

# A Taste of Torah

## Slippery Slope

by Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher

During my years in yeshiva, I had a rebbi who would exhort us not to stay up too late studying Torah. He would explain that going to sleep late would mean we'd be tired the next day. That would result in being unable to concentrate on our regular daily study sessions, as well as his daily lecture. This would lead to confusion in what was being studied, which would lead to problems with one's *chavrusa* (study partner). The next thing you'd know, he continued, you'd be dropped by the *chavrusa*, unable to find a satisfactory new one, and that would spell doom for the remainder of the *z'man* (semester). This, of course, would leave you with a bad reputation and a bad taste for your studies altogether, and one's promising path toward becoming a great Torah scholar would be derailed... due to one late night of uncalled-for Torah study.

At the time, most of us found the series of events a bit far-fetched, but, truth be told, it is not uncommon for similar scenarios to play themselves out all the time - like in this week's parsha.

The Torah relates the sordid story of a man born of an Egyptian father and Jewish mother. This fellow blasphemed the Name of G-d, and was sentenced to death for his crime. Rashi relates several opinions as to what led this man to utter such terrible words. One opinion states that he "left his world," meaning, according to some, that he began harboring heretical thoughts.

A second opinion is that the man had just heard Moshe discuss the twelve loaves of *Lechem Hapanim* (showbread) that were baked on Friday, placed upon the *Shulchan* (Table) on Shabbos, and left there until the following Shabbos, when they were distributed among the *kohanim* (priests). The man scoffed at this, cynically pointing out that it was inappropriate for nine-day-old bread to be used in the service of the King of kings. He then cursed the Name

of G-d.

A third approach is that he attempted to pitch his tent in the encampment of the Tribe of Dan, as his mother hailed from that tribe. He was rebuffed, though, as tribehood follows the paternal line. The case came before Moshe, who ruled that, as the man's father was Egyptian, he could not live in that area. Enraged at being left without a place to go, the man cursed the Name of G-d.

Rabbi Shimon Schwab (1908-1995) is puzzled by the final two views. Why would the man mock the nine-day-old *Lechem Hapanim* if, in fact, the bread miraculously remained fresh throughout? As for the interpretation that the Tribe of Dan refused to allow him in - why, indeed, did they not? Sure, they were not required to provide him with a place to live, but are we not enjoined by the Torah to go beyond the letter of the law, especially in this situation, where the poor fellow had nowhere else to go?

Rabbi Schwab explains that these three explanations of what led to this man blaspheming do not argue; they are, in fact, all part of one process. This man initially began entertaining heretical notions. His problematic views affected his spiritual stature to such a degree that although others recognized the miraculous nature of the *Lechem Hapanim* and saw that it remained fresh despite its age, this man was unable to see this reality, spiritually blinded as he was by his warped outlook. Once his degeneration became known to others, the tribe of Dan refused to allow him residence, concerned that he would affect others. This, of course, culminated in the man cursing G-d, for which he was executed.

Life is full of innocuous, insignificant temptations. The *Yetzer Hara* (Evil Inclination) generally doesn't bother to get us with the big stuff at the start; he tries

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## Stories for the Soul

### Marriage Counseling

based on a story on [revach.net](http://revach.net)

A couple had been harmoniously married for fifteen years without being blessed by children. Hoping to build a family, they decided to divorce and look for another spouse. Shortly after the divorce was completed, the woman discovered she was expecting. The joyous news had a very sad side; the husband was a *kohen* and was forbidden to remarry his former wife, who was now a divorcee. Their pain and heartbreak knew no bounds.

The husband poured out his pain to Rabbi Chaim Kanievsky (b. 1928), who told him that he couldn't see any way that he could remarry his former wife. Rabbi Kanievsky suggested that he consult with his father-in-law, Rabbi Yosef Shalom Elyashiv (1910-2012), the leading halachic authority of his time.

The man went to Rabbi Elyashiv and repeated his tale of woe. Rabbi Elyashiv sadly informed him that he saw no way out of the painful reality. "The only thing I can tell you is that you should go to the *Kosel* and daven to Hashem that He help you."

The man regarded Rabbi Elyashiv's words as a direct instruction, and immediately traveled to the *Kosel*. Upon arriving, he approached the stones and poured out his heart without restraint. After praying for a lengthy period of time, the *kohen* felt a hand on his back. He turned and saw a man, who inquired as to why he was praying with such emotion. The *kohen* related his painful saga, to which the stranger replied, "Do you have a father?" The *kohen* didn't understand the point of the question, but he answered that of course he had a father. His father was old and ill, was living in a nursing home in America, where he barely communicated with those around him.

