

OHR NET

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PARSHA INSIGHTS

THE WORLD ON OUR SHOULDERS

“G-d appeared to him (Avraham) in the plains of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance of the tent...” (18:1)

It's very easy for us to see our lives as rather small and insignificant. How many of us really make an impression while we're here, and how many are remembered after we leave?

The truth is that every one of us is capable of supporting entire worlds on our shoulders. Before a picture of some muscle-bound Greek god wafts into your imagination, let me explain what I mean.

“G-d appeared to him in the plains of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance of the tent...” (18:1)

Rashi says that when G-d appeared to Avraham, he wanted to stand up. G-d said to him “You sit and I will stand and you will be a sign for your children, for in the future I will stand in the assembly of the judges and they will sit as it says in Psalms that ‘G-d stands in the assembly of the judges’.”

When you go to an audition for a play the director sits and you stand. When you enter the bank manager's office to explain why your loan is overdue he sits and you stand. When you want to get a visa from a foreign consulate they sit and you stand. The way of the world is that the one who stands depends on the one who sits.

When Avraham wanted to stand, G-d told him that things were to be the other way round, “You sit and I will

stand” meaning I need you, and on you everything will depend. How can we understand that G-d wanted to “depend” on Avraham?

We find this principle in the verse “Give strength to G-d...” How can we give anything to G-d, let alone strength? However, it is the Divine will that all the upper worlds, the entire creation, stands and depends on this, the lowliest of worlds.

G-d directs the entire universe in precise harmony with our every miztva, every kindness, every prayer. And the reverse is also true. We can blemish vast tracts of the spiritual universe with an unkind word or a foolish action.

Similarly, when a Jewish religious court makes a halachic decision, G-d, as it were, “complies” with that earthly decision. For it is His will that the whole creation responds to this lowliest of worlds. That's the meaning of “G-d stands in the assembly of the judges.” The entire conduct of the universe is initiated by what happens in this world.

And that's really having the world on your shoulders.

Source:

• Based on Da'at Torah

HIDDEN MIRACLES

“And I appeared to them as Keil Shakai...”

The purpose of this world is to be factory to produce a product called *Olam Haba* – the World to Come. That is our only target, and the *mitzvot* constitute our only

continued on page six

In Honor of the Bar Mitzvah of

YOSSI LAUFFER

Parshat Vayera

SPECIAL MAZEL TOV TO THE LAUFFER - KIRSCHENBAUM FAMILIES

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Three days after performing *brit mila* on himself, Avraham is visited by G-d. When three angels appear in human form, Avraham rushes to show them hospitality by bringing them into his tent, despite this being the most painful time after the operation. Sarah laughs when she hears from them that she will bear a son next year. G-d reveals to Avraham that He will destroy Sodom, and Avraham pleads for Sodom to be spared. G-d agrees that if there are fifty righteous people in Sodom He will not destroy it. Avraham “bargains” G-d down to ten righteous people. However, not even ten can be found. Lot, his wife and two daughters are rescued just before sulfur and fire rain down on Sodom and her sister cities. Lot’s wife looks back and is turned into a pillar of salt. Lot’s daughters fear that as a result of the destruction there will be no husbands for them. They decide to get their father drunk and through him to perpetuate the human race. From the elder daughter, Moav is born, and from the younger, Ammon. Avraham moves to Gerar where Avimelech abducts Sarah. After G-d appears to Avimelech in a dream, he releases Sarah and appeases

Avraham. As promised, a son, Yitzchak, is born to Sarah and Avraham. On the eighth day after the birth, Avraham circumcises him as commanded. Avraham makes a feast the day Yitzchak is weaned. Sarah tells Avraham to banish Hagar and Hagar’s son Yishmael because she sees in him signs of degeneracy. Avraham is distressed at the prospect of banishing his son, but G-d tells him to listen to whatever Sarah tells him to do. After nearly dying of thirst in the desert, Yishmael is rescued by an angel and G-d promises that he will be the progenitor of a mighty nation. Avimelech enters into an alliance with Avraham when he sees that G-d is with him. In a tenth and final test, G-d instructs Avraham to take Yitzchak, who is now 37, and to offer him as a sacrifice. Avraham does this, in spite of ostensibly aborting Jewish nationhood and contradicting his life-long preaching against human sacrifice. At the last moment, G-d sends an angel to stop Avraham. Because of Avraham’s unquestioning obedience, G-d promises him that even if the Jewish People sin, they will never be completely dominated by their foes. The Parsha ends with the genealogy and birth of Rivka.

