

Pulse OF Emunah

ANI
MAAMIN
Foundation

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life

LESSONS

TEFILLIN IN THE CAMPS

Adapted from Touched by a Story by Rabbi Spero, with the permission of the copyright holders, Artscroll/Mesorah Publications, Ltd. (Artscroll)

Almost a hundred years ago, Meyer Birnbaum was born in East New York. During the day, he worked to help his parents. At night, they encouraged him to acquire what they called “*ah bissele Yiddishkeit*,” to learn what it means to be a Jew. Meyer became a talmid of Rav Yitzchak Hutner.

In World War II, Meyer was drafted. As Lieutenant Birnbaum, he was a liberator of Buchenwald. He helped the survivors however he could; some needed kosher food, others needed a hug. One day, a sergeant told him that two Jewish boys had come to see him. They appeared to be 14 and 15 years old, although they were so gaunt and scrawny it was hard to tell. “How can I help you?” he asked.


“We would like to borrow your *tefillin*,” they said.

Lieutenant Birnbaum handed them his *tefillin*, but the boys didn’t put them on. “It’s not a game,” the lieutenant said. “Use the *tefillin*, or give them back.”

The boys apologized. “We were deported before *bar mitzvah*, so we don’t know how to put them on or when to make the *brachos*. Can you teach us?”

The lieutenant demonstrated, and they followed his lead. When they finished davening, one boy said, “Now we get a *mazel tov*! We never had a *bar mitzvah*, and now we were *zoche* to put on *tefillin*!”

The lieutenant served cookies his mother had sent, and they drank Coca-Cola. That was the *bar mitzvah*.

We are lucky to have been born into a generation that is blessed with such bounty. But it comes with a responsibility. Let us make Hashem proud. 



gem

OF THE WEEK

TO SEEK OUT G-D

By Rabbi Moshe Pogrow

Based on the commentary of Rabbi Shamshon Raphael Hirsch zt”l on Chumash, with permission from the publisher.

These *parshiyos* teach us how our forefathers lived during their 40 years in the wilderness. Their food was provided for each day, and everything else was also taken care of. Thus, meeting their basic needs was simple and easy, and did not take much of their time. They were not engaged most of the day in activities like labor, trade, and household chores that normally occupy the life of a people. So what did they do most of the time? They would come to Moshe, or—as *parshas Yisro* tells us—to his deputies, *lidrosh Elokim*.

Lidrosh Elokim means: to seek instruction and help from G-d. It encompasses all the ways we are to seek out G-d in all our activities in life, which we must do if we really believe He is our G-d.

The words of the *navi* Amos, “*Dirshuni v’chiyu*,” express the most comprehensive demand that G-d makes of us. To be included among the *dorshei Hashem* is a distinction to aspire to, the mission that devolves upon us from maturity until the return of our souls to their source. “To seek G-d”


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powerful
PRAYER



SHEMONE ESREI:
THE GREATEST CHOICE

When one stands before Hakadosh Baruch Hu in *tefillah* and places his feet together as one, emulating the *malachim*, he is expressing the thought that he is relinquishing his free will and thus offering himself as a *korban* to Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

In so doing, he has performed the greatest act of free choice of which a human being is capable: that of voluntarily relinquishing that choice to Hakadosh Baruch Hu. 

Adapted from Rav Schwab on Prayer (Artscroll)

**From our
readers...**

The lessons are profound and the stories well written;
they keep my children riveted.

- Mordechai P.

THE WORLD OF ASHKENAZ

by Rabbi Dovid Sapirman, Dean, Ani Maamin Foundation

In recent weeks, we focused on the history of Spanish Jewry and the various Sephardic communities that developed following the expulsion from Spain. Now we turn our attention to what is known to us as Ashkenaz.

The name Ashkenaz generally refers to Germany, where history tells us there has been a Jewish presence for 1,700 years. There is even one tradition that Ezra Hasofer sent a message to Jews settled in Worms, Germany, encouraging them to return to Eretz Yisrael after the Bais Hamikdash was rebuilt. However, we will begin our recollections with Rabbeinu Gershom, known as the Meor Hagolah, “the Light of the Diaspora.”

