

THE HARRY H. BEREN TORAH WEEKLY

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Because Torah Is for Every Jew

Parshas Bechukosai

May 31, 2019

A Taste of Torah

Exchange Student

by Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher

It's an odd way to end a book. After the Torah's terrifying narrative of what will occur if the Jewish People don't live up to G-d's expectations, the parsha suddenly makes a sharp left turn and discusses various laws of consecrated animals and property. The parsha - indeed, the Book of Vayikra - ends with a prohibition against *temurah*, exchanging an animal consecrated as a sacrifice for another, even if the new animal is of better quality. True, the final verse of the parsha wraps up with the statement, "These are the commandments that Hashem commanded Moshe to the Children of Israel on Mount Sinai." (27:34) But one is struck by the fact that after the litany of curses that would befall a sinful Jewish People, the third book of the Torah seems to end on an anti-climactic note.

The Rambam makes things even more interesting. In his halachic compendium *Yad Hachazaka*, the final section of the book of the laws of *Korbanos* (Sacrifices) focuses on the laws of *temura*. And while the Rambam rarely strays from halachic discussion in the *Yad Hachazaka*, he makes an exception in his concluding comments, where he explains why the Torah prohibits *temurah*, even when exchanging for a better animal:

The Torah descended to the depths of Man's psyche and an aspect of his Evil Inclination, for it is the nature of a person to incline toward increasing his possessions and to show concern for his money... and if a person consecrated an animal with sanctity of its body [as a sacrifice], he may want to renege. Since he is [halachically] unable to redeem it, he will exchange it

for one of lesser quality. And if he receives permission to only exchange one of lesser quality for one of better quality, he will end up exchanging one of better quality for one of lesser quality, and say that [the lesser-quality animal] is, in fact, better... And all these things are to force the Evil Inclination into submission and to rectify a person's mindset. And most of the laws of the Torah are only a means - from a distance, from great counsel - to rectify the mind and to straighten the deeds...

The Rambam teaches us that while we may, at times, scratch our collective heads at some of the Torah's laws, they are ultimately a means for us to become better people. Perhaps understanding some of these mitzvos may seem distant, but they come from a source of great wisdom - G-d Himself - and will enable us to become more perfect in both thought and deed.

This idea is a vital one upon concluding the Book of Vayikra. Vayikra, more than any other part of the Torah, contains numerous laws and details, mostly pertaining to sacrifices and service in the Tabernacle and Temple, that don't seem to have a logical explanation. Some of them may seem almost random. But G-d, in the final parsha of this third section of the Torah, teaches that we must serve Him and fulfill His laws, even if we don't fully understand them. Failure to do so is catastrophic, and results in the terrible consequences detailed in the parsha.

And lest one pound his fists in frustration and ask, "But I don't understand why I have to this!!" the

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Stories for the Soul

Toil with Tears

Rabbi Aharon Kotler (1891-1962) was one of the primary builders of Torah in America following World War II. As the founder of Lakewood Yeshiva, he is largely responsible for the Kollel movement that has had such a huge impact on Jewry in the United States.

Rabbi Kotler was a brilliant person. His complex lectures were difficult to follow, even for the more experienced students in his yeshiva. He was constantly studying Torah, even when engaged in other activities.

It once happened that Rabbi Kotler observed an individual toiling mightily as he studied Torah. It was clear that the fellow was having a hard time understanding a fairly basic passage. Watching the man work, Rabbi Kotler began crying.

When asked to explain his tears, he explained, "I will never have the ability to toil in Torah as that man is working right now!" Rabbi Kotler, though constantly engaged in Torah study, saw a level of Torah study - the hard work needed to process basic passages of Torah - that he himself had never experienced. And missing this type of Torah study caused him anguish.

The parsha begins (Bechukosai 26:3), "If you will follow My statutes." Rashi explains this to refer to toiling in Torah. Studying Torah is not merely learning the information, it is sweating over it until one fully understands the material at hand.

Kollel Happenings

LEARN-A-THON & SIYUM THIS SUNDAY

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 Sukkah with a class or chavrusah. Women, sign up and attend a special study session. Email info@denverkollel.org or call 303-820-2855.

THE RESPONSIBILITY OF AN EMPLOYER TO EMPLOYEES THIS WEDNESDAY, JUNE 5, AT TORAH FOR TYCOONS

Join Shua Horowitz, owner of the East Side Kosher Deli, and Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher, Senior Educator for the Denver Community Kollel, as they work out this sometimes complex ethical dilemma. June 5th, 12-1:15 p.m. at the East Side Kosher Deli. Cost: \$25. RSVP info@denverkollel.org.

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: When did the custom of the *meturgeman* (translator, who would translate the Torah reading) cease?

A: First, let us see if it indeed ceased! The communities of Yemen still maintain this practice. Among other communities, Tosafos (Megilla 23b and 24a) records the then-prevalent custom to have a *meturgeman* for the *haftarahs* of Pesach and Shavuot, due to their special messages. This is the current practice of Italian Jewish communities, and they also translate the Torah reading of Simchas Torah. It is unclear when and why this custom ceased among Ashkenazic communities (as it was practiced in the era of Tosafos, 12-13th century

Europe). Additionally, Tosafos maintains that this custom was never universally accepted, and that our custom of not having a *meturgeman* at every Torah reading is based on the custom of those communities who never had one (seemingly combined with the fact that we are no longer proficient in Aramaic, as mentioned in a previous week's column).

Sources: Tosafos, Megilla 23b and 24a, Tur Orach Chaim 145.

This week's question: Although most communities nowadays do not have a *meturgeman*, there are some prevalent customs based on that custom. What are they?

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

Lives of Our Torah Leaders Rabbi Eliezer Silver Part IV

Rabbi Silver recommended that the man give his wife a conditional divorce that would take effect the moment prior to his death. While realizing that he wasn't actually divorcing his wife so long as he was alive, the man was not comfortable with this approach.

Rabbi Silver eventually prevailed, and invited an older rabbi to write the *get* (bill of divorce) and administer its giving to the wife, as it was considered proper respect to ask an older rabbi to take care of the *get*.

A Taste of Torah

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Torah concludes with the prohibition of *temurah*. This mitzvah teaches us that we cannot rely on our own intellect to determine the best course of action. Nay, when left to our own devices, we will inevitably fall prey to our lower self, the Evil Inclination, and justify that what we are doing is perfectly fine when it may be, in fact, quite abhorrent. If we want to ensure that we are taking the proper approach to every area of life, we must look to the Torah and fulfill its dictates, even

when we think we know better.

And thus, the final two verses of the Book of Vayikra, seemingly so incongruous, now make a great deal of sense. After stating the prohibition against *temurah*, the Torah tells us that these are the mitzvos given at Sinai. As the Rambam so eloquently expresses, "from a distance, from great counsel." One's approach to life is not governed by one's own moral aptitude. It is charted and mapped by the mitzvos handed down at Mt. Sinai.