ISRAEL Forever

WE WILL OUTLIVE THEM ALL!

“Israel poses the biggest threat to world peace!” “The Jews are a race of murderers!” Sound familiar? The first statement is the sensational conclusion of a survey conducted by the European Union. Although the Israeli government expressed shock at this report that a majority of Europeans consider Israel as the world’s biggest problem, this attitude could hardly surprise anyone familiar with the bloody history of anti-Semitism in so many European countries.

The second statement, however, really shocked Israel and world Jewry with its audacity. A member of parliament in the country that murdered six million Jews has the nerve to call the survivors of that slaughter “murderers”!

These shrill cries of Jew hatred emanating from Europe must be viewed in the context of the prophecy revealed to the Patriarch Avraham in the Torah chapter we read last Shabbat. This prophecy is introduced with the words “a

deep sleep fell upon Avram, and behold, a horror of great darkness fell upon him” (Bereishet 15:12). Although the words in this chapter speak only of the exile which Avraham’s descendants would endure in Egypt, our Sages saw in the aforementioned description of horror and darkness a reference to the four periods of exile Jews would suffer after they had already gained possession of their promised land.

In this week’s Torah portion, we hear Avraham, after he has demonstrated his loyalty by being prepared to sacrifice his son Yitzchak, promised that “Your descendants will inherit the gate of their enemies” (Bereishet 22.17).

The message communicated to Avraham – that Jews would suffer from many tyrants but would outlive them all – has become an indispensable part of the Jewish psyche that allows a hated people to be confident of Israel forever.

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PARSHA Q&A?

1. Why did G-d appear to Avraham after the *brit mila*?
2. Why was Avraham sitting at the entrance to his tent?
3. What were the missions of the three angels?
4. Why did Avraham enjoin the guests to wash the dust off their feet?
5. Why did Avraham ask specifically Yishmael, and not someone else, to prepare food for the guests?
6. Why did the angels ask Avraham where Sarah was?
7. When G-d related Sarah's thoughts to Avraham, He did not relate them precisely. Why?
8. What "cry" from Sodom came before G-d?
9. How many angels went to Sodom?
10. Why was Lot sitting at the gate of Sodom?
11. Lot served the angels *matza*. Why?
12. Why did Lot delay when he left Sodom?
13. Why were Lot and his family not permitted to look back at Sodom?
14. Lot's wife looked back and became a pillar of salt. Why was she punished in this particular way?
15. In what merit did G-d save Lot?
16. Why did Avraham relocate after the destruction of Sodom?
17. Why did Avimelech give gifts to Avraham?
18. Why was Avraham told to listen to Sarah?
19. Why did G-d listen to the prayer of Yishmael and not to that of Hagar?
20. Who accompanied Avraham and Yitzchak to the *akeidah* (binding)?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this week's Questions!

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary unless otherwise stated.

