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PARSHA INSIGHTS

THE SECRET OF PERSUASION

"...and so that you may relate in the ears of your son and your son's son... that you may know I am G-d" (10:2)

A true story. After a presentation on Jewish outreach, a member of the audience approached the rabbi, "Rabbi, do you know I was able to bring a 92-year old lady back to Torah and *mitzvot*."

"Wow! How did you do that?" asked the rabbi.

"I own a nursing home, and this lady, Mrs. Greenberg, came to live there. Of course we ordered her kosher food.

A couple of weeks later, the state inspector for nursing homes came to check, and she complained to him, 'They don't give me normal food, here! They give me weird food. I want normal food like everyone else here.' The inspector called me in on the spot and said, 'This lady says you don't give her normal food.' So I replied, 'We're giving her better than normal food, we're giving her kosher food.'

'I don't want kosher, I want normal!' she said.

'But, Mrs. Greenberg, kosher food is better for your health.'

'You think, at ninety-two, I'm worried about cholesterol? Just give me normal food!'

'But, Mrs. Greenberg, kosher food tastes better.'

'At my age, you think I can taste anything? I just

want normal food like everyone else.'

'But, Mrs. Greenberg, kosher food is more expensive than regular food.'

'Keep the extra and just give me **NORMAL FOOD!**'

The inspector said to me, 'Listen, I'm coming back here in three months, and if you're not giving her the same food as everyone else, I'm going to close you down.'

So that's what happened, Rabbi, I persuaded her to eat kosher. Now she lights Shabbat candles and everything."

"Yes," said the rabbi, "but what did you say to her to convince her to change?"

"I have no idea. But, Rabbi, you're missing the point – he was going to **CLOSE ME DOWN!**"

The secret of persuasion is commitment.

"...and so that you may relate in the ears of your son and your son's son... that you may know I am G-d."

When you want someone else to accept what you tell him or her, you first have to be completely convinced it's true yourself. Only then will your words be accepted.

In order for our children, or elderly ladies for that matter, to be convinced of what we are saying — *"that you may relate in the ears of your son and your son's son"* — we first have to *"know I am G-d."*

• Ohel Yehoshua and a story heard from Mordechai Weissman

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PARSHA OVERVIEW

G-d tells Moshe that He is hardening Pharaoh's heart so that through miraculous plagues the world will know for all time that He is the one true G-d. Pharaoh is warned about the plague of locusts and is told how severe it will be. Pharaoh agrees to release only the men, but Moshe insists that everyone must go. During the plague, Pharaoh calls for Moshe and Aharon to remove the locusts, and he admits he has sinned. G-d ends the plague but hardens Pharaoh's heart, and again Pharaoh fails to free the Jews. The country, except for the Jewish People, is then engulfed in a palpable darkness. Pharaoh calls for Moshe and tells him to take all the Jews out of Egypt, but to leave their flocks behind. Moshe tells him that not only will they take their own flocks, but Pharaoh must add his own too. Moshe tells Pharaoh that G-d is going to bring one more plague, the death of the first-born, and then the Jews will leave Egypt. G-d again hardens Pharaoh's heart,

and Pharaoh warns Moshe that if he sees him again, Moshe will be put to death. G-d tells Moshe that the month of Nissan will be the chief month. The Jewish people are commanded to take a sheep on the 10th of the month and guard it until the 14th. The sheep is then to be slaughtered as a Pesach offering, its blood put on their door-posts, and its roasted meat eaten. The blood on the door-post will be a sign that their homes will be passed-over when G-d strikes the first-born of Egypt. The Jewish People are told to memorialize this day as the Exodus from Egypt by never eating *chametz* on Pesach. Moshe relays G-d's commands, and the Jewish People fulfill them flawlessly. G-d sends the final plague, killing the first-born, and Pharaoh sends the Jews out of Egypt. G-d tells Moshe and Aharon the laws concerning the Pesach sacrifice, *pidyon haben* (redemption of the first-born son) and *tefillin*.

ISRAEL Forever

ARISTOCRATIC FREEDOM

On the eve of their departure from Egypt and liberation from bondage, our ancestors were commanded to eat the *korban pesach* which they slaughtered that afternoon. In this week's Torah portion we read the rules given by their Divine Liberator as to how the meat of this sacrifice is to be prepared and eaten.

