

A Taste of Torah Not Worth the Risk

by Rabbi Rabbi Shmuel Halpern

“The rabble that was among them cultivated a craving, and the children of Israel also wept once more, and said, ‘Who will feed us meat?’” (Bamidbar 11:4) Rashi, based on a Medrash, asks, didn’t the Jews have plenty of meat in the desert? In Shemos 12:38, we learned that the Jews ascended from Egypt with a great amount of livestock. Should one argue that all the livestock had been eaten by this point in time, the Medrash advises us to turn a couple of pages, for it is clear later, in Bamidbar 32:1, that the tribes of Gad and Reuven had a great abundance of livestock just before the Jews’ entered into the Land of Israel. Clearly it was something other than a mere craving.

A precursory glance at the verse itself indicates that there was something happening under the surface. The Torah doesn’t just report that the rabble had a craving; it says that they *cultivated* a craving. What does it mean to *cultivate* a craving? If you don’t have a desire for something, what motivates you to want to want?

The Sfas Emes (Rabbi Yehuda Aryeh Leib Alter; 1847-1905) explains that at this point in history, the Jews had been largely freed from their Evil Inclination. The climactic events of Har Sinai had brought them to a level where they no longer struggled with base desires. What the Torah calls “cultivating craving” was, in fact, a deep spiritual desire to serve Hashem on a higher level. The Jews yearned for an opportunity to subjugate and direct their physical desires toward the service of Hashem. They sought to cultivate a desire for meat, so that

they would have the opportunity to overcome a challenge and thereby give honor to Hashem. So where did they go wrong? And why were they punished?

The Sfas Emes explains that this attitude was (at their supernal level) a display of a laxity in their fear of Heaven. A person who truly values the will of Hashem will not be willing to risk violating His will in even the smallest of ways. The stakes are simply too high to afford a risky venture. This situation can be likened to a fellow who invests his last twenty dollars in a perilous prospect with potentially high returns; anyone with a bit of sense would advise the fellow to save it for tomorrow’s bread, lest he die of hunger. Here, too, putting oneself at risk of violating the will of his Creator should simply not be an option. No matter how great the potential gain, the risk is simply not affordable.

These comments of the Sfas Emes open up a very fundamental question. Do we desire challenges that force us to grow in our service of Hashem, or do we take the safe road all the time? On one hand, we pray every day, during the morning blessings, “Do not bring us... to a test.” On the other hand, though, Hashem does challenge us, and it is those very challenges that allow us to grow.

In light of this idea of the Sfas Emes, perhaps we can explain that it’s a matter of perspective. From Hashem’s perspective (so to speak), challenges are the path to greatness, and the very purpose of human life. Although when challenged, we often fail, the

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Stories for the Soul

Hidden Greatness

A grandson of the Chofetz Chaim (Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan; 1838-1933) asked Rabbi Aharon Kotler (1891-1962) why his grandfather, who was a brilliant person, a tremendous Torah scholar and an author of very important works of Torah, was acknowledged by the world as a great tzaddik but less so as the great Torah genius that he was. Rabbi Kotler replied that he did not know, but as he happened to be on his way to visit the Brisker Rov (Rabbi Yitzchak Zev Soloveitchik; 1886-1959), invited the grandson to join him so that they could pose the question to the Brisker Rov.

When they asked the Brisker Rov, he replied in his classic terse fashion with a verse, “He [G-d] performs the will of those who fear Him.” Rabbi Kotler explained to the questioner that apparently, the Chofetz Chaim prayed to Hashem, begging him to keep his greatness in Torah hidden from the world.

“If so,” asked the grandson, “then why was his great piety not hidden, as well?”

