



TORAH WEEKLY

A project of the Denver Community Kollel



Parshas Lech Licha

October 30, 2020

A Taste of Torah

A Source of Blessing

by Rabbi Chaim Yeshaya Freeman

The Torah relates that there was a famine in the Land of Canaan, and Avraham travelled to Egypt in search of sustenance. As he was about to enter Egypt, he said to his wife Sarah (Lech Licha 12:11-13) "See now, I know that you are a woman of beautiful appearance. And it shall occur, when the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife!'; then they will kill me, but you they will let live. Please say that you are my sister, that it may go well with me for your sake, and that I may live on account of you." Rashi (Bereishis 12:13) interprets "that it may go well with me" to mean that they would give Avraham gifts.

This request is strange, especially in light of the verse in Mishlei (18:15) which states "One who despises gifts shall live," which implies that it is not a good attribute to take free gifts. Additionally, later in the parsha, Avraham tells the king of Sodom (ibid. 14:22-23), "I lift my hand to Hashem, G-d, the Most High, Maker of Heaven and Earth, if so much as a thread to a shoestraps, or if I shall take from anything of yours! So you shall not say, 'It is I who made Avram rich.'" So why was Avraham not concerned about taking a gift from the Egyptians?

Rav Yitzchok Zilberstein explains that Avraham was teaching the world a great lesson. He cites the Gemara (Sotah 10a) which expounds on a verse in Daniel (11:45) which states, "There he proclaimed the name of Hashem, G-d of the Universe." Reish Lakish expounds the verse to be saying that "he (Avraham) caused to

be called." This teaches that Avraham caused the name of Hashem to be called by every passerby, for he would invite wayfarers into his tent for a meal. After they ate and drank, they stood up to bless Avraham. Avraham, however, would say to them, "Was it my food that you ate? You ate the food of Hashem! Thank and praise Him!"

Rabbi Zilberstein continues that Avraham also taught the world how Hashem conducts this world. As the Gemara teaches (Bava Metzia 59a) in the name of Rav Chelbo, a person must always be careful about his wife's honor, because blessing is found in a person's house only on account of one's wife. This is derived from the verse (ibid. 12:16) "And he [Pharaoh] treated Avram well on her [Sarah's] account." The Gemara continues that this is what Rava meant when he told the people of Mechuza, "Honor your wives in order that you may become wealthy."

Based on these ideas, we can explain why Avraham wished to receive gifts from the Egyptians. Avraham was willing to take gifts from Pharaoh because, as Avraham stated, they would be bestowed in Sarah's merit and honor. Avraham, whose mission was to teach the world about Hashem and His ways, wished to display that blessing comes through one's wife.

May we merit to follow the ways of Avraham to show the world that everything comes from Hashem and follow the guidance of Chazal on how to treat other people, especially those close to us.

Stories for the Soul

Unbelievable

He proclaimed his atheism loudly for anyone interested enough to listen. This man, living in the town of Berditchev, was proud to explain that he did not believe in a G-d who, he exclaimed, was so cruel and uncaring.

Eventually, the fellow met up with Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev, and the two began a discussion. After the man finished listing all the terrible things that had been visited upon the world and that he could never believe in a Being Who was so cruel, it was Reb Levi Yitzchak's turn to respond. "You know," said Reb Levi Yitzchak, "the god you don't believe in - I don't believe in such a god either!"

Whether that man changed his mind or not is unknown. But Reb Levi Yitzchak made an important point taught by noone less than Avraham and Sarah themselves. They taught the world that there was one Creator who was good and wished to bestow goodness upon His creations. Avraham and Sarah reflected Hashem's *chesed* to all those who came into contact with them, bringing many people close to Hashem.

Kollel Happenings

TORAH FOR TYCOONS VIA ZOOM ON NOV. 4

Torah for Tycoons resumes on Wed., Nov. 4 via Zoom. Join Jonathan Fleisher Esq., Principal at Law Offices of Jonathan Fleisher, and Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher, Senior Educator for the Denver Community Kollel, for *Additional Charges May Apply: Liability for COVID-19 Transmission*. Visit denverkollel.org or email info@denverkollel.org for more info.

BUILD YOUR LEGACY AND SECURE THE FUTURE OF TORAH WITH LIVE ON/LIFE & LEGACY

The Kollel is one of 28 local organizations selected to be part of Rose Community Foundation's Live On/LIFE & LEGACY program, which focuses on creating financial stability for the future through planned giving. Think it's not for you? Think again! Anyone can make a planned gift, no matter the amount. Visit www.denverkollel.org, email rmh@denverkollel.org or call 303-820-2855 for more information.

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.

Halacha Riddles

Last week we asked: Where is triple-dipping a good thing to do?

Answer: Dipping bread in salt after making the *hamotzi* blessing.

The Shulchan Aruch rules that one is supposed to dip the bread he is about to eat after reciting the blessing into salt, but this is usually not required in modern times. The purpose of dipping the bread into salt is to add flavor to the bread (and so other dips would work, as well), thus honoring

the blessing just recited with a tasty bite of bread. However, our bread has flavorings such as salt incorporated, and so dipping in salt is not necessary. (Matzah, which is usually just flour and water, would require salt or another dip.) Nonetheless, the Mishna Berura (167:33) says that kabbalistically, one should dip bread specifically in salt three times, as this "sweetens" the attribute of *din*, Divine judgement.

This week's question: When does one use all ten fingers to make a blessing?

Lives of Our Torah Leaders

Rabbi Saadia Gaon - Part I

Rabbi Saadia Gaon was one of the later and most famous Ge'onim. A brief discussion explaining who the Ge'onim were is necessary to understand the life and times of Rav Saadia Gaon.

The Babylonian Talmud was completed by Rav Ashi and Ravina around the year 500 CE; Ravina died in the year 499 CE. The great Torah academies of Sura and Pumbedisa in Babylon (modern-day Iraq) continued to flourish, and they were headed by Torah leaders known as the Savora'im; these Torah authorities made minor adjustments, clarifications and additions to the Talmud. (In a number of places in the Talmud, later commentators note that a particular passage or comment was inserted by the Savora'im.)

In the year 589 CE, the brief era of the Savora'im came to an end; no deliberate changes to the Talmud would be made henceforth. From this point onward, the leaders of the Yeshivos of Sura and Pumbedisa were known as Ge'onim. (The term "*ga'on*" literally means "pride" or "glory;" in contemporary terms, the word is

often used for a genius.) This period continued until the death of Rav Hai Ga'on in 1038 CE. Already before the end of the Ge'onic period, the center of Torah authority had begun to shift away from Babylon toward Europe, notably Northern Africa/Spain (the Sefardic communities) and Germany (Ashkenaz). The Torah leaders of these new centers are known as the Rishonim. With the death of Rav Hai Gaon and the end of the Ge'onic period, Babylon ceased to be a major center of Torah leadership on the world stage (although Jewish communities thrived in Iraq until their expulsion in 1948 with the founding of the State of Israel.)

Rav Saadia Gaon was born in Dilaz, a village near Fayyum, Egypt. Fayyum is identified with the Scriptural city of Pison, which is noted by the Torah as one of the two cities the Jewish People built during their slavery in Egypt. Not much is known about his father, a man named Yosef, but Rav Saadia traced his lineage to the great Tanna Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa and, further back, to Shela, son of Yehuda, who one of the twelve Tribes.

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