A common denominator of these rules, points out Rabbi Aharon Halevi in his classic *Sefer Hachinuch*, is to inculcate in these slaves on the threshold of freedom a sense of aristocracy. They must view themselves not as mere slaves escaping bondage but rather as princes cho-

sen by G-d to soon receive His Torah and be elevated to the status of "a nation of *kohanim* and a holy people".

There is an important lesson here for all of our people today in Israel and throughout the world. If we are privileged to enjoy freedom as Jews almost everywhere and to even have our independent land, we must behave as responsible aristocrats rather than as hedonists pursuing only physical pleasures and unfettered freedom.

If we internalize this Torah message of *noblesse oblige* we will deserve to enjoy the noble freedom of 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

OHR AKIVA – ECHO OF MARTYRDOM

Near Caesaria, on the northern costal plain between Tel Aviv and Haifa, is the city of Ohr Akiva. Named for the Talmudic Sage Rabbi Akiva who was martyred by the Romans in Caesarea, this is a community composed of immigrants to Israel.

The original settlers were North African Jews who



were transferred from an immigrant camp in nearby Hadera to the sand dunes of Caesarea. The massive immigration from the former Soviet Union brought many *olim* immigrants from the Caucasian region to Ohr Akiva and transformed the city into a Russian enclave.

PARSHA Q&A ?

1. What was Pharaoh's excuse for not releasing the Jewish children?
2. How did the locusts in the time of Moshe differ from those in the days of Yoel?
3. How did the first three days of darkness differ from the last three?
4. When the Jews asked the Egyptians for gold and silver vessels, the Egyptians were unable to deny ownership of such vessels. Why?
5. *Makat bechorot* took place at *exactly* midnight. Why did Moshe say it would take place at *approximately* midnight?
6. Why did the first-born of the animals die?
7. How did Moshe show respect to Pharaoh when he warned him about the aftermath of the plague of the first-born?
8. G-d told Moshe, "...so that My wonders will be multiplied" (11:9). What three wonders was G-d referring to?
9. Why did G-d command the mitzvah of Rosh Chodesh to Aharon, and not only to Moshe?
10. Up to what age is an animal fit to be a Pesach offering?
11. Prior to the Exodus from Egypt, what two *mitzvot* involving blood did G-d give to the Jewish People?
12. Rashi gives two explanations of the word "*Pasachti*." What are they?
13. Why were the Jews told to stay indoors during *makat bechorot*?
14. What was Pharaoh screaming as he ran from door to door the night of *makat bechorot*?
15. Why did Pharaoh ask Moshe to bless him?
16. Why did the Jewish People carry their matzah on their shoulders rather than have their animals carry it?
17. Who comprised the *erev rav* (mixed multitude)?
18. What three historical events occurred on the 15th of Nissan, prior to the event of the Exodus from Egypt?
19. What is the source of the "milk and honey" found in *Eretz Yisrael*?
20. The only non-kosher animal whose first-born is redeemed is the donkey. What did the donkeys do to "earn" this distinction?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

1. 10:11 - Since children don't bring sacrifices there was no need for them to go.
2. 10:14 - The plague brought by Moshe was composed of one species of locust, whereas the plague in the days of Yoel was composed of many species.
3. 10:22 - During the first three days the Egyptians couldn't see. During the last three days they couldn't move.
4. 10:22 - During the plague of darkness the Jews could see and they searched for and found the Egyptians' vessels.
5. 11:4 - If Moshe said the plague would begin exactly at midnight, the Egyptians might miscalculate and accuse Moshe of being a fake.
6. 11:5 - Because the Egyptians worshiped them as gods, and when G-d punishes a nation He also punishes its gods.
7. 11:8 - Moshe warned that "All these servants of yours will come down to me" when, in fact, it was Pharaoh himself who actually came running to Moshe.
8. 11:9 - The plague of the first-born, the splitting of the sea, the drowning of the Egyptian soldiers.
9. 12:1 - As reward for his efforts in bringing about the plagues.
10. 12:5 - One year.
11. 12:6 - Circumcision and *Korban Pesach*.
12. 12:13 - "I had mercy" and "I skipped."
13. 12:22 - Since it was a night of destruction, it was not safe for anyone to leave the protected premises of his home.
14. 12:31 - "Where does Moshe live? Where does Aharon live?"
15. 12:32 - So he wouldn't die, for he himself was a first-born.
16. 12:34 - Because the commandment of matzah was dear to them.
17. 12:38 - People from other nations who became converts.
18. 12:41 - The angels came to promise that Sarah would have a son, Yitzchak was born, and the exile of the "covenant between the parts" was decreed.
19. 13:5 - Goat milk, date and fig honey.
20. 13:13 - They helped the Jews by carrying silver and gold out of Egypt.