Rabbi Kotler replied that the Chofetz Chaim clearly understood his breadth and depth of Torah were astounding and far beyond the rest of the generation. However, when it came to piety, the Chofetz Chaim did not see himself as any more special than any Jew trying to serve his Creator to the best of his abilities. He did not see himself as being greater than anyone else, and did not bother praying that

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Kollel Happenings

STRETCHING THE TRUTH ON A CLAIM AT JUNE 13TH T4T

Join Richard Sokol, President of Personicare Healthcare Network LLC, and Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher, Senior Educator for the Denver Community Kollel, as they discuss the issue of exaggerating a claim to ensure you get what you deserve. Wednesday, June 13th, 12-1:15 p.m. at the East Side Kosher Deli. Cost: \$25. RSVP info@denverkollel.org.

THE M.B. GLASSMAN FOUNDATION GOLD LUNCH & LEARN PROGRAM

The M.B. Glassman Foundation GOLD Program is a division of the Denver Community Kollel dedicated to bringing Torah study to seniors in the community. Don't miss a great Lunch and Learn class on the weekly parsha at EDOS, 198 S. Holly St., at 12 pm. There is no charge for the lunch or the learning! Transportation can be arranged. For more information, contact rmf@denverkollel.org or call 303-820-2855.

SFAS EMES: A PIERCING LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS

It is one of the most widely-studied works of our time. Sfas Emes gives us a glimpse into the infinite depths of Torah and Jewish thought. Kollel Scholar Rabbi Avraham Dovid Karnowsky is an expert in this great work, and a master in bringing its timeless lessons into daily life. Join Rabbi Karnowsky on Thursdays, 8:15-9 pm at the Southeast Kollel Torah Center, 4902 S. Xenia St.

Increase Your Jewish IQ

By Rabbi Yaakov Zions

Last week we asked: What are the ratios for *bittul* (nullification of forbidden items)?

A: Most items are nullified when they are 1/60 or less. *Terumah* needs 1/100 and both *orla* (fruits of a tree's first three years) and *kila'ei hakerem* (species mixed in a vineyard) need 1/200. On the other hand, according to many authorities, forbidden wine (*yayin nesech*) is nullified with a ratio of just 1/6!

(Sources: Rambam, Hilchos Ma'achalos Asuros 16:16, Shulchan

Aruch Yoreh De'ah 134:5 and Taz 114:4 with Nekudos Hakesef.)

This week's question: An incident is related where Rav Shmuel Salant (1816-1909, Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem) was consulted regarding a dish into which a non-kosher ingredient had accidentally been mixed in excess of the 1/60 ratio which would have permitted it. He requested that a Sefardic Jew and a non-Jew be sought to aid in determining the permissibility of the dish. How would they be of assistance?

To submit an answer to Rabbi Zions, email ryz@denverkollel.org.

Lives of Our Torah Leaders

Rabbi Yechezkel Landau, the Noda BiYehuda - Part IX

Rabbi Landau spoke out against the rise of the widespread study of Kabbalah (Jewish mysticism). To that end, in his responsa, he would often refuse to address sources lacking origin in the Talmud. Rabbi Landau was concerned that the ideas contained in Kabbalah were being misunderstood in a heretical fashion. In particular, he was concerned with the infiltration of the Kabbalistic teachings of the false and heretical messiah Shabbetai Tzvi.

Rabbi Landau authored many works of Torah. His most famous work, *Noda Biyehuda*, is an extensive collection of his halachic responsa on all areas of Jewish law. These responsa are a major source for later halachic authorities in deciding practical Jewish law. The work also became the eponym by which Rabbi Landau is often referred - the Noda Biyehuda. Another important halachic work is *Dagul Mervava*, glosses on the *Shulchan Aruch* (Code of Jewish Law) and its major commentaries.

A Taste of Torah

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potential for greatness is worth the risk. Our perspective, however, must be different. We must be concerned with guarding Hashem's will, and therefore not attempt risky ventures.

Even when the potential for greatness is high, if there is a serious risk that it will lead us astray, we must be careful and avoid that course of action.

Stories for the Soul

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his piety remain hidden!

The Torah describes Moshe as being the most humble man who ever lived. Humility does not mean ignoring

one's abilities and talents; it means not regarding oneself as being special due to one's abilities or accomplishments.