

## A Taste of Torah A Matter of Life and Death

by Rabbi Shmuel Halpern

This week's parsha opens with a discussion of the laws of *kohanim* (priests). The very first law mentioned is that the *kohanim* may not come into contact with the dead. What is the meaning of this halacha? And why was it chosen as the opening of our parsha?

Rabbi Shamshon Raphael Hirsch (1808-1888) explains that this law teaches us the Torah view of life. Hashem created the world so that man has the opportunity to exercise free will. One's ability to act with free will is a sign of how "alive" he is. To be truly, morally "free," one must first conquer the tendency to be a slave to his physical urges and moral weaknesses. If "life" is the ability to act truly free, then "death" is to be bound by one's moral deficiencies, unable to choose and act upon that which is truly to our greatest benefit. Excessive focus on the inevitable reality of death can lead one to the incorrect notion that all of life is inevitable as well. One may mistakenly think that moral success and failure aren't products of free-willed choices. Rather, life is all preordained, leaving one with no motivation to utilize the great gift of free-willed living. The *kohanim* are our spiritual guides, and, as such, they must carry the beacon of true living. Were they to get too involved with the burial of the dead, they would run the risk of compromising their free-willed spirit of life.

Rabbi Hirsch goes on to explain that

there are some religions where the main focus is on death. While there may be an emphasis on being a good person, the spiritual side of things only begins after life on this earth is over. Life in the here-and-now is purely a physical/material reality. As such, the primary obligations of the religious leader are to tend to the dying. The *kohen's* restrictions serve to emphasize that in the Torah's view, the very opposite is true. The here-and-now is absolutely a place of spirituality. It is our responsibility to spread G-dliness in this world, and the way to bring the *shechina* (Divine presence) into the world is by living our lives in accordance with the Torah. The *kohen* models this attitude for all of us. Life, not death, is the way that we can build our connection with Hashem.

As mentioned, the very purpose of creation was for the human being to exercise free-will. This is only possible in this life, with the fusion of body and soul. Without the physical body living in a material world, there would be no chance to choose to perform a mitzvah and to refuse the temptation to sin. Some sources define free will as the choice to allow the soul to speak and act through the body. The soul then elevates and perfects the body, elevating the entire world along with it. This great opportunity is available to us each and every moment of our lives; let's make the very most of it!



Because Torah Is for Every Jew

### Stories for the Soul

#### For Whom Are You Crying?

During the dancing of Shemini Atzeres in Ponovezh Yeshiva in 1947, the Ponovezher Rav (Rabbi Yosef Shlomo Kahanemen (1886-1969) was approached by a distressed elderly man who had lost his children during the Holocaust. "Rebbitz," cried the man, "where are my children? Why have they been taken from me? They could have become great Torah scholars - why aren't they here?"

The Ponovezher Rav, who had himself lost his entire family save for one son, began to cry. In front of the entire crowd, who had gathered to hear his response, he replied, "We don't have to cry for those who died. They gave their lives *al kiddush Hashem* (in sanctification of G-d's Name), and they are now receiving great reward that we cannot fathom.

"But we should cry - for ourselves! There is so much we can accomplish with every moment of life! With every moment of Torah study we can acquire eternal life, filled with awesome, exalted reward. How are we using our time? This question pierces the heavens.

"Our families sanctified Hashem's Name in death. Our mission is to sanctify His Name here, in our difficult lives following the destruction that we experienced.

"We dare not despair, even though we don't understand why this happened.

"Let us study Torah and carry out the mitzvos with love and awe of Hashem, by accepting His

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## Kollel Happenings

### LEARN-A-THON & SIYUM ON JUNE 2ND

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](mailto:info@denverkollel.org) or call 303-820-2855.

### TAKEN INTO A COUNT: THE HOLIDAYS OF SEFIRAS HA'OMER

The Kollel presents *Taken Into a Count: The Holidays of Sefiras Ha'omer* for women. Wednesday, 5/22 8 pm at the Meyer home, 9532 E. Grand Pl., *Flames of Torah: Understanding the Lag Ba'omer Bonfire* with Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher, and Wednesday, 5/29 8 pm at the Pitler home, 9200 E. Grand Ave., *Interior Decorating: Creating a Home for Torah* with Rabbi Chaim Yeshia Freeman.

### THE RESPONSIBILITY OF AN EMPLOYER TO EMPLOYEES AT JUNE 5 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](mailto:info@denverkollel.org).

## Increase Your Jewish IQ

By Rabbi Yaakov Zions

**Last week we asked:** Many communities will recite some part, or parts, of their services in a language other than *Lashon Hakodesh* (Hebrew). What is the earliest official communal service to be specifically translated to another language?

**A:** It seems this would be the *meturgeman* (translator), who would

translate the Torah reading in Aramaic for the congregation to understand. This practice is mentioned in Mishnayos Megilla (ch. 4).

**This week's question:** Why is it not the common practice today to have a *meturgeman* (translator, to translate the Torah reading, as mentioned in the Mishna)?

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

## Lives of Our Torah Leaders Rabbi Eliezer Silver Part II

Eliezer Silver was born in 1882 in Kovno, Lithuania to Rabbi Bunim Tzemach and Malka Silver. Young Eliezer studied in Dvinsk, where he had the opportunity to interact with two of the great Torah minds of that time, the great Rabbi Yosef Rosen, better known as the Rogatchover Gaon, and Rabbi Meir Simcha of Dvinsk, better known as the Ohr Sameyach.

Rabbi Silver married Basya of Vilna, and was invited to learn in the kollel of the great Rabbi Chaim Ozer Grodzinski, one of the preeminent Torah minds and leaders of the era. Rabbi Silver received *semicha* (ordination) from Rabbi Grodzinski in 1906.

Rabbi Silver was a great Torah scholar. He is said to have been an expert in the Babylonian as well as Jerusalem Talmud and the four sections of Shulchan Aruch. He wrote works on Mishnah on the sections of *Zera'im*, *Mo'ed*, *Kodshim* and *Taharos*; many of these areas are not commonly studied. He mastered (in addition to Yiddish) Russian, Hebrew and English, and was

able to intelligently discuss the poetry and literature of all three languages.

Rabbi Silver received a draft notice from the Russian army in 1907. At that time, being drafted into the army meant extreme difficulty in observing Torah and mitzvos, as well as great persecution for being a Jew. While many other yeshiva students had various ways to get exempted from the army, Rabbi Silver and his wife chose to emigrate from Vilna to the United States.

Initially, Rabbi Silver worked as a garment salesman and, later, he sold insurance. At one point, he was interviewed for a post at the Jewish Theological Seminary. The seminary had originally been Orthodox, but, under the leadership of Solomon Schechter, became a bastion of Conservative Judaism. When Solomon Schechter interviewed Rabbi Silver, he did so without any head covering, much to Rabbi Silver's dismay; Rabbi Silver did not take a position at the JTS.

## Stories for the Soul

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judgment with love..."

The mitzvah of *kiddush Hashem*, sanctifying Hashem's Name, is given in this week's parsha. While *kiddush*

*Hashem* is often associated with martyrdom. Living a life that sanctifies His Name is a great fulfillment of this mitzvah, as well.