- The roles of the *aron*, ashes, sackcloth and graves in the prayer for rain
- The preacher and his message of Nineveh's repentance
- Qualifications for leader of the prayer service
- The prayer service in *Beit Hamikdash* and elsewhere
- Wine drinking and haircutting then and now
- The special days recorded in *Megillat Ta'anit* and the days before and after them
- The stories of the wicked Niknor and Turainis and the heroism of Lulainis and Papus
- Fasts for problems other than lack of rain
- The prayer of Choni HaMeagel for rain
- What determines a drought and a famine
- How Nakdimon ben Gurion secured water for the pilgrims to Jerusalem
- Three for whom the sun stopped
- Comparison of Jerusalem to a *nidah* and widow and the hidden blessing of disgrace
- The lesson an ugly man taught a sage
- Collapsed houses and the saintliness of some sages
- The saga of Rabbi Yochanan and the Sage Ilfa
- Nachum Gamzu who saw that all was for the good
- The magic weapons of the Patriarch Avraham
- What constitutes a plague for which to fast
- The saintliness of ordinary Jews and the very special blood-letter
- Rabbi Brokah of Chozai, the Prophet Eliyahu and the "citizens of the World-to-Come"
- Crop failure, wild animals, transient armies and too much rain

THROW AWAY THE DEAD RODENT!

What is considered a complete *teshuva* (repentance) for sin? A profound insight is offered in our *gemara* by Rabbi Ada bar Ahaba:

"One who has sinned and confessed his sin but has not really retracted is similar to one who has become ritually impure by holding on to a dead rodent and immerses himself in a *mikveh* to purify himself while still holding on to the dead rodent. He may immerse himself in all of the waters in the world but they will not purify him. Once he throws away the dead rodent, any *mikveh* will make him pure."

Rambam (Laws of *Teshuva* 2:3) uses this statement as a basis for his prescription for complete *teshuva* but uses the term "makes up his mind to abandon the sin" rather than "retracted" which appears in the *gemara*. This change may be understood in light of what he writes in

the preceding paragraph where he mentions the different components of *teshuva*: Regret for the past, verbal confession of the sin, and a resolution not to repeat it are all mentioned, but he also adds the need to "abandon the sin".

Retraction and regret are certainly vital to the process of *teshuva*, but if one does not analyze the root of the sin which he has committed – the underlying weakness of character which caused him to go wrong – he is indeed like one who attempts to achieve purity while holding on to the dead rodent which will contaminate him over and over. It is like someone who takes an aspirin to cure an illness that requires surgery.

Throw away the dead rodent, urges the Sage, and get rid of your problem so that you can achieve a complete return.

• *Ta'anit* 16a

WHAT THE Sages SAY

"One should always be as flexible as a reed and not as unyielding as a cedar. This is why a reed has merited to have made from it a quill to write a Sefer Torah, *tefillin* and *mezuzot*."

• Rabbi Elazar ben Shimon - *Ta'anit* 20b

KEEPING IT IN THE FAMILY

From: Josh in San Francisco

Dear Rabbi,

My family has not been religious for many generations. If maintaining tradition is important, I feel my most immediate family tradition is to be secular. The last person who was observant in my family was my great-grandfather, who I recently found out was a rabbi in a community in Europe. But that was such a long time ago, and really has no relation to me now. In your opinion, does the fact that Jews were religious in the "old country" have any bearing on the way we choose to live our lives now?

