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PARSHA INSIGHTS

THE DUST OF GREATNESS

“Come, blessed of Hashem...”

About four decades ago in the nineteen sixties, there was a Hollywood hairspray ad whose slogan was, “*The closer you get, the better she looks!*” Judging by the model in the ad’s hairdo, this particular hairspray made motorcycle crash helmets redundant. (Could it be they were pitching their sales at Hell’s Angels?)

It always struck me that the closer you got to the rich and the beautiful, the less and less better they looked.

Unlike the denizens of Hollywood, to whom proximity usually reveals nothing but larger and larger flaws, the privilege of spending time with a true Torah sage demonstrates the closer you get — the better they look.

I met Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, *atzal*, just once. The meeting cannot have lasted more than 5 minutes. My grasp of Hebrew at the time was nearly negligible. However, when I left the room, I felt a different person. It was nothing he had said. He had barely looked at me. It came from merely being in his presence. I left his room with the dust of greatness on me.

The four species of Succot, the palm, the Etrog, the willow and the myrtle represent four kinds of Jews.

The etrog has a beautiful aroma and it tastes good. The etrog symbolizes a Jew who has both Torah wisdom and *mitzvot* performance.

The palm tree yields dates, which taste good, but the tree has no aroma. This symbolizes the Jew who has Torah but no *mitzvot*.

The myrtle has a beautiful aroma, but it has no taste. This is the Jew who has *mitzvot* but no Torah.

And finally, the willow, which has neither taste nor aroma; this is the Jew who has neither Torah nor *mitzvot*. Without this willow, however, one cannot perform the mitzvah of the four species – and without the “*arava* (willow) Jew”, the

Jewish People is not the Jewish People. It is not *klal Yisrael*.

The willow is essential to the wholeness of the Jewish People. By itself however, it has little or nothing to recommend it. Why then, during Succot, is the lowly willow accorded a special day of its own – Hoshana Rabba? Why does the willow, the least auspicious of the four species, have its own day? There is no “*Etrog Day*” or “*Lulav Day*” during Succot. What is so special about the willow that it merits its own special day?

Everything in this world recognizes itself by its opposite. A pigmy can never understand what small is, until he meets a Watussi giant. And someone on a low spiritual level can only recognize where he is when he meets someone great.

When Lavan saw Eliezer, he mistook him for Avraham Avinu. Eliezer was no Avraham Avinu, but to Lavan he was a spiritual giant. Through his encounter with Eliezer, Lavan recognized his own lowliness, and in doing so he was elevated to a point where his words had the power to change reality. For when Lavan said, “*Come, blessed of Hashem...*” Eliezer emerged from the curse of being a descendent of Canaan, and became in truth a “*baruch*”, a “blessed.”

The same is true of the willow. By being bound together with the other species and recognizing its lowliness it is elevated to the point that it has a power of its own, distinct from its role of completing the four species. The discovery of true self that comes through self-effacement and humility makes the willow worthy to have its own day in the festival.

Few things can be more depressing than realizing exactly how low we are spiritually; how far we are from where G-d wants us to be — how far we are from where we ourselves want to be.

And yet, that “willow moment” can unlock the key to true spiritual power.

• *Based on the Kotzker Rebbe quoted by the Shem MiShmuel in his essays on Hoshana Rabba*

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PARSHA OVERVIEW

Sarah, Mother of the Jewish People, passes on at age 127. After mourning and eulogizing her, Avraham seeks to bury her in the Cave of Machpela. As this is the burial place of Adam and Chava, Avraham pays its owner, Ephron the Hittite, an exorbitant sum. Avraham sends his faithful servant Eliezer to find a suitable wife for his son, Yitzchak, making him swear to choose a wife only from among Avraham's family. Eliezer travels to Aram Naharaim and prays for a sign. Providentially, Rivka appears. Eliezer asks for water. Not only does she give him water, but she draws water for all 10 of his thirsty

camels. (Some 140 gallons!) This extreme kindness marks her as the right wife for Yitzchak and a suitable Mother of the Jewish People. Negotiations with Rivka's father and her brother Lavan result in her leaving with Eliezer. Yitzchak brings Rivka into his mother Sarah's tent, marries her and loves her. He is then consoled for the loss of his mother. Avraham remarries Hagar who is renamed Ketura to indicate her improved ways. Six children are born to them. After giving them gifts, Avraham sends them to the East. Avraham passes away at the age of 175 and is buried next to Sarah in the Cave of Machpela.

