

A PARASHA THOUGHT

Climbing the Ladder

GUEST CONTRIBUTOR
RABBI DOVID TZVI MEISSNER

The events of *Yetzias Mitzrayim*, the Exodus from Egypt, were awe-inspiring and something we remember every day. All of this, though, was just a lead up to the ultimate purpose of Creation – the giving of the Torah.

The Torah fuels the existence of the world. As Rav Chaim Volozhiner (*Nefesh Hachaim* 4:11) puts it, if the world would be entirely devoid of Torah learning for even just one moment, the world would revert to chaos and emptiness as was before Creation.

Many of us think, “What can I accomplish? I’m just a simple person, not a big Torah scholar. I’m not capable of learning much. Leave the real learning to the scholars.”

Rav Ahron Kotler (*Mishnas Rav Ahron, Bo*) gives us some words of encouragement. He notes that when it comes to Torah learning, most people don’t have high aspirations; they set the bar low. One looks at where he currently stands and may think to himself that he won’t gain much after a learning session. He, therefore, doesn’t aim high or push himself too hard.

This is a grave mistake! In *Tehillim* (81:11), Hashem tells us, “Open your mouth and I will fill it.” The Gemara in *Brachos* (50a) interprets this to be referring to words of Torah. *Open your mouth* – ask and desire for tremendous accomplishments in Torah, “and I will fill it” – your request, and grant you all the knowledge of the Torah.

No one should think he is just a simple layman, incapable of reaching great heights in Torah. Every single one of us can master the entire Torah! We just have to *sincerely desire to know all areas of the Torah, pray for it, and start doing our*

part; the results we can leave up to Hashem.

The Midrash in *Mishlei* (Ch. 10) gives a scary depiction of the final Day of Judgement when we pass from this world.

Someone who knows verses of the Torah will be asked why he doesn’t know Mishna. If he knows Mishna, he will be asked why he didn’t learn Talmud... What about *halacha*? *Toras Kohanim*? Did you learn about the *Merkava*–Heavenly Chariot? What does My Heavenly Throne look like? What about a *Chashmal*–Angel? ...

This sounds like a tall order! Every person is responsible for knowledge of all the intricacies of the Torah?! Rav Kotler explains that if everyone is held accountable for this, it must be feasible to attain. If we *truly* desire to master everything, we will be granted our wish. The probing question really is then, how much do we really desire to grow and are we willing to toil?

Every one of us must know that we really *can* reach tremendous heights, and we should raise the bar in our aspirations to grow and be successful in our personal *Kabbalas Hatorah*. 🌟



LEARNING WITH THE KOLLEL (CHOSHEN MISHPHAT)

WITH
RABBI MEIR MINSTER

The morning after Yisro’s arrival he sees long lines of people waiting to bring their cases before Moshe for judgment. Yisro finds this situation untenable and suggests to Moshe to instead appoint a system of judges. After consultation with Hashem, Moshe follows the advice of his father-in-law. The instructions that Moshe gives to these newly appointed judges is elaborated upon in *Devarim* (1:16 -17), and among these instructions is the command, “small and great alike shall you hear.” Rashi there, based on his interpretation of the Gemara in *Sanhedrin* (8a), explains this to mean that there is a positive command to hear cases in the Jewish court on a “first-come, first-served” basis.

The *SM”A* (*Choshen Mishpat* 15:1) explains that “first come, first-served” does not necessarily mean the first one to walk through the door (or our modern-day phenomenon of camping out and waiting for the doors to open). What is meant is that once a case is presented before the judges and the judges are prepared to hear it, they are required to rule on it, and not to defer to another case, even if the other case seems more significant.

Furthermore, the *SM”A* explains that even with this more limited definition of first come, we are only speaking about a Rabbinic requirement of precedence. The Torah itself only obligates the court

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LEARNING WITH THE KOLLEL (CHOSHEN MISHPHAT)

CONTINUED

to settle the first case if the judges have already begun to **hear** the arguments of the litigants, as implied in the words, “shall you hear?”

It is interesting to note that according to the *Ba”ch*, the Rambam does not agree with Rashi at all, that the intent of this command is to hear the first case to come before the court, first. Rather, Moshe is instructing the court that when there are other reasons to hear a case first, for example, the case of a Torah scholar or a widow or an orphan, the court is required to take that case, and not to be swayed to instead hear what appears to be a more significant case.

