



SHABBAT PARSHAT VAYEISHEV · 23 KISLEV 5769 · DEC. 20, 2008 · VOL. 16 NO. 9

PARSHA INSIGHTS

THE LIGHT OF TRUTH

“Then they brought Yosef to Egypt” (37:28)

Charisma in the eyes of secular society is a dangerous blessing for a Jewish leader. Someone who becomes the darling of the chattering classes walks a tightrope. On the one hand, the chattering can turn to gnashing when the fangs of anti-Semitism emerge quite suddenly from behind the gin-and-tonics.

On the other hand, the court Jew can find himself so enamored with his own brilliance and societal acceptance that he unknowingly betrays his heritage and promotes a counterfeit Judaism estranged from the Torah’s eternal truths. Currying favor with the media can be an overwhelming, if unconscious, temptation.

When a Jewish leader is overflowing with Torah like wine from a cup, however, no alien ideas will take hold in his worldview. There is simply no room for them to gain a foothold. The Torah is like a *mikveh* ritualarium that purifies and refines his thought process. When he is nothing but Torah he is immune to both the approbation and the opprobrium of secular society. His universe is the four cubits of halacha, all that is left of true spirituality in this world.

A Jewish leader lacking the Weltanschauung of deep Torah knowledge is a half-empty cup waiting to be filled with an alien brew.

In this week’s Torah portion Yosef begins his rise to power in Egypt. Yosef represents the ideal relationship between the Jew and society. He has the ear of the nation. He is celebrated and showered with accolades wherever he goes, but he never forgets Whom he represents.

There could have been no more difficult place to bring up Jewish children than Egypt three thousand years ago. And yet when a father blesses his son on Friday night, the universal paradigm of blessing is that his sons should be like Ephraim and Menashe, the two Egyptian-born (but far from bred) sons of Yosef.

Every Chanuka “contains” a Shabbat. Both Shabbat and Chanuka are “statements”. Every time we keep Shabbat, we are making the statement that there is a Creator who created everything in existence from nothing. This statement disputes the Greek contention that the world was always here. If the world was always here there can be no absolute.

Everything is relative. Ultimate good and bad have no meaning in a steady-state world, a world where there is no G-d. When you take G-d out of the world, things just are “better” or “worse” and dictated by pragmatism or sentiment. Without G-d, nothing is ultimately good or bad.

The symbol of Chanuka is the pure flask of oil hidden in the Holy of Holies. Chanuka is the festival of light, the unadulterated light that shines in our Holy Torah. Chanuka says that not only does absolute truth exist, but it exists in this world.

It’s exclusive, but it’s also available.

It’s exclusive because it exists only in the Torah, not in the Koran nor the New Testament nor the Bagavad Gita nor the Tibetan Book of the Dead. It’s only in the Torah.

Of all the places that a searching Jew looks for spirituality, the Torah is probably the last. Nowadays, all the holiest things are hidden. Nowadays, anything that smacks you in the eye is the opposite of the Truth.

If you look hard enough, however, if you seek it like pearls and precious stones, there is absolute truth in this world.

That truth was clear for all to see when it shone once at the dawn of Creation in the “hidden light” and was sequestered for the righteous in a future world. That same light shines on in the lights of Chanuka.

And, most of all, it shines on in the depths of our Holy Torah.

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Yaakov settles in the land of Canaan. His favorite son, Yosef, brings him critical reports about his brothers. Yaakov makes Yosef a fine tunic of multi-colored woolen strips. Yosef exacerbates his brothers' hatred by recounting prophetic dreams of sheaves of wheat bowing to his sheaf, and of the sun, moon and stars bowing to him, signifying that all his family will appoint him king. The brothers indict Yosef and resolve to execute him. When Yosef comes to Shechem, the brothers relent and decide, at Reuven's instigation, to throw him into a pit instead. Reuven's intent was to save Yosef. Yehuda persuades the brothers to take Yosef out of the pit and sell him to a caravan of passing Ishmaelites. Reuven returns to find the pit empty and rends his clothes. The brothers soak Yosef's tunic in goat's blood and show it to Yaakov, who assumes that Yosef has been devoured by a wild beast. Yaakov is inconsolable. Meanwhile, in Egypt, Yosef has been sold to Potiphar,