ISRAEL Forever

A SECOND LOOK AT LEADERS

When the Patriarch Avraham negotiated with the Hittites for a plot in which to bury his deceased wife, he was accorded the greatest respect by the heathens possessing Hebron.

"You are a prince appointed over us by G-d," they said to him as they offered him the choice of any plot he desired.

This is how the dialogue between Avraham and the erstwhile landlords of the land promised to him is recorded in the Torah portion which will be read this week.

It is a timely reminder of how saintly people throughout history have glorified the Name of Heaven with their behavior and gained the respect of not only their own people but of non-Jews as well. This is a far cry from the way modern leaders, including those in Israel, have lost the respect due to their position because of their irresponsible personal and official behavior. Daily headlines of police investigations of prominent politicians can only lead to a disrespect of authority altogether.

The people of Israel deserve leaders of a higher moral caliber to secure Israel forever.

LOVE OF THE LAND - THE PLACES

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

BNEI R'AIM – RABBI AVRAHAM MORDECHAI

Near the city of Gedera in the south of Israel there is a well-known crossroads known as the R'aim Junction because of its proximity to Moshav Bnei R'aim.

R'aim is actually the abbreviation of **Rabbi Avraham Mordechai Alter**, the leader of the



Gerrer Chassidim also known as the Imrai Emes. This leader of hundreds of thousands of Polish Jews miraculously escaped the Holocaust and established his court in Jerusalem. He passed away during the Jordanian siege of Jerusalem in the War of Independence and was buried in the heart of the city.

לע"נ

ר' דוד בן ר' אהרן ז"ל

ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

PARSHA Q&A ?

1. Name the four couples buried in *Kiryat Arba*.
2. What did Sarah hear that caused her death?
3. What title of honor did the *B'nei Chet* bestow upon Avraham?
4. Where was Avraham born?
5. How were Avraham's camels distinguished?
6. What is meant by "all the good of his master in his hand?"
7. What special character trait did Eliezer seek when choosing a wife for Yitzchak?
8. Why did Avraham's servant, Eliezer, run toward Rivka?
9. Why did Lavan run to greet Eliezer?
10. When Lavan told Eliezer that the house was cleared out, what did he remove?
11. Who did Eliezer want Yitzchak to marry?
12. Aside from Eliezer, to which other people did Rivka offer to give water?
13. Lavan answered Eliezer before his father, Betuel, had a chance. What does this indicate about Lavan's character?
14. What did Rivka mean when she said "I will go"?
15. What blessing did Rivka's family give her before she departed?
16. Who was *Ketura*?
17. What gift did Avraham give to Yitzchak?
18. How old was Avraham when he died?
19. For how many years did Yaakov attend the Yeshiva of *Ever*?
20. How many times is Eliezer's name mentioned in this week's Parsha?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

1. 23:2 - Adam and Chava, Avraham and Sarah, Yitzchak and Rivka, Yaakov and Leah.
2. 23:2 - That Yitzchak was almost slaughtered.
3. 23:6 - Prince of G-d.
4. 24:7 - Ur Kasdim.
5. 24:10 - They were muzzled, so they wouldn't graze in the fields of others.
6. 24:10 - Eliezer carried a document in which Avraham gave all he owned to Yitzchak so that people would want their daughter to marry him.
7. 24:14 - He sought someone who excelled in performing acts of kindness.
8. 24:17 - He saw that the waters of the well rose when she approached.
9. 24:29 - Lavan coveted his money.
10. 24:31 - Idols.
11. 24:39 - His own daughter.
12. 24:44 - To the men who accompanied Eliezer.
13. 24:50 - That he was wicked.
14. 24:58 - I will go even if you don't want me to go.
15. 24:60 - That the blessings given to Avraham would continue through her children.
16. 25:1 - Hagar.
17. 25:5 - The power of blessing.
18. 25:7 - 175 years old.
19. 25:17 - 14 years.
20. None!