1. 18:1 - Avraham was sick, so G-d came to "visit" him.
2. 18:1 - He was looking for guests.
3. 18:2 - To announce Yitzchak's birth, to heal Avraham and to destroy Sodom.
4. 18:4 - He thought they were among those who worship the dust, and he didn't want any object of idolatry in his home.
5. 18:7 - To train him in the performance of *mitzvot*.
6. 18:9 - To call attention to Sarah's modesty, so as to endear her to her husband.
7. 18:13 - For the sake of peace.
8. 18:21 - The cry of a girl who was executed for giving food to the poor.
9. 19:1 - Two; one to destroy the city and one to save Lot.
10. 19:1 - He was a judge.
11. 19:3 - It was Passover.
12. 19:16 - He wanted to save his property.
13. 19:17 - As they, too, deserved to be punished, it wasn't fitting for them to witness the destruction of Sodom.
14. 19:26 - She was stingy, not wanting to give the guests salt.
15. 19:29 - Lot had protected Avraham by concealing from the Egyptians the fact that Sarah was his wife.
16. 20:1 - Because travel in the region ceased and Avraham could no longer find guests.
17. 20:14 - So that Avraham would pray for him.
18. 21:12 - Because she was greater in prophecy.
19. 21:17 - Because the prayer of a sick person is more readily accepted than the prayer of others on his behalf.
20. 22:3 - Yishmael and Eliezer.

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

A TZADDIK IN OUR TIME

Anyone who ever attended a wedding in Bnei Brak up until a year or two ago was familiar with Reb Dovid Leib Schwartz, of blessed memory, who solicited money for tzedaka and profusely blessed the donors.

This Tzaddik endured the horrors of the Nazi concentration camps and heroically maintained his observance of *mitzvot*, even managing to fulfill the obligations of three meals on Shabbat. In one camp the inmates were called together before Shabbat and each of them was given a loaf of bread which was to last them during an exhausting three-

day march which they would be forced to make after Shabbat. Everyone except for Reb Dovid Leib cautiously saved the loaf for the long march. He insisted on consuming it for the three Shabbat meals.

At the end of the day there came a surprise announcement that the march had been cancelled and that all unconsumed loaves must be returned to the camp kitchen. This Tzaddik had no need to return anything. Instead he received a Heavenly return for his self-sacrificing heroism and his faith in G-d which was so dramatically vindicated.

COUNT YOUR BLESSINGS

A Jew, Rabbi Meir rules, is supposed to make at least one hundred blessings daily. This is easily accomplished on a weekday when he says the 19 blessings of the *Shmone Esrei Amida* three times a day. On Shabbat and Festivals when there are far less blessings in the *Amida* prayers, Rabbi Chiya, the son of Rabbi Iyya, suggested making up this shortfall by indulging in delicacies and fragrances which require blessings.

The source for the number 100 lies in the words of a challenge issued by Moshe to his people: “Mah (What) does Hashem, your G-d, ask of you...” (*Devarim* 10:12). Although the essence of the challenge was to fear G-d and serve Him wholeheartedly, Rabbi Meir saw in the words of the passage a subtle signal for making a hundred blessings.

Rashi’s understanding of this signal was the similarity between the opening word *mah* and the word *me’ah*, which means “one hundred”. *Tosefot*, however, shies away from this approach, because when such interpretation is done elsewhere, the *gemara* introduces it by guiding us not to read it only this way but another way as well. Rabbeinu Tam therefore points out that if you count all the letters in that passage you will arrive at a total of one hundred.

Both approaches saw in Moshe’s challenge about responding to G-d’s expectation of fear and service a hidden reference to how this is accomplished by constantly acknowledging G-d through the blessings.

• *Menachot* 43b

COUNTING THE LAMBS

On the Festival of Shavuot in the *Beit Hamikdash* additional sacrifices were offered in honor of the day as on other holidays. In regard to the Shavuot

• *Menachot* 45b

ones, however, we find two different passages as to which animals were to be sacrificed as *olah* burnt offerings:

“And you shall offer together with the bread (the two loaves of a new *mincha* offering mentioned in the previous passage as a Shavuot service) seven lambs...one bullock and two rams.” (*Vayikra* 23:18)

“And you shall offer... two bullocks, one ram and seven lambs” (*Bamidbar* 28:27).

Are the seven lambs mentioned in both passages the same or is there a need to offer fourteen lambs?