Pharaoh's Chamberlain of the Butchers. In the Parsha's subplot, Yehuda's son Er dies as punishment for preventing his wife Tamar from becoming pregnant. Onan, Yehuda's second son, then weds Tamar by levirate marriage. He too is punished in similar circumstances. When Yehuda's wife dies, Tamar resolves to have children through Yehuda, as this union will found the Davidic line culminating in the *Mashiach*. Meanwhile, Yosef rises to power in the house of his Egyptian master. His extreme beauty attracts the unwanted advances of his master's wife. Enraged by his rejection, she accuses Yosef of attempting to seduce her, and he is imprisoned. In jail, Yosef successfully predicts the outcome of the dream of Pharaoh's wine steward, who is reinstated, and the dream of Pharaoh's baker, who is hanged. In spite of his promise, the wine steward forgets to help Yosef, and Yosef languishes in prison.

ISRAEL Forever

A GIFT WITH STRINGS ATTACHED

“**Y**aakov wished to finally enjoy some peace in Eretz Yisrael and there came upon him the trouble concerning Yosef.”

This is Rashi's commentary on the very first passage of this week's Torah portion.

Although Rashi, citing the words of our Sages, applies this to the concept of the constant challenges that Heaven poses to the righteous, we may perhaps see in it a hint to the situation of Yaakov's descendants, the Jewish People who live in Eretz Yisrael.

This can be understood in light of the statement of our

Talmudic Sages that Eretz Yisrael is one of the three wonderful gifts that G-d gave to our people but that it comes with strings attached – the suffering that we must endure.

Maharsha explains that suffering is an inseparable part of life in Eretz Yisrael because this is what reminds us of our dependence on G-d and prevents us from becoming obsessed with our own national achievements.

This is an important perspective for Jews in Israel who suffer from terrorism and the threat of a nuclear enemy. Our response to internalize our total dependence on G-d is what will eliminate that suffering and 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

SHECHEM – FULFILLMENT OF A WISH

“**M**y brothers, you stole me alive from Shechem. I beg you to return my bones to there.” Tradition has it that this is what Yosef asked of his brothers before his death.

Just as Yosef, in his position as chief advisor to the Egyptian ruler, arranged for the remains of his father, the Patriarch Yaakov, to be taken from Egypt for burial in Eretz Yisrael, so too did he make prepara-



tions for the same honor to be accorded to him. In making his request to his brothers he reminded them that their descendants would eventually be redeemed by G-d from Egyptian exile, and asked that when they leave they should take along his bones for burial in Eretz Yisrael.

During their forty years in the wilderness the Children of Israel carried Yosef's casket, and when they finally entered Yisrael they fulfilled his wish by burying him in Shechem.

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PARSHA Q&A ?

1. "These are the offspring of Yaakov: Yosef..." Give three reasons why Yosef is considered Yaakov's main offspring.
2. What was praiseworthy about the fact that Yosef's brothers did not speak to him in a friendly manner?
3. How do we see from Yosef's dream about the sun, moon and stars that all dreams contain some untrue element?
4. Who brought Yosef down to Egypt?
5. Where was Reuven when Yosef was sold?
6. In addition to the brothers, who else knew that Yosef was alive?
7. Why didn't G-d reveal prophetically to Yaakov that Yosef was alive?
8. For how long did Yaakov mourn the loss of Yosef?
9. Verse 37:35 states "his father wept." To whom does this refer?
10. Who was Tamar's father?
11. In what merit did Tamar deserve to have kings as her descendants?
12. Why is the word "hand" mentioned four times in connection to the birth of Zerach?
13. Why does the Torah relate the incident with Potiphar's wife immediately after the incident of Yehuda and Tamar?
14. How did Potiphar "see" that G-d was with Yosef?
15. Who in this week's Parsha pretended to be sick?
16. Why were the butler and the baker imprisoned?
17. For how long were the butler and the baker in prison?
18. How did the baker know that Yosef had correctly interpreted the butler's dream?
19. What prompted the butler and baker to tell Yosef their dreams?
20. How was Yosef punished for asking the butler for help?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this week's Questions!