Dear Josh,

Four generations ago, most Jews across the globe were observant. Many lived this traditional way of life because that's how they were brought up. Because of persecution and economic hardship many Jews did not have an opportunity to bolster their childhood-ingrained belief with rigorous academic and intellectual study of Judaism. For this reason, when the winds of "isms" starting blowing through the world, many young Jews, lacking a strong basis in their Judaism, were led astray.

Still, the simple, heart-felt commitment of "*alte-zaides and bubbies*" – Jewish great-grandfathers and grandmothers – was passed on, albeit dormant, in the spiritual genes of their children. Now, four generation later, we are witnessing an unprecedented revival of interest among young Jews in Judaism. This dynamic of the return of the fourth generation is mentioned in traditional Jewish sources, and applies even more so in a case like yours where your reli-

gious forebears were rabbis.

This is evident from the following story:

About a hundred years ago, a rabbi from a family of rabbis immigrated to the Land of Israel and became the rabbi of one of the then nascent neighborhoods of Tel Aviv. One of his sons was swept up in the ardent fervor of the Zionist movement of those days, and eventually became a founding member of one of the most strongly communistic, anti-religious *kibbutzim* in Israel. He was one of the heads of the Zionist Movement, a signer of the Israel Declaration of Independence, head of the wing for indoctrinating Zionist youth, and a minister in the first government of Israel. His son and grandson were raised in this environment on the very same *kibbutz* that he founded.

After having grown up in this sheltered environment, the great-grandson came of age and entered the Israeli Army. There, his horizons were broadened and he met many different types of people that he never met before, including religious people. When they heard his last name, they revealed to him his lineage of illustrious rabbis. His curiosity sparked, he looked into the matter until he finally chose to renew his family's original tradition and became a rabbi himself.

Many years later he "happened" to meet a newly religious young man from none other than the very same *kibbutz* that the rabbi grew up on. The youth described the surge of interest in Judaism among the *kibbutz* members and young people, and asked the rabbi if he would come teach them Torah. How surprised the rabbi was when it turned out that the first class he gave was given on the day of the *yahrzeit* of his great-grandfather, the rabbi from Tel Aviv. Who knows if the soul of that saintly Jew was not pulling at the strings behind the scene in order to re-establish the original family tradition?

WHAT'S THE RIGHT THING TO DO?

REAL-LIFE QUESTIONS OF SOCIAL AND BUSINESS ETHICS

WHO IS TO BE BLAMED FOR LATENESS

Question: As a frequent user of buses in Jerusalem I often take advantage of the option given by the Egged Bus Company to pay a little more than the regular single fare in order to purchase a transfer ticket which enables me to board without charge another bus within an hour. It sometimes happens that the late arrival of that next bus causes my transfer ticket to technically be invalid although I am convinced that I have a right to use it. What is the right thing to do?

Answer: This question has been put to the Egged manage-

ment. Their response was that the regulations established by the government's supervisor of transportation form the terms of the contract between the bus company and the passenger. The regulation clearly states that there is an absolute limit of an hour in which the transfer ticket is valid for another ride.

The Egged spokesman noted, however, that the passenger who presents an honest case to the driver such as the one you describe can rely on the fairness of the driver to accept his excuse and honor the transfer ticket even though more than an hour has passed.

SHAMPOO AND THE JEWISH PROBLEM

“You didn’t shampoo your hair so we can’t operate!” This shocking statement was made by a nurse to the wife of the head of a Day School in Minneapolis who had not been given instructions on how to prepare herself for surgery.

The only way she would be able to avoid postponing the operation and remaining in the hospital an extra day was to rush out to a drugstore and purchase the required shampoo. But when she reached the nearby pharmacy she was disappointed to find it closed. After desperately banging on the door she was relieved to see a clerk open it, only to inform her that there was no way he could sell her anything since all the computerized cash registers

had been shut down.

Explaining her urgent need for the shampoo, the lady begged the clerk to give her a tube and promised that her husband would arrive at eight o’clock, opening time, on the next morning to pay for it. Her appeal touched the clerk’s heart and he consented.

The next morning her husband, a Slonimer *chassid* in traditional black garb, did indeed arrive at the designated hour to make payment. To his surprise, this created a hubbub among the clerks. They had made bets that morning as to whether he would actually come to pay. One clerk who lost the bet cried out, “It’s not fair. You didn’t tell us his wife was Jewish!”

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