions

Last week we asked: What word, one of the most common in the Torah, appears in every parsha of Torah except Mikeitz and Vayigash?

**A:** The four-letter name of Hashem (the Tetragrammaton) appears in every other parsha of Torah, with the exception of Mikeitz and Vayigash!

We now begin a 10-part series related to the Shir Shel Yom (Psalm for the day of the week)

**This week's question:** What is the source of our daily recitation of the Shir Shel Yom (the psalm which the Levites recited in the Temple on that day of the week)?

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

## Lives of Our Torah Leaders

### Rabbi Moshe Alshich, the Alshich Hakadosh - Part IV

The Chida, Rabbi Yosef Chaim Dovid Azulai (1724-1806) relates that during the Chmielnicki-led Cossack uprising of 1648-49, when Eastern European Jewry underwent terrible massacres, the Alshich, who had died more than a half-century earlier, appeared in a vision to a particular scholar who regularly studied and taught the Alshich's works and guided him to safety.

The Alshich is listed by Rabbi Chaim

Vital as a student of the great Arizal. However, it is said that the Arizal refused to accept the Alshich as a full disciple, and that whenever the Alshich attempted to attend the Arizal's lectures focused on *kabbala*, he would invariably fall asleep. The Arizal insisted that the Alshich's purpose in this world was to focus on *derush*, homiletically and allegorically interpreting the Torah, not *kabbala*, which focused on the mystical aspect of Torah.

## Stories for the Soul

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taking his repentance into account?"

"No," I replied, "I only fined him according to halachic demands. I didn't calculate that the fine would assist his repentance." After I answered, the three men disappeared.

"A few minutes passed, and the butcher himself appeared in my dream, and he was black as night. He was crying and pulling at his hair. He cried out, 'What does the Rav want from me? They sent me to the seventh level of Gehinnom, to the depth of the depths. When they brought me to judgment, they claimed that I sold non-kosher meat, but I countered that I repented and the proof was that Rabbi Yisrael Meir HaKohen fined me and restored me to my position. However, the prosecutor claimed that the fine was only for its sake alone, and not for the purpose of

repentance. The Heavenly Court ruled that they needed to ask the Rav himself what his motive was when he levied the fine. If the Rav had said that the fine was for the sake of repentance, I would have been spared this terrible suffering!"

The Chofetz Chaim concluded his story, "I woke up from the dream, and I then left the rabbinate. It's true that there were other reasons, but this was the main reason. If I was capable of causing a soul to descend to Gehinnom - what did I need the position for?"

The Talmud tells us that Yosef died first from among the tribes because positions of authority bury their bearers. As great as Yosef was, and as much good as he did, being in power brings great responsibility, and one can easily be remiss in fulfilling one's duties.