



Parshas Vayigash

December 10, 2021

## A Taste of Torah Until Death

by Rabbi Yossi Ephrathi

Ever find yourself mired in a moral battle? Trying to overcome your temptations but need some proven strategies to guide you?

The Talmud (Brachos 5a) teaches: A person should constantly agitate his *Yetzer Tov* (Good Inclination) to fight against his *Yetzer Hara* (Evil Inclination). If he vanquishes it, fine. But if not, he should engage in Torah study. If that doesn't work, he should recite *Shema*. And finally, if that doesn't help, he should remind himself of the day of death.

Let's examine these three strategies. Firstly, Torah study. The Talmud (Kiddushin 30b) states that learning Torah is the antidote against the *Yetzer Hara*. The Rambam explains that thoughts of immorality take hold only in a mind that is devoid of wisdom. Learning Torah will teach a person right from wrong and guide him away from evil.

But most of us can't learn Torah around the clock. Our impulses tug us at times when we're not studying Torah. What do we do then?

Here comes the next strategy. Recite the *Shema*. In *Shema* we accept G-d's sovereignty, we talk about loving G-d, and we take upon ourselves the yoke of mitzvos. These concepts should curb one's baser impulses.

Lastly, one reminds himself of the day of death. This morbid thought will definitely help a person avoid sin.

In this week's parsha, at Yosef's behest, Yaakov travels to Egypt, a land notorious for its immorality. Yaakov was very concerned of being corrupted

by the country's negative influences. Therefore, says the Chortkover Rebbe (Rabbi Dovid Moshe Friedman; 1828-1903), Yaakov employed these three strategies. The Torah says (46:28), "[Yaakov] sent Yehuda ahead of him to Yosef to prepare ahead of him in Goshen." Rashi explains that Yaakov dispatched Yehuda to establish a house of Torah study. In the following verse, Rashi comments that Yaakov recited the *Shema* as soon as he arrived in Egypt. And in the next verse, Yaakov tells Yosef, "Now I can die after having seen your face." He mentioned his death to engage the final method of fighting his *Yetzer Hara*.

One more thought. If reminding oneself of the day of death is so powerful, why should one study Torah and recite *Shema* as a means of avoiding sin? Just remember your mortality and you'll keep your impulses in check!

The Sifsei Chachamim answers by quoting a verse from the prophet Yeshaya. G-d sent the prophet to rebuke the people and urge them to repent. However, they didn't heed the warning and replied, "Eat and drink, for tomorrow we die" (Isaiah 22:13). From this verse we see that, unfortunately, the thought of death alone does not always provide a person with a reason to mend his ways; it can have the opposite effect. But if one first studies Torah and recites *Shema*, that will put a person in the proper frame of mind, and at that point, the thought of death will certainly help him avoid sin.

### Stories for the Soul

#### Never Give Up

Rabbi Fischel Schachter tells the story of a woman, a Holocaust survivor, who settled in America after the war and was married for twelve years without having children. One day, she was sitting in a doctor's office on Madison Ave. in Manhattan, and the doctor, going over her charts, said to her, "Madame, please listen to me. I am saying this for your own benefit - give up. Medically speaking, there is nothing we can do so you can have children. Hair will grow on my palm when you have children!"

The woman left and despondently boarded the bus. During the ride, she contemplated her life. She alone, from her entire family, had survived the horrors of the war. She had arrived in America, desperate to begin a family. And now, after twelve long years, her hopes were shattered.

"I have no reason to get off this bus," she said to herself. And so she stayed on the bus, sitting there the rest of the day. At day's end, the driver told her she had to get off the bus; the poor woman just sat there, depressed.

"Listen, lady," the driver said, "I've had a hard day. I don't know what your problem is, but you're not going to solve it by staying on this bus."

She got off the bus and said, "Master of the world, You were with me all along. You saved my life countless times. You brought me here. You let me start my life

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## Halacha Riddles

**Last week's question:** How would a *mezuman* be affected by six instead of seven?

**Answer:** If ten adult males ate a bread meal together, they recite *mezuman* with Hashem's name. If seven ate a *kezayis* (olive's-volume) of bread, while the other three did not eat bread but ate a *kezayis* (olive's-volume) of some other food or drank a *revi'is* (3-5.3 fl. oz.) of a beverage (besides water), they combine for a *minyan* and Hashem's name is included. If only six ate bread

and four did not, they do not combine. Even though six should suffice, as this is a majority of the required ten people, here a "recognizable majority" of seven is required (Shulchan Aruch 197:2).

**This week's question:** Three adult Jewish males ate a meal together and were ready to make a *mezuman*. However, they made a discovery and could no longer make a *mezuman*. What did they discover?

## Lives of Our Torah Leaders

### Rabbi Meir Shapiro - Part XXIX

The Gerrer Rebbe opened the Gemara and began learning Tractate Brachos *daf bais* - the first page of the Talmud. Through this, the Rebbe had essentially announced that he backed *daf yomi* and would be an active participant. As Gerrer Chassidus was the largest chassidic group in Poland, this approbation launched the *daf yomi* program.

The first *siyum* (completion celebration) of the Talmud via the *daf yomi* program occurred on February 2, 1931 in several cities in Europe and in

Jerusalem. It gained great popularity before World War II. Following World War II and the Holocaust, *daf yomi* continued, at first with smaller numbers, but gradually increasing in popularity. The last *siyum*, the thirteenth completion of the Talmud via *daf yomi*, took place on January 4, 2020. Celebrations took place across the world. The largest event was organized by Agudas Yisrael of America at MetLife Stadium in New Jersey, which has a capacity of 92,000 seats.

## Stories for the Soul

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over, and so it is in Your hands. I have no right to give up. The bus driver is absolutely right - You didn't save my life for me to live on the bus. Please tell me what to do. I won't give up. I will continue serving You no matter what."

A year later, she had a child.

That child grew up, got married, and has his own grandchildren. By the time this woman passed away, she had enough great-grandchildren for a full head of hair to grow on the doctor's palm.

Rabbi Fischel Schachter added that he heard this story firsthand from the woman herself, whom he knew quite well. She was his mother.

Yaakov Avinu lived through numerous difficulties and tragedies during his lifetime, including the apparent death of his beloved son Yosef. But he did not change in his dedication to G-d one iota. Ultimately, he lived to see his son Yosef again, as viceroy of Egypt, yet steadfast in his faith.

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