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PARSHA INSIGHTS

A BILL FOR THE PYRAMIDS

"Only the land of the priests he did not buy..." (47:22)

A few months ago the newspapers carried a news report of an Egyptian legal move to sue the Jewish people for the silver and gold that we asked from the Egyptians on our departure from that land some three thousand years ago.

Those Egyptian lawyers obviously had failed basic Egyptian History 101, because the Egyptians tried the exact same thing some two thousand years ago in the court of Alexander of Macedonia. Alexander summoned a representative of the Jews. The task fell to Geviha ben Pesia who argued as follows: "Our ancestors were 600,000 able-bodied men who worked for a full 210 years. Let's calculate a laborer's wages for a year and multiply that by 600,000 and then multiply it again by 210, and we'll see how much you owe us for our work. Whatever excess there is we'll return to you."

When the Egyptians started to calculate they very soon reached astronomical numbers and fled without even attempting to defend themselves.

Why did the Egyptians accept Geviha ben Pesia's claim in the first place? It was Pharaoh, not the Egyptian people, who had enslaved the Jews. It was Pharaoh who owed them their wages, not the Egyptians. Why, then, were the Jewish People allowed to take the gold and silver of the Egyptians? Ostensibly, the Egyptians owed them nothing.

During the years of famine, it was not only foreign

nations that had to buy grain from Yosef but the Egyptians themselves. Eventually, they exhausted their money and they sold Yosef their horses, sheep, and donkeys. In the second year of the famine they came to Yosef and said "The only thing we still own are our bodies and our land. Give us grain and we will be your slaves. We will give you our land as well so that we and our children do not die from hunger. Yosef acquired both the people and their lands for Pharaoh. From then on, the Egyptians became tenants on their former lands and had to give Pharaoh a fifth of all their crops.

Thus in reality, Pharaoh owned the entire land of Egypt and all its inhabitants. When the Jews took the treasures of Egypt with them – they were really taking Pharaoh's gold and silver.

"Only the land of the priests he did not buy..."

One section of Egyptian society was exempt from paying for grain – the priests. Why does the Torah bother telling us of the priests' unique status? Nothing that the Torah records is incidental. It must be, therefore, that we are supposed to learn something from their inclusion.

If Pharaoh granted special status to his priests who were mere idolaters, surely we should be prepared to support in every way we can the *talmidei chachamim* (Torah scholars) of our generation, on whose shoulders the world stands.

Sources:

- *Talmud Sanhedrin 91; Meshech Chochma; Bereishet 47:22; Sefer Chassidim*

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PARSHA OVERVIEW

After 17 years in Egypt, Yaakov senses his days drawing to a close and summons Yosef. He has Yosef swear to bury him in the Machpela cave, the burial place of Adam and Chava, Avraham and Sara, Yitzchak and Rivka. Yaakov falls ill and Yosef brings to him his two sons, Ephraim and Menashe. Yaakov elevates Ephraim and Menashe to the status of his own sons, thus giving Yosef a double portion that removes the status of the first-born from Reuven. As Yaakov is blind from old age, Yosef leads his sons close to their grandfather. Yaakov kisses and hugs them. He had not thought to see his son Yosef again, let alone Yosef's children. Yaakov begins to bless them, giving precedence to Ephraim, the younger, but Yosef interrupts him and indicates that Menashe is the elder. Yaakov explains that he intends to bless Ephraim with his strong hand because Yehoshua will descend from him, and Yehoshua will be both the conqueror of Eretz Yisrael and

the teacher of Torah to the Jewish People. Yaakov summons the rest of his sons in order to bless them as well. Yaakov's blessing reflects the unique character and ability of each tribe, directing each one in its unique mission in serving Hashem. Yaakov passes from this world at age 147. A tremendous procession accompanies his funeral cortege up from Egypt to his resting place in the cave of Machpela in Chevron. After Yaakov's passing, the brothers are concerned that Yosef will now take revenge on them. Yosef reassures them, even promising to support them and their families. Yosef lives out the rest of his years in Egypt, seeing Ephraim's great-grandchildren. Before his death, Yosef foretells to his brothers that Hashem will redeem them from Egypt. He makes them swear to bring his bones out of Egypt with them at that time. Yosef passes away at the age of 110 and is embalmed. Thus ends Sefer Bereishet, the first of the five Books of the Torah. *Chazak!*