The first indication that these are two completely separate sets of sacrifices, one for the Festival itself and one as an accompaniment to the offering of the two loaves, is the switch in the number of the bullocks and rams brought to the altar along with them. But this alone would be inconclusive as proof that the Torah insisted on two separate sets. There still could be an understanding that the Torah required only seven lambs but in regard to the accompanying bullocks and rams gave an option of offering either one bullock and two rams or two bullocks and one ram.

What proves to be conclusive is the switch that the Torah makes in listing the order of the animals sacrificed. In the first passage the lambs are mentioned before the bullock and rams, while in the other one the lambs are mentioned after the bullocks and ram, providing a subtle signal that the lambs mentioned in the two passages, although equal in number, were part of a separate set and for a different purpose. The result is that the *olah* offered on Shavuot consisted of 14 lambs, 3 bullocks and 3 rams.

LOVE OF THE LAND - THE NAMES

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael

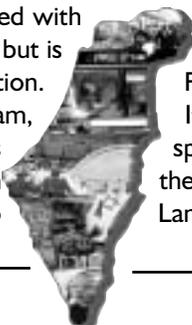
ERETZ HAMUVTACHAT – THE PROMISED LAND

A name which has been popularly associated with Eretz Yisrael does not appear in Tanach, but is based on an oft-repeated Divine declaration.

The Creator promised the Patriarchs, Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov, that their descendants would inherit the land in which all three of them had dwelled. He repeated this promise to

Moshe when He sent him to liberate His chosen people from Egyptian bondage and to lead them to the Promised Land.

It should be noted that in some American folk songs and spirituals the term “Promised Land” sometimes connotes the afterlife of Heaven. For Jews, however, the Promised Land is the “Heaven on Earth” promised to our ancestors.



EUTHANASIA

From: Ira in Florida

Dear Rabbi,

Here in Florida the husband of a woman in a persistent vegetative state won the right to 'pull the plug' and allow her to die. Her parents opposed this request. What is your position on the right to die and living wills in which a person leaves instructions for one's family to end life if one has no quality of life and/or is comatose and unable to make one's own decisions? Thank you.

Dear Ira,

Jewish law forbids euthanasia in all forms, and considers it an act of homicide. The life of a person is not "his". Rather, it belongs to God, the One who granted that life. Therefore it may be reclaimed only by the true Owner of that life, at the time and under the circumstances that He wills. Despite one's noble intentions, mercy-killing is a flagrant intervention into a domain that transcends this world.

One source for this prohibition is in the verse: "But your blood of your lives will I require; ...from the hand of man, from the hand of a person's brother, will I require the life of man" (Gen. 9:5). After having stated "from the hand of man", the phrase "a person's brother" is redundant. This seeming redundancy refers to the prohibition against euthanasia. Although murder is the opposite of brotherly

love, one might think that euthanasia is in fact a permitted expression of brotherly love. The verse thus implies that this particular form of "brotherly love" is nothing more than murder.

Nevertheless, one must not be lax about relieving the person's pain. Elimination of suffering is a commendable goal. In fact, this may permit even "aggressive" treatment of pain to a degree that is not standard medical practice. For example, heroin may be used to treat pain according to Jewish law, even though it may be prohibited by civil law. But by the same token, Jewish law certainly forbids euthanasia, even if it were to be permitted by civil law.

There are other considerations which are beyond the scope of this column, such as active vs. passive intervention, praying for a suffering person's death, and the definition and treatment of a moribund patient. These and other related topics may be further studied in the accompanying list of sources.

Sources:

- "Judaism and Healing", J. David Bleich, Ktav Publishing House.
- HaKtav v'haKaballah, *ibid*.
- "The Jewish Attitude Towards Euthanasia", by Fred Posner; Jewish Bio-Ethics, by Fred Posner & J. David Bleich, Sanhedrin Press.
- Jewish Ethics and Halacha for Our Time, by Basil F. Herring, Ktav Publishing.
- Practical Medical Halacha - Association of Orthodox Jewish Scientists, Feldheim Publishing.
- Medical Halacha for Everyone, Abraham S. Abraham, Feldheim Publishers.