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## Kollel Happenings

### LEARN-A-THON & SIYUM ON MAY 13<sup>TH</sup>

Join the communal completion of an entire tractate of Talmud in the course of one hour of Torah study! Men, sign up and study a preassigned section of Tractate Beitzah and Mo'ed Katan with a class or chavrusah. Women, sign up to take part in a special study session. Sponsorship opportunities available with all proceeds to go to Tomchei Shabbos of Denver. For more info, to sign up or to sponsor, visit [denverkollel.org](http://denverkollel.org), email [info@denverkollel.org](mailto:info@denverkollel.org), or call 303-820-2855.

### THE TWO SIDES OF THE GUN CONTROL DEBATE THIS WEDNESDAY AT 4T

Join Ken Toltz, Founder & Co-Chair of Safe Campus Colorado, and Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher, Senior Educator for the Denver Community Kollel, as they discuss the explosive issue of gun rights vs. gun control. Wednesday, May 9<sup>th</sup>, 12-1:15 p.m. at the East Side Kosher Deli. Cost: \$25. RSVP [info@denverkollel.org](mailto:info@denverkollel.org).

### THE LETTERS OF THE LAW: THE MELACHOS OF SHABBOS

Rabbi Shmuel Halpern received *semicha* (ordination) from Beth Medrash Govoha in 2016 and has spent the past four years receiving *shimush* (training in practical halacha) from Rabbi Micha Cohn of Lakewood. Rabbi Halpern now shares his halachic expertise in this weekly class that will help familiarize you with the laws of Shabbos. Monday evenings 8-9 pm at the Southeast Kollel Torah Center, 4902 S. Xenia St.

## Increase Your Jewish IQ

By Rabbi Yaakov Zions

**Last week we asked:** When may the testimony of an individual be trusted for halachic matters (e.g., whether a food is kosher) by one Jew and not by another?

**A:** Although, generally, the testimony of a single witness is sufficient for such matters (*ed echad ne'eman b'issurin*), there are some whose testimony is not trusted. Rabbi Moshe Feinstein (1895-1986) permitted a close confidant of such an individual to trust their testimony, provided they had

first-hand knowledge of their credibility. This would only permit the confidant to rely on the testimony; for all others, it would be prohibited. (See Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh De'ah 119 and Igros Moshe Yoreh De'ah 2:54)

**This week's question:** We have quite a number of *targumim*, authoritative translations of *Tanach*. Who is the author of Targum Yonasan Ben Uziel?

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

## Lives of Our Torah Leaders

### Noda BiYehuda Part V

It may well be due to the skill and sensitivity displayed by Rabbi Landau in navigating the dispute that he was offered the position of chief rabbi of Prague, a major Jewish community; Rabbi Landau

took the position sometime during 1754-55. He also became Av Bais Din (Head of the Rabbinical Court) and Rosh Yeshiva of the yeshiva in Prague.

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to convince a person to err on something small, knowing that it will open a gateway for more. Once the *Yetzer Hara* has his foot in the door, it is easier to move on to bigger and worse things. Before the victim knows

of sin that he could have avoided had he stayed away from the first slight misstep. So go to sleep on time – it's a great way to avoid ruining your life.

## Stories for the Soul

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"In my opinion, you should fly to America, and tell your father what happened to you," said the man, and he turned to leave. The *kohen* tried to explain to him again that his father's condition made it almost impossible to communicate with him at all. In addition, his father was irreligious and had never made peace with the fact that his son had chosen to return to his roots; their relationship was not very good. There was no reason that he should make such a great effort to fly to the States to tell his elderly father the story. However, the stranger brushed off his words and left.

The *kohen* eventually decided to heed this man's words and to try and repair his ties with his father. He reasoned that if Rabbi Elyashiv told him to go to the *Kosel* to pray, and this stranger had advised him to see

his father, maybe it was worthwhile for him to go. He arranged a flight, and not long after he was at his father's bedside.

The medical staff had informed the son when he first arrived that his father had been non-communicative for some time, and he shouldn't expect his father to speak to him. The *kohen* began his story; his father didn't respond, but he seemed to be listening to what his son was saying. As the son continued his story, he began crying, and couldn't stop. The unbelievable then occurred; his father began speaking and informed him that he was not his biological son, but was adopted after the Holocaust! He did not have the status of a *kohen*, and there was no reason that he couldn't remarry his former wife.

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