ISRAEL Forever

DEAD OR ALIVE

Throughout the generations Jews in foreign lands have made a special effort to be buried in Eretz Yisrael. When this was impossible there were those who asked that some earth from the Holy Land be placed in their grave.

Where did this all begin and why?

The answer lies in this week's Torah portion.

The deathbed wish of the Patriarch Yaakov was that he be buried, not in Egypt where he lived his last years, but in Eretz Yisrael. His son Yosef, the Egyptian potentate whom he asked to arrange this for him, repeated the same wish to his brothers. The wishes of both were fulfilled, Yaakov's

upon his passing and Yosef's when his people were liberated from Egyptian bondage.

Our Talmudic Sages saw a great spiritual significance in becoming a part of the Holy Land after death. But they saw an even greater significance in becoming a part of Eretz Yisrael while still alive. Despite all the problems facing our beloved country in terms of security and economics, it is hard to recall a time in the history of our two millennia exile when it was easier for a Jew to come to Eretz Yisrael and improve the spiritual status of himself and his family. The more Jews who realize this and seize the opportunity for aliya, the greater the guarantee for Israel forever.

LOVE OF THE LAND - THE NAMES

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

THE DEAR AND CHERISHED LAND

“For Your servants hold dear her stones and cherish even her dust.” (*Tehillim 102:15*)

The touching scene of Jews kissing the earth upon their arrival in Eretz Yisrael has its roots in the words of King David and in the actions of our



Talmudic Sages. Rabbi Abba kissed the rocks at the port of Acco. Rabbi Chiya bar Gamda rolled in the dust of the land. Rabbi Chanina went even further by repairing the roads so that his beloved country would not have a bad reputation with those who traveled upon them. (*Ketuvot 112*)

PARSHA Q&A ? _____

1. Why is kindness towards the dead called “*chesed shel emet*” — kindness of truth?
2. Give three reasons Yaakov didn’t want to be buried in Egypt.
3. How do you treat a “fox in his time” (i.e., a commoner who rules)?
4. “When I was coming from Padan, Rachel died on me... I buried her there on the way to Efrat...” Why did Yaakov say all this to Yosef?
5. Initially, why was Yaakov unable to bless Ephraim and Menashe?
6. What does *pillalti* mean?
7. What does “*Shechem*” mean as used in this week’s Parsha? (two answers)
8. Which individual is called “the *Emori*”? Why? Give two reasons.
9. What did Yaakov want to tell his sons but was unable to?
10. What privileges did Reuven lose due to his rash actions?
11. What congregation from Yaakov’s offspring did Yaakov not want to be associated with?
12. What did Yehuda do after he heard Yaakov rebuke Reuven, Shimon and Levi? Why?
13. What does milk do to teeth?
14. Why is Yissachar like a “strong-boned donkey?”
15. With what resource did both Yaakov and Moshe bless Asher?
16. In Yosef’s blessing, Yaakov said, “They embittered him...” Who are “they”?
17. Which descendants of Binyamin “will divide the spoils in the evening”?
18. From whom did Yaakov buy his burial place?
19. What oath did Yosef make to Pharaoh?
20. Which two sons of Yaakov did not carry his coffin? Why not?

PARSHA Q&A! _____

Answers to this Week’s Questions!