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LOVE of the LAND

VOLUME ONE - THE GLADSTONE EDITION

- Slaughtering on Yom Tov an animal in which a non-Jew is a partner
- Inviting a non-Jew for a Yom Tov meal
- Heating water for washing feet or making a fire for heat
- What can be done for one who forgot to make an *eiruv tavshilin*
- Putting together a candelabra and extinguishing a candle or fire
- Medical care on Shabbat and Yom Tov
- Limitation on baking on Yom Tov
- Sweeping and burning incense on Yom Tov and eating roast goat on Pesach eve
- The cow of Rabbi Eliezer ben Azariah's neighbor
- Scratching an animal's back with a comb
- Spice grinders and baby carriages
- What constitutes forbidden trapping of an animal on Yom Tov
- How to deal with things which were not trapped before Yom Tov
- Some counsel on eating meat and vegetables and drinking wine
- The positive aspect of Jewish *chutzpah*
- Things forbidden because of their non-holiday nature
- The *bechor* (first-born animal) that fell into a pit
- Examining the *bechor* on Yom Tov to see if it has any blemish
- The ban on moving an animal which died on Yom Tov

THE PROBLEM OF PARTNERSHIP

Slaughtering an animal, baking bread or doing other things that are permitted on Yom Tov for the sake of preparing food for consumption that day can only be done if the food is the property of a Jew. Rabbi Chisda distinguishes between slaughtering an animal that is half owned by a non-Jew and between baking dough in which a non-Jew is a partner. His explanation is that slaughtering is permitted because, since it is impossible to eat any part of the animal without slaughtering it, we view this act as being performed on behalf of the Jewish partner. A loaf of dough, however, can be divided, so that the Jew will bake only his half. To bake the other half together with his is considered as working on behalf of the non-Jew and is forbidden on Yom Tov.

Tosefot raises the question that this seems to run counter to what Rabbi Shimon ben Elazar ruled (*Beitzah* 17a) that a woman is permitted to fill the oven with dough for baking bread even if she needs only a portion of it. His rationale is that each individual loaf attains greater quality when the oven is thus full, so that this is considered as baking for Yom Tov. Why then do we not apply this concept to baking the entire dough partly owned by the non-Jew?

The answer given by Tosefot is that where the entire dough is owned by a Jew and he has the option of eating any of the breads baked in that full oven or offering them to his Jewish guests, it is considered as if he baked for the sake of Jewish consumption, which is not so in the case of part of the dough belonging to a non-Jew.

• *Beitzah* 21a

WHAT THE Sages SAY

“Why was the Torah given to the people of Israel? Because they are the boldest of nations.”

• *Rabbi Meir (Beitzah 25b)*

(Although our Sages tell us that G-d offered the Torah to all the nations, only Israel was chosen to be urged into acceptance by placing the mountain above them. — *Maharsha*)

SHARING TORAH, TAILING LIONS

From: Simon in England

Dear Rabbi,

I have been studying Torah close to two years. I am currently learning in an environment with relative beginners. Even though they are enthusiastic, I feel I have little patience to hear their ideas when I have already learned them before. Do I have to listen, or since it's a waste of my time, can't I just say I already know the Torah idea they're saying and go on with my own learning?

Dear Simon,

I commend you on your close to two-year commitment to learn Torah. May you have many more years of learning and fulfilling it with joy.

As I'm sure you've learned in your years of Torah study, a very integral part of learning Torah with joy is to share the learning experience with others.

Isolating oneself from others may lead one to arrogance and might also result in inaccurate, incomplete or even wrong understanding of the Torah. In this vein our Sages taught, "The Torah can only be acquired by learning with others, as is in the verse 'A sword is upon the *badim* (a Hebrew word implying separateness) and they shall become foolish; a sword is upon its mighty men, and they shall become dismayed' (Jer. 50:36). From this we learn that a sword is placed upon Torah scholars who learn alone...and what's more, they become foolish...and what's even more, they are transgressing..." (Berachot 63b).

Furthermore, one's learning should be directed toward teaching others and learning from them in the process. This is the spirit behind the teachings: "Who is wise? One who learns from every man" (Avot 4:1); "Much I have learned from my rabbis, even more from my colleagues, and the most from my students" (Ta'anit 7a); "One who learns in order to do is given the opportunity to learn, teach, observe and do" (Avot 4:5).

Learning in order to "do" includes learning in order to do acts of kindness. These acts of kindness should also be performed by teaching Torah to others and lis-

tening to their ideas as well. Thus our Sages, commenting on the verse "the kindness of Torah is on her lips," asked: Is there a Torah that is kind, and a Torah that is not kind? To which they reply that the kindness of Torah is referring to teaching others (Succah 51a).

