

THE HARRY H. BEREN TORAH WEEKLY

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Because Torah Is for Every Jew

Parshas Eikev

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A Taste of Torah

A Strong Focus

by Rabbi Aharon Wilen

Picture the final round of a strength and endurance competition. The defending champion sets his feet, breaths deep, and, face furrowed with determination, leans into the rope as the Airbus 380 begins inching forward.

It's a strange way to think of a *navi* (prophet). Yet the Gemara (Nedarim 38b) tells us that a *navi* must be strong, wealthy, wise, and humble. At first glance, one may decide that the need for strength is not the standard understanding of might. Rather, one could say that the Gemara is referring to strength of willpower, similar to the mishna in Pirkei Avos (4:1), "Who is strong? He who controls his inclination." In truth, the Rambam (Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah 7:1) describes a *navi* in this fashion, one who is strong in character and whose desires can't overpower him in any matter in the world.

Looking back at the original passage in Gemara, however, this doesn't seem to be the case. The Gemara continues that we learn that a *navi* must be strong from Moshe. Moshe's strength is mentioned in this week's parsha, as Moshe recounts, "I grasped the two tablets and threw them from my two hands." (Eikev 9:17) The tablets were square blocks of sapphire six *tefachim* (handbreadths) high, six *tefachim* wide and three *tefachim* thick. Considering that a *tefach* measures somewhere between three and four inches, tossing them any distance was a feat of superhuman strength – clearly indicating that the strength required for a *navi* is of the literal

sort. Why is it expected of a *navi* that he be physically strong, and why does the Rambam only mention strength of character?

Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz (1902-1979) explains that the Torah warns us in this week's parsha not to think "my strength and the might of my hand made me all this wealth." (Devarim 8:17) This refers to any type of strength, for even strength of character is only possible with Heavenly assistance. Our Sages teach (Kiddushin 30b) that if it weren't for Heavenly assistance, no one would be able to resist the Evil Inclination. What is expected of a person is to do his best and devote his entire body and soul to developing himself to resist temptation. When one does that, he can merit Heavenly assistance in reaching his goals.

The physically mighty person in his moment, explains Rabbi Shmuelevitz, embodies total devotion to a goal, every muscle and bone in his body working in unison, every neuron in his brain totally focused on the same task. This is the same strength the mishna describes in one who controls his inclination, something only possible through total focus and dedication. It's not the strength itself, rather, it's the determination it reflects that is a quality expected of a *navi*.

We may not be prophets, but we, too, can go the extra mile in focusing our energies toward overcoming our Evil Inclination, thus achieving the unique strength of a spiritually advanced individual.

Stories for the Soul

Got to Hand It to You

A group of children who had survived the horrors of the Holocaust arrived in Eretz Yisrael in the late 1940s. They ended up in Bnai Brak, and met Rabbi Yosef Shlomo Kahaneman (1886-1969), better known as the Ponovezher Rav.

At one point, Rabbi Kahaneman offered the children candy, but asked each one to first make a blessing before receiving the sweet. The children, who had grown up religious, happily obliged, except for one little boy who refused to make a blessing.

The Ponovezher Rav, thinking that the traumatic experiences had pushed the poor boy so far away from his heritage that he would not even make a blessing, encouragingly asked him why he would not make the blessing.

"My mother taught me," replied the child, "that one does not make a blessing unless one is holding the food in his hand, ready to eat it."

The Ponovezher Rav was awestruck by the lad's dedication to his upbringing (which was indeed correct from a halachic standpoint, as well) and tearfully handed the boy the candy, whereupon the lad recited the blessing.

Our Sages infer from a verse in this week's parsha that there's an obligation to recite 100 blessings daily. Let's ensure that our blessings are recited in the proper way.

Kollel Happenings

LEGAL HOLIDAY LEARNING THIS LABOR DAY

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.

THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR A BLOWN CALL AT SEPTEMBER 4th TORAH FOR TYCOONS

Join Jesse Aragon, president, Ark Seal International, and Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher, Senior Educator for the Denver Community Kollel, as they tackle this fascinating subject. Sep. 4th, 12-1:15 p.m. at the East Side Kosher Deli. Cost: \$25. RSVP info@denverkollel.org.

HELP BUILD THE FUTURE OF TORAH IN DENVER

Claim your part in building the future of Torah in Denver! The Kollel is in the midst of a capital campaign to build a three-story, state-of-the-art Torah Center that will serve the entire Denver Jewish community. To contribute, or for dedication opportunities and details on the building, visit denverkollel.org or email info@denverkollel.org.

Increase Your Jewish IQ

By Rabbi Yaakov Zions

Last week we asked: When is a *haftarah* recited by some communities, while others omit it completely? Both are in the same locale.

A: On public fast days (with the exception of Tisha B'Av), Ashkenazic communities recite a *haftarah* at *mincha* while Sephardic communities do not. Interestingly, the Shulchan Aruch seems to advocate for a

haftarah reading on Tzom Gedalia. This is the custom of some Sephardic communities, primarily those following Moroccan custom.

Sources: Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 566:1, 428:8.

This week's question: How many ways do we traditionally publicize the coming or presence of Rosh Chodesh?

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

Lives of Our Torah Leaders Rabbi Eliezer Silver Part XVI

There is a humorous anecdote that allegedly occurred during the court proceedings of the case over the construction of the mikvah. At open point, Rabbi Silver was being questioned by one of the lawyers for the opposition, who was trying to make a case that traditional Judaism was archaic and outdated. "Tell me, Rabbi," said the lawyer, "do you really believe all the stories in the Bible?"

When Rabbi Silver replied in the affirmative, the lawyer asked, "Come now, rabbi, do you really believe a donkey opened its mouth and began talking?" a reference to the famous incident in the Book of Bamidbar where Bilam's donkey spoke to him.

"What's so strange?" said Rabbi Silver, without missing a beat, "there's a donkey talking to me right now!"

In September of 1939, Germany invaded Poland, and World War II began. While the full horrors of the Holocaust had not yet been unleashed, the situation for the Jews in Germany and other lands conquered by the Nazis was known to be dire. In November of that year, Rabbi Silver called a meeting in New York City to discuss the developments in Europe. At this meeting, the *Vaad Hatzalah*

(Rescue Committee) was formed, with Rabbi Silver serving as its president. A fundraising campaign was immediately launched, and it succeeded in raising \$5 million to help rescue Jews from the European inferno.

However, the United States severely limited the numbers of immigrants it would take in, despite the life-threatening circumstances European Jewry was facing. There was a loophole in the anti-immigration policy - an exemption to the quota for ministers. Rabbi Silver exploited this loophole and, at his behest, congregations across the country sent contracts to rabbis in Europe, allowing them to enter the United States. Some 2,000 emergency visas were issued in this fashion.

As the campaign of the Nazis against the Jews became clearer, efforts were stepped up to save as many Jews as possible. While other Jewish organizations in the United States shied away from applying too much pressure to governmental bodies and officials, and certainly refused to engage in illegal activities to save their brethren, the *Vaad Hatzalah* used any means possible to get Jews out of Europe.