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

1. 47:29 - Because the giver expects no reward from the recipient.
2. 47:29 - a) Egypt’s ground was to be plagued with lice; b) At the time of the resurrection, those buried outside Israel will suffer; c) So the Egyptians wouldn’t make him into an idol.
3. 47:31 - Bow to him.
4. 48:7 - Yaakov thought Yosef harbored resentment since Yaakov had not buried Yosef’s mother, Rachel, in the *Ma’arat HaMachpela*.
5. 48:8 - The *Shechina* departed from him.
6. 48:11 - “I thought.”
7. 48:22 - a) The actual city of Shechem; b) A portion.
8. 48:22 - Esav. a) He acted like an Emorite; b) He trapped his father with words (*imrei pi*).
9. 49:1 - When *mashiach* will come.
10. 49:3 - Priesthood and Kingship.
11. 49:6 - Korach and his congregation.
12. 49:8 - He drew back. He was afraid that Yaakov would rebuke him for the incident with Tamar.
13. 49:12 - It makes them white.
14. 49:14 - Just as a donkey bears a heavy burden, so the tribe of Yissachar bears the yoke of Torah.
15. 49:20 - Oil-rich land.
16. 49:23 - Yosef’s brothers, Potifar and his wife.
17. 49:27 - Mordechai and Esther.
18. 50:5 - From Esav.
19. 50:6 - Yosef swore not to reveal Pharaoh’s ignorance of Hebrew.
20. 50:13 - Levi, because he would carry the *aron* (holy ark). Yosef, because he was a king.

BONUS QUESTION ? _____

“**The scepter will not be removed from Yehuda**” (49:10). For most of our history we have been without a king. And during the second Temple period the Hasmonean kings were from the tribe of Levi, not Yehuda. How can Yaakov’s statement be explained?

BONUS ANSWER ! _____

Yaakov did not promise that Yehuda would reign continuously, or that no other tribe would produce leaders; rather he promised that kingship would eventually return to Yehuda.

• Gur Aryeh

RESPECT FOR ROYALTY

One should always show respect for kings, states Rabbi Yannai who cites two examples of the respect shown by prophets to kings.

When Moshe warned Pharaoh about the plague of the first-born which would be visited by G-d upon Egypt he prophesied that "all of these your servants will descend to me, bow to me and say 'Go, you and your people...'" (*Shmot 11:8*) Although he knew through prophesy that the king would himself thus surrender together with his servants, as we see in a later passage (*ibid. 12:30*), Moshe showed respect for royalty by mentioning only the submission of the servants.

The second example is that of the Prophet Eliyahu and his behavior towards his archenemy, the idol worship propagator King Achav. "A G-d-given spirit of courage came to Eliyahu and he girded his loins and ran in front of Achav's carriage until they reached Yizreel" (*Melachim I 18:46*). Whether he did so, as Rashi explains, because it was undignified for a king to travel unaccompanied, or, as others suggest, because having an advance runner is one of the trappings of royalty, Eliyahu's action was an expression of respect.

But why should such evil kings deserve the respect of all their subjects, even such exalted prophets?

In his commentary in *Mesechta Zevachim (102a)* Maharsha quotes the Talmudic dictum that "kingdom on earth is a reflection of the kingdom of Heaven" (*Mesechta Berachot 8a*). One who shows disrespect for the earthly reflection, he concludes, is guilty of slighting the kingdom of Heaven as well.

• Menachot 98a

THE BROKEN TABLETS

When Moshe came down from heaven after forty days and saw the people worshipping the golden calf they had made in his absence he smashed the sacred tables with the Ten Commandments etched upon them that G-d had given him. When he recounted these events to his people forty years later he mentioned that he was commanded by G-d to prepare new tablets and an Ark in which to place them. "And I shall write upon the tablets," said G-d, "the words which were on the first tablets which you broke, and you shall place them in the Ark." (*Devarim 10:2*)

The mention of the broken tablets next to the command to place their replacements in the ark led Rabbi Yosef to conclude that the fragments of the original tablets were placed in the Ark along with the new ones. From this he drew the lesson that one must be careful not to show disrespect for a Torah scholar who has unwillingly forgotten what he learned.