Given all the above, if you are in a position that you know relatively more Torah than those around you, you should not separate yourself from the group; rather you should humbly share your knowledge and guide them along the Torah path. This is a very difficult task since there is an inclination to lure one into being arrogant, condescending and impatient with others. Therefore you should be careful to listen to what they have to say, share in their enthusiasm, and thereby make them feel good about themselves and the Torah they are learning. This is another way to express the kindness of Torah.

In addition, the fact that people share with you Torah ideas that you already know should not be a source of aggravation at all. Imagine a child repeating a very basic *parsha* point he learned in school – or even *alef-bet* – to his father. Would his father say, "Oh you're just learning that now? That's real basic, kid, I learned that twenty years ago." Of course not! He would be thrilled and overjoyed to hear his beloved son repeat the words of Torah he so loves. In a non-condescending way, the same should apply here as well. One who truly loves his fellow Jew and the Torah should be overjoyed when someone learns something new in Torah and wants to share it with others.

In fact, if we are really sensitive to others, we can learn something new even if they're saying something we "already know". Our Sages taught, "Just as people's faces are different, so their ideas are different". Just as no two people look exactly alike, every person's ideas, way of thinking, insights and way of expressing is novel. If we listen to others with humility and patience, we most certainly can enjoy viewing a familiar idea in a fresh new way that may open facets, or even vistas that we simply hadn't seen.

We repeat this teaching twice daily in the "Shema": "And it will be, if you **hearkened** you will **hearken** (*shamoa tishmeu*) to My commandments that I command you **this day...**" (Deut. 11:13). Rashi comments on the peculiar twice-mentioned "hearken" and emphasized "this day": "If you hearken to the old [i.e., if you

continued on page six

THE TUITION SQUEEZE AND SQUEAKS

Question: As the financial officer of my local Jewish Day School I am in charge of collecting tuition fees from parents of pupils. Because of the extreme difficulties of maintaining a balanced budget our Tuition Committee takes a very tough stand with parents who are reluctant to pay the amount demanded of them. A good friend of mine recently asked me to use my influence in getting the Committee to give him a break. I am aware that he is capable of paying full fees but wishes to save some money. What is the right thing to do?

Answer: Much has been written and discussed concerning the “tuition squeeze” which pits parents against tuition

committees. In general, the committees, which consist of serious laymen who devote time and energy to help keep the school afloat, do show consideration to parents who truly cannot afford the fees. Their battle is with those parents, like your friend, who have other ideas about where to spend their money and do not accord a high priority to paying for their child’s education.

Try to explain to your friend how difficult it is for the school to effectively serve his child if parents like him do not do their part to the best of their ability. Remind him as well that our Sages promise that whatever he spends on his child’s Torah education will not really cost him anything in the end.

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY _____

NEVER TOO LATE

A holiday visit from a former student brought tears to the eyes of his teacher. Brought up in a very secular home the visitor courageously returned to his Jewish roots, studied at Ohr Somayach and settled in Israel. His father came to Israel this past Succot to visit his son and grandchildren. As he entered their beautiful succah he was filled with emotion. For this ninety-year old American Jew

this was the first time in his life that he ever sat in a succah.

This was not his only first. The son introduced his father to the *mishna* dealing with the laws of succah, blending the theoretical and practical in a way that brought true joy to the heart of an old man.

Which once again proves that it’s never too late to learn and to do.

Ask! YOUR JEWISH INFORMATION RESOURCE - WWW.OHR.EDU _____

continued from page five

study what you have already learned], you will hearken to the new [i.e., you will have a new and deeper understanding]...and “this day” suggests that the commandments should always be to you as new, as though you had just heard them on this very day (Sifrei 11:32)”.

That being said, I must qualify that the above applies in general, and particularly as long as you remain in your current situation. However, you are certainly encouraged to find a more challenging learning environment. This is evident in the following teaching: “Rabbi Matya

the son of Charash would say, Be first to greet every man. Be a tail to lions, rather than a head to foxes” (Avot 4:15). At first glance, the juxtaposition seems odd, but in reality it may apply very well to you. As long as you are in a situation where your learning is above others, you must be humble and kind. But you should strive to be in a place where you’re tailing lions instead.

May God open our eyes and hearts to constantly appreciate the novelty of His Torah, and I hope to see you soon here in Yeshivat Ohr Somayach!