The more complex questions of precedence between cases involving various combinations of a Torah scholar, widow, and orphan, and whether the concept of a true Torah scholar even exists today, are matters discussed there in the *Shulchan Aruch* and its commentaries, and will have to wait for a further time. 🕒



The Kollel will be on recess beginning on January 26th and will resume February 1st.

A SHINING EXAMPLE

RABBI EPHRAIM SKOLNIK

Michael Rabi was born in Frankfurt in 1920, and was able to escape Nazi Germany on one of the last Kindertransports in the summer of 1939. Michael was sent to England, where he was taken in by a kind Jewish family. Unfortunately for Michael, after the Nazis attacked England in 1940, all German nationals were accused of spying and sent to detention camps. So, despite being Jewish, Michael found himself with many fellow German Jews in a camp with horrible living conditions. The German nationals objected to their treatment and were given a choice to stay or emigrate to Canada. Michael chose to emigrate. As the boat set sail, Michael realized they were going in the wrong direction. After clarification, they were told that they were heading to Australia! As they neared the Australian coast, they nearly got hit by a torpedo fired from a German U-boat. The infuriated crew took out their anger on the poor German refugees and threw all their personal belongings overboard. Michael was very distraught, but there was not much to do about it. Eventually, the boat docked safely in Australia. A few days later the boat set out for England but, shortly after it set sail, it was struck and sunk by a German torpedo. Many years later the diary of the German U-boat captain was found. It revealed that after the first torpedo missed, the crew planned on striking again and sinking the boat, but they saw debris tossed from the British ship. Thinking that it might contain important

TEFILLA TIDBITS

RABBI YAAKOV MARCHUK

Generally, we translate the words “*Boruch atah Hashem*” to mean blessed are you Hashem. Rabbeinu Bachya asks that if all blessings come from Hashem Himself, how is it proper to bless Him; even if we would bless Hashem all day, what would we be adding to Him. He therefore understands the word *Boruch* as a praise of Hashem, that You are the source of all blessings, and from You comes all blessing into this world (*Kad Hakemach – Boruch*). 🕒

intelligence information, the crew held their fire and collected and examined the debris. To their dismay they realized that many of the documents were in German. Realizing that there were probably German passengers on board, the captain decided to wait for the boat to dock and disembark its German passengers, and on the return trip to England they would sink it with only its English crew. What had seemed a terrible moment for Michael was really his saving grace. 🕒



THE AUTHENTICITY OF THE ZOHAR

RABBI NOSSON WIGGINS

The Testimony of Rabbi Yitzchak of Akko (Part I)

Both the compilation and publication of the *Zohar* are shrouded in mystery. Fortunately, though, preserved in Rabbi Avraham Zacuto’s renowned historical work *Sefer Yuchsin* is an invaluable piece of evidence – the testimony of the great 13th century kabbalist Rabbi Yitzchak of Akko (Acre). Let us briefly introduce Rabbi Yitzchak of Akko and his important voyage from Akko to Spain.

Rabbi Yitzchak (ben Shmuel) of Akko was presumably born in Eretz Yisrael in the coastal town of Akko and, according to Chida, became a student of Ramban after he [Ramban] emigrated to Eretz Yisrael in 1267. In the 13th century, Akko boasted a large Jewish community while Jerusalem barely had a *minyan* of Jews. In Akko, Rabbi Yitzchak wrote a commentary, *Meiras Anayim*, to elucidate the profound mysteries of his teacher, the Ramban. Chida holds Rabbi Yitzchak of Akko in great esteem as a saintly kabbalist (see *Shem ha-Gedolim*, ma’areches gedolim, 353). Rabbi Yitzchak was living in Akko in the spring of 1291 during the famous Fall of Akko (also known as the siege of Akko), when the Crusaders lost control of the city as it fell to the Mamluks. Many Jews were murdered, but Rabbi Yitzchak survived the war and escaped to Spain.

During his stay in Spain, Rabbi Yitzchak of Akko met important Spanish scholars and kabbalists and recorded significant evidence about the *Zohar*’s publication in his personal diary. Rabbi Yitzchak’s account sheds some light on the enigma of the *Zohar*’s authorship. What follows is an abridged version of Rabbi Yitzchak of Akko’s testimony, which as mentioned has been preserved in Rabbi Avraham Zacuto’s *Sefer Yuchsin*.

To be continued... 🕒