Rashi in *Mesechta Berachot (14b)* explains that the forgetting referred to here is the result of illness or the pressures of earning a livelihood. Such a Torah scholar is compared to the broken tablets because, like them, he once was a carrier of Torah information and is no longer. If G-d instructed Moshe to place the fragments of the broken tablets in the Ark rather than discard them He taught us that we must not discard a Torah scholar just because he no longer carries with him the Torah knowledge he once possessed. For this reason Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi warned his son (*ibid.*) to be careful to show respect for the Torah scholar whose circumstances turn him into broken tablets.

• Menachot 99a

The Weekly Daf

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PRAYER — IS ANYONE LISTENING?

From: Sharon in London

Dear Rabbi,

I realize that G-d controls everything. Therefore I pray to Him that He help me in whatever I do, even for the small, insignificant things. The problem is, He doesn't seem to hear. Why isn't G-d answering my prayers?

Dear Sharon,

It is very good that you realize the need to pray to G-d for help in whatever you do. Praying to G-d is a positive commandment mentioned many times in the Torah, for example "I command you this day...to serve [Me] with all your heart" (Deut. 11:13). Our sages clarified "What is service of the heart? It is prayer". We are particularly commanded to pray to Him for help in times of distress (Num. 12:9).

The Torah warns, "Beware...lest you say in your heart, 'my strength and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth'" (Deut. 8:17). We must remember that while we need to strive for what we want, ultimately our success is from G-d. Praying to Him for success helps us to remember this. Conversely, since success depends on G-d, He may decide, either for our own good or because we lack merit, not to answer our prayers.

The Talmud teaches that one who is persistent in his prayers will ultimately be answered. Expecting G-d to answer our prayers, though, is wrong, and can cause "heart pains" when the prayer goes unanswered. In such a case, what should one do? Our Sages suggest studying Torah, which will increase one's merit in order that the prayers be answered. Then pray again, as the verse suggests, "Wait on the Lord, strengthen your heart, and wait on the Lord" (Psalms 27:14).

That being said, often G-d answers and it is we who don't hear: Once a man fell overboard and was in danger of drowning. He prayed to G-d, "Save me." A man rowed by and offered to pull him aboard. "G-d will save me", he replied. A sailboat passed and threw him a rope. "G-d will save me". A large ship approached and lowered a ladder, "G-d will save me". Eventually the man drowned and, standing before the heavenly tribunal, demanded "I had faith in G-d, I prayed to Him, why didn't He answer me?" Came the reply, "He answered you three times but you weren't listening".

Sources:

- Shulcan Aruch, Orach Chaim, 106:1
- Rambam, Mishna Torah, Tefilla, 1:1
- Ramban, on Rambam's Sefer HaMitzvot, mitzvah 5, argues that the requirement to pray is rabbinic, and that the Torah commandment to pray is only in times of distress.
- Ta'anit 2a
- Berachot 32b, Maharsha

PUBLIC DOMAIN

Comments, quibbles and reactions concerning previous Ohrnet features

Re: Ohr Somayach and the Kiruv Movement

As an Ohrnet fan who greatly appreciates the impact of your publication and your educational facilities, I'd like to paraphrase some powerful statistics I recently read in a different publication.

"In the past 30 years more than 100,000 people have returned to old timeless Judaism. Through the doors of Ohr Somayach and Aish HaTorah yeshivot more than 25,000 people have come on their own to find their roots and meaning in life... a study done by an Orthodox and Conservative joint effort in 2001 shows that the number of those returning is three times greater than those leaving religion. And this does not take into account the number of non-Jews, in the thousands, who have converted to Orthodox Judaism and live

Torah lives."

• M. B.

Re: Holy and Kadosh (Ohrnet Vayishlach)

The last point in the article says that one who sacrifices his life for his belief in G-d, Torah, and the Commandments is *kadosh* and receives an elevated status in heaven. This should be made clear to reflect that this is a passive sacrifice and not an active sacrifice of one's life in their belief of G-d. Otherwise, one could believe from your words that Judaism would condone or look favorably on actions like the regular Arab/Muslim homicide bombings who believe their murder is for the sake of their G-d.