WHAT'S THE RIGHT THING TO DO? _____

REAL-LIFE QUESTIONS OF SOCIAL AND BUSINESS ETHICS

WHAT WOULD YOU DO FOR YOURSELF?

Question: Someone who prays in the same synagogue with me left his tefillin home one day in his rush to come to the Shacharit service on time. He approached someone with a request to lend him tefillin when he completed his *shmona esrei* so he would be able to catch his regular ride and save the time and expense of taking several buses to his place of work or hailing an expensive cab. This neighbor hesitated to do so because he was accustomed to keeping his tefillin on until the very end of the service in accordance with the most preferred practice. What is the right thing to do?

Answer: This very question came before Rabbi Yitzchak Zilberstein, Rabbi of the Ramat Elchanan community in Bnei Brak. His response was based on something that the Chofetz Chaim wrote in his *Mishne Berura* about a person engaging in only as much work as he needs for his basic sub-

sistence so that the major part of his time can be devoted to Torah study. "In order that his evil inclination should not delude him into how much he needs for his subsistence," he writes, "let him imagine a situation in which he assumed responsibility for supporting someone else and then consider what he would then consider as a basic level of subsistence."

Applying this to the above situation, Rabbi Zilberstein asked the reluctant tefillin wearer what he would do for himself if keeping his tefillin on until the end of the service would mean that he would be late for work and be forced to take a cab. Whatever he would have done for himself in such a case is what is incumbent on him in regard to the other fellow.

This is the meaning of "Love your neighbor like yourself".

continued from page one

passport.

However, you can read the Torah from cover to cover and you won't find one specific promise about the reward for keeping the *mitzvot* in the next world. Promises of reward in this world abound: We are promised the rains in their time; the land will give its produce and the trees will bear fruit; there will be an abundance of food that we will eat to satiety. We will dwell securely in our land. No one will walk down a dark street and be frightened. No one will worry about sending their children off on the bus in the morning. There will be abundance and peace.

Why is it the Torah makes no open promises about the reward for keeping the *mitzvot* in the next world, but is replete with details of their reward in this existence?

All reward and punishment in this world is through hidden miracles. When a person eats a bacon/cheeseburger and dies prematurely, nobody knows that he died because he ate a bacon/cheeseburger. People die at his age when even when they don't eat bacon/cheeseburgers. They die younger.

A person gives *tzedaka* charity and becomes rich. You don't see that he became rich because he gave *tzedaka*. There are plenty of rich people who don't give *tzedaka* – they inherited it or they won the sweepstake. The hidden miracle is that this person wasn't destined to become rich or wasn't supposed to die young, but because he gave *tzedaka* or because he ate the bacon/cheeseburger G-d changed this person's destiny.

It's miraculous, but it's hidden. It looks like nature, but if it

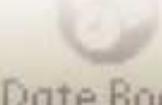
were actually the work of nature then nothing that a person did in this world could have any effect on himself. For a person is born under a certain *mazal*, a certain destiny, and without the intervention of an outside force — the hidden miracle — nothing that a person did, whether for good or bad, would have any repercussions in this world.

That's why the Torah speaks at great length about the outcome of the performance (or non-performance) of the *mitzvot* in this world. For it is truly miraculous that our actions should affect anything in this world, a world that, aside from these hidden miracles, is run by a system of *mazal* and nature.

However, as far as the next world is concerned, it's obvious that our actions will have repercussions there. The Torah doesn't need to stress the reward and punishment in that existence because it's obvious that people who engage in spiritual pursuits and serve G-d faithfully should receive spiritual rewards. But it is certainly *not* natural that people who are immersed in the work of the spirit, the study of Torah and the performance of *mitzvot* should receive their reward in this world as well. Therefore the Torah stresses the reward for keeping the *mitzvot* in this world, because that is something that no one could surmise without being told of its existence.

Source:

• Ramban on Vayera and at the beginning of Parshat Bechukotai



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