Over a thousand years ago, Rabbeinu Gershom is said to have met with Rav Hai Gaon, who had visited Mainz, Germany. Indeed, Rabbeinu Gershom ascribed his approach in Talmud to what he has learned from Rav Hai Gaon. Rabbeinu Gershom unified many of the generation’s rabbis and enacted many laws to regulate social interactions between Jews. These are subject to what is known as *cherem d’Rabbeinu Gershom*, a severe ban on transgressors. These prohibitions included, among others, opening others’ mail in order to respect privacy. Often, letters would be stamped with an acronym for *cherem d’Rabbeinu Gershom*, reminding the outsider that it would be a transgression of the ban to pry into this letter. Rabbeinu Gershom also decreed that a woman could not be divorced without her consent, and that polygamy was forbidden. These *takanos* were binding upon Ashkenazi Jews.

In the year 1012, a Catholic priest converted to Judaism in Mainz. The church had him burned at the stake, and, for good measure, forced all the Jews in Mainz to convert to Christianity, avenging themselves on the Jews who had welcomed him to their faith. Most of the Jews fled rather than convert, but some were trapped in the city. Rabbeinu Gershom’s own son was among them. When he died (sadly, in his father’s lifetime), he had still not formally renounced Christianity. Rabbeinu Gershom sat *shiva* for fourteen days: seven for his son’s body, and seven for his soul.

Today, Rabbeinu Gershom is best known for his *takanos*. But he was also the *rosh yeshivah* of Mainz, where Rashi’s teachers studied, and where Rashi himself would eventually study. It was Rashi and his family who would establish the *yeshivos* of the Tosafists, who would facilitate the study of the Gemara for the entire Jewish world—all thanks to the foundation laid by Rabbeinu Gershom. 🕯

To be continued...

expresses the exhilarating truth that if we seek instruction and help from G-d, we will find G-d Himself. Our transient lives, with their petty concerns, will be lived in His Presence.

According to our Sages, Moshe in this *parsha* is told to teach *klal Yisrael* how to go about securing their livelihood and wellbeing. Most people seek only their own welfare. In the case of the Jewish people, however, not only are they to act with lovingkindness toward one another, but that lovingkindness is to be their purpose in seeking their own welfare. Everyone is to look out for himself for the sake of his neighbor.

Moreover, acting benevolently toward others takes precedence over safeguarding one’s own life (e.g. visiting the sick, even if there is danger of infection) and upholding one’s own prestige (e.g. attending to the dead without regard to one’s position or age).

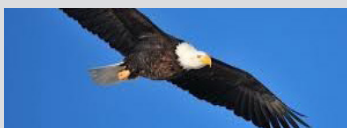
A person who has not received the radiant light of the Torah will take the goal of his *derech*, of his way through life, to be strictly his own benefit and his own welfare. When you enlighten him, he will realize that his existence on earth is only for the sake of others; he will seek the *derech* to *beis chayav* in *gemilus chesed*, and through self-sacrifice will pursue this *derech* and devote himself to it with every fibre of his being: *yelchu ba*.

The years of their wandering through the wilderness were indeed the great training period for the Jewish people. The task of the Jewish people through all the centuries to come would be to spread the knowledge of Torah among all classes of the people. Here, “the people stood around Moshe from morning until evening,” their purpose “*lidrosh Elokim*.” 🕯



wonder WORLD

EAGLE EYED III



Why is the bald eagle so distinctive?

Bald eagles, also known as American eagles, fishing eagles, Washington eagles, and white-headed eagles, belong to a grouping known as the sea or fish eagles. It is the only species of eagle unique to North America, and most can be found in Canada and Alaska. Bald eagles usually make their homes near a body of water, since their diet consists mainly of fish. The bald eagle’s unique brown body, white head, and white tail make it easy to identify even from far distances. The average wingspan of the bald eagle is six to eight feet. While flying, the bald eagle rarely flaps its wings. Instead, it allows the wind currents to hold it up in the air by spreading its large wings almost completely flat. This allows the eagle to soar while conserving energy at the same time. 🕯

Adapted from *Exploring the Wild World of Animals & Birds* (Israel Bookshop Publications)