• S. G

THE TOMBSTONE'S TALE

Among the thousands of tombstones in the graveyard in the Israeli city of Holon, there is one that stands out in its beauty. It was placed there by a monument maker who did it not for profit but for a special reason. Following is the story behind this stone.

A monument maker who was running a successful business was approached by some drug dealers who offered him a lot of money if he would consent to have a substantial quantity of the illegal substance smuggled into the country in a shipment of his marble material. Unable to resist the temptation to make some easy money he succumbed. Before the shipment arrived, however, there was a feud among the gangsters and one of them reported the smuggling plan to the police. A sentence of 10 years in prison was the result of his foolish mistake.

During his prison term his mother passed away and he appeared one day in a local synagogue on leave from jail to say *kaddish* for her. Although he had hardly been observant before entering prison, his fall into such tragic circumstances moved him to become more serious about his faith. His lack of familiarity with observance was, however, still evident to

the worshippers who saw him clumsily turning pages in his prayer book. One Jew, the unofficial spiritual leader of the congregation, came over to him and patiently guided him in what he had to say and do. He even told him that he would arrange, at his own expense, a memorial gathering in the synagogue when the thirty-day mourning period ended and he wanted him to join it and say *kaddish*.

The convict's happy surprise at such consideration was surpassed only by the good news he received a few weeks later from the prison warden that, in deference to the request of a very respected Jew, he was being granted a leave to attend that memorial gathering. Upon his arrival there he profusely thanked his benefactor and promised to become his devoted disciple when he would be released.

Not only did he keep his promise but went on to become a lecturer on the subject of returning to religion and gained fame as the "drug dealer who repented". When the man who got him started on this new path in life passed away he showed his appreciation in a manner recalling his old trade. He arranged that the grave of his benefactor and mentor be honored with a most beautiful tombstone.

WHAT'S THE RIGHT THING TO DO?

REAL-LIFE QUESTIONS OF SOCIAL AND BUSINESS ETHICS

WHEN NOT TO BORROW

Question: May someone borrow money from an individual or from a Free Loan Fund although he has no foreseeable way of repaying the loan and relies only on "borrowing from Reuven to pay Shimon" or on some miracle to provide the money?

Answer: Borrowing money when you know how you are going to pay it back is an integral part of both business and domestic life. The Torah therefore urges Jews to lend money and one of the beautiful features of observant Jewish communities is the proliferation of Gemillat Chassadim (*gemach*) Free Loan funds.

The borrower who takes a loan from such a fund or from a friend must, however, do so only when he knows how he will pay back the loan — and on time! It is a wonderful thing to have faith that "Heaven will provide," but not at the expense of others.

When Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai, the great Talmudic Sage and head of the Sanhedrin, challenged his five outstanding disciples to identify the ideal path of human behavior and which path was the one to most carefully avoid, he received a variety of responses. One praised a good eye, others a good

heart, a good friend or a good neighbor, while Rabbi Shimon extolled the virtue of anticipating the outcome of one's actions. When it came to warning against negative courses each of the first four simply named the opposite of the positive — an evil eye, evil heart, evil friend or evil neighbor. Rabbi Shimon, however, did not condemn the one who fails to anticipate the result of his actions as we would have expected him to do, but rather directs his warning against one who borrows but fails to repay.

The explanation offered by the commentaries on *Pirkei Avot* where this advice appears is that Rabbi Shimon's position was that although it is a very positive thing to anticipate the outcome of one's actions, it is impossible to condemn one who is not so careful in his planning and relies on his ability to improvise should a crisis result from his lack of caution. Should one, however, borrow money without anticipating how he will repay the loan, such reckless reliance on improvisation will backfire on him, because when he will ever be in need of a loan again he will be unable to get one since he has lost his credibility. We may add to this the reflection that relying on improvisation or miracles at another's expense is certainly something to be avoided.