



TORAH WEEKLY

A project of the Denver Community Kollel



Parshas Acharei Mos-Kedoshim

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A Taste of Torah

Stay Moral

by Rabbi Dov Holczer

Hashem commands the Jewish People (Acharei Mos 18:3), “Like the practice of the land of Egypt, in which you dwelled, you shall not do, and like the practice of the land of Canaan, to which I am bringing you, you shall not do, and you shall not follow their statutes.” Rashi explains that these two locations were the most immoral societies of the world and yet, these were the two societies most connected to the Jewish People. Egypt was where the Jewish People dwelled for 210 years, and the Canaanites lived in the land promised by Hashem to the Jewish People. It is therefore understandable that Hashem gives His nation a stern warning not to follow in their ways.

Still, it is a bit strange that the Jewish People required such a commandment from Hashem. It is well known, based on the Medrash, that the Jews in Egypt were distinct, as they did not change their names, language, or clothing to match that of the Egyptians. This prevented intermingling and the like and, in essence, they lived separate lives from the Egyptians. That being the case, what was the imminent danger of “following practice of the land of Egypt, in which you dwelled,” if they were essentially a separate nation living in Egypt? The same question can be asked regarding the Canaanites. The Jewish People were ordered to wipe out these nations upon their arrival in Canaan, so how much danger was there that they would be drawn after their practices?

The answer is that our surroundings have a profound impression upon us. The Rambam (Hilchos De’os 6) explains that a person is naturally affected by his environment. Therefore, one should live in a positive environment, make sure to have friends who are righteous and upstanding, and the like. If one lives in a place and is surrounded by evil, says the Rambam, he must leave.

As such, Hashem, who created us all and is aware of this reality, warns us not to stray after

the surrounding environment of immorality encountered by the Jewish People. Even as they were able to remain separate from the culture, the danger of being influenced by one’s environment still lurks.

One must still ask, if a negative environment is naturally dangerous to one’s spiritual state, why is it then that Hashem chose the two aforementioned places to be the primary residences of the Jewish People? What could possibly be gained by having such close contact with such immoral societies?

The Maharal (Rabbi Yehuda Loew; 1512/1526-1609) in his work Gevuros Hashem (Chapter 4) explains that it was no coincidence that these were the locations of the Jewish Nation. It is precisely these places that contribute to our lofty level of being the Chosen Nation, intended to exist as the epitome of morality and righteous behavior before the rest of the world.

The Torah bears witness that throughout the stay of the Jewish People in Egypt, only one person was involved in any sort of relationship with an Egyptian, and even that one, a woman named Shlomis bas Divri, was tricked into believing the man was her husband.

The Jewish People, with their high level of moral behavior, are diametrically opposed to such behavior. But, says the Maharal, the only way that Hashem’s promise to Avraham that his children would be strangers in a strange land could be fulfilled is by being stuck in a culture opposed to their very essence. Finding themselves in a society more in line with their values would make them more comfortable and would not fulfill the decree of being strangers.

Rabbi Chaim Friedlander (1923-1986) adds another level of explanation the words of the Maharal. He explains that it is precisely due to being in such immoral places that are so opposed to the spiritual stature of

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Stories for the Soul

Riding to Success

Rabbi Asher Arieli is a legendary *maggid shiur* (lecturer) in the Mir Yeshiva of Jerusalem. His erudition and knowledge in all areas of Torah is stunning and his humility is awe-inspiring. Many hundreds of eager students attend his daily Torah *shiur*, which has a reputation as one of the top lectures in the Torah world.

Someone once asked Rabbi Arieli why he merited to deliver such a widely popular *shiur* to so many students. With great modesty, he replied, “I, too, have wondered about this. Perhaps the reason is as follows.

“As a teenager studying in yeshiva, my parents would give me some pocket money. Most boys spent this money on things like snacks, *sefarim* (Torah books), and the like.

“I saved that money to use for a taxi to go to and from yeshiva, instead of taking the much cheaper public bus. I did this to avoid passing through marketplaces and large streets where people walk around dressed inappropriately, so that I would not be exposed to such sights.

“Perhaps it is in the merit of guarding my eyes carefully in my youth that Hashem has blessed me with so many students and a well-received

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Kollel Happenings

THE KOSHER STATUS OF ARTIFICIAL MEAT AT MAY 5 T4T ON ZOOM

As technology progresses in creating everything from artificial flavors to artificial intelligence, the question of artificial meat comes to the fore in the realm of kashrus. Join Kollel Senior Educator Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher as he explores the halachic view of lab-produced meat at a May 5 T4T. Visit denverkollel.org for further details.

SPRING-SUMMER AVOS UBANIM ON SHABBOS AFTERNOON

The Kollel's spring-summer Avos Ubanim program continues this Shabbos afternoon at the Kollel Torah Centers in West Denver and Southeast Denver. Learning begins one hour before mincha, followed by nosh and prizes. For sponsorships and more info, email info@denverkollel.org.

MILE HIGH TORAH PODCAST FROM THE KOLLEL

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Halacha Riddles

This week's question: How could the required blessing on an item be downgraded twice due to the passage of time, with no human intervention?

Answer: If a food with a blessing more specific than *shehakol*, such as bread or a fruit, becomes slightly spoiled or moldy, but is still edible, its proper blessing is downgraded to *shehakol* (Shulchan Aruch

Orach Chaim 204:1; see also Mishna Berura 202:18). If it spoils further to the point that it is inedible, no blessing would be recited if someone would choose to eat it (Mishna Berura 204:1).

This week's question: How is it possible for there to be three different proper blessings for a fruit (eaten alone) under three different circumstances?

Lives of Our Torah Leaders

Rabbi Saadia Gaon - Part XXVI

So extensive was his writing that a later commentator, Rabbi Avraham ibn Ezra of 12th century Spain, referred to Rav Saadia as the *rosh hamidabrim bichol makom*, "the first to speak in every place." While some of these *sefarim* are still extant, many of them have been lost over the centuries. Pieces of some

of Rav Saadia's works were found in the Cairo Geniza, a repository of some 400,000 manuscript fragments of *sefarim* produced from approximately the 9th through the 19th century that was found in a storeroom of the Ben Ezra Synagogue in Fostat, or Old Cairo, in Egypt.

A Taste of Torah

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the Jewish People that forces the nation to raise its collective guard and not allow those influences in, thus enhancing the level of moral behavior within the Jewish People. It is therefore a key factor in the development of the Jewish People. While the Jewish Nation possesses this trait to start with, being surrounded by immorality causes that trait to become stronger and to solidify, making it not just a natural character trait but an integral, key feature of the Jewish Nation. The Torah, therefore, gives a great deal of attention to relationship-related sins of immorality, as it is part of the very foundation and integral to the essence of the Jewish Nation.

It is related that great Torah leaders of several generations ago in Europe stated that the final stop of our long exile is America. Unfortunately, the steep decline of morality that has developed in the past number of decades surrounds us on all sides in this generation, penetrating homes through all manner of media. It would thus appear that the final leg of our long journey through many exiles is similar to the very beginning of our existence as a nation. An effort must be made to continuously solidify this foundation of maintaining our moral standards despite all that surrounds us. Perhaps it is precisely through this that we will merit the Final Redemption.

Stories for the Soul

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shiur."

In this week's parsha, Hashem command the Jewish People to "be holy," which Rashi explains refers to

being careful in areas of modesty and immoral relationships. Every person can strive to safeguard himself, to some degree, from the immodesty that pervades our time.

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