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

1. 37:2 - (a) Yosef was the son of Rachel, Yaakov's primary wife. (b) Yosef looked like Yaakov. (c) All that befell Yaakov befell Yosef.
2. 37:4 - They did not act hypocritically.
3. 37:10 - The moon represented Rachel. Since she had already died, it was impossible for that element of the dream to come true.
4. 37:28 - A caravan of Midianites.
5. 37:29 - He was attending to Yaakov.
6. 37:33 - Yitzchak.
7. 37:33 - Because the brothers had issued a ban against revealing the truth to Yaakov, and G-d, so to speak, abided by their ban.
8. 37:34 - Twenty-two years.
9. 37:35 - Yitzchak, who wept because of Yaakov's suffering.
10. 38:24 - Shem.
11. 38:26 - In the merit of her modesty.
12. 38:30 - To allude to his descendent, Achan, who sinned with his hand by taking four things from the spoils of Jericho.
13. 39:1 - To teach us that just as Tamar acted with pure motives, so did Potiphar's wife.
14. 39:3 - Yosef mentioned G-d's name frequently in his speech.
15. 39:11 - Potiphar's wife.
16. 40:1 - The butler was imprisoned because a fly was found in the king's goblet, and the baker was imprisoned because a pebble was found in the king's bread.
17. 40:4 - Twelve months.
18. 40:5 - The baker dreamed the interpretation of the butler's dream.
19. 40:6 - Yosef asked them why they looked troubled.
20. 40:23 - He remained in prison an additional two years.

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- Problems arising from doubts as to when change of a status took place
- Credibility of a man returning from abroad and claiming that those with him are his wife and children
- The prohibition of *yichud* – being alone with a woman
- How some Sages went to extremes in avoiding *yichud*
- Satanic temptations for saintly Sages
- *Yichud* with mother, daughter or sister
- The problem of singles as teachers of children
- Occupations that increase contact with women
- Teaching a son how to make a livelihood or to study Torah

FESTIVAL AFTERMATH

The final pages of our *mesechta* deal with the restrictions that the Torah and the Talmudic Sages instituted on contact between men and women.

There is a custom of fasting on the Monday, Thursday and Monday following the Festivals of Pesach and Succot. In many communities even those who do not fast add special *slichot* prayers to the morning services.

The source for this custom is traced to our *gemara* in which we learn that the most vulnerable times of the year

regarding the danger of improper contact between men and women are the festivals. Both Rashi and *Tosefot* point out that since both men and women would come to hear the public Torah lectures given during the holidays they would inevitably look at each other or discuss what they had heard. Since this could lead to improper relations between the sexes, concludes *Tosefot*, there was a need to do something as an atonement following the festival. Thus was born the custom of BaHaB (2,5,2) - Monday, Thursday, Monday fasting and *selichot* prayers.

• *Kiddushin 81a*

What the SAGES Say

“Unlike any occupation which cannot provide for one in his old age, I will teach my son Torah which provides for him in his youth and offers him a future and hope in his old age.”

• *Rabbi Nehorai - Kiddushin 82b*

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CHANUKA FOR WOMEN

From: Jill in Toronto

*Dear Rabbi,
What is the special connection of women to Chanuka? In particular, why do women customarily rest or refrain from work while the candles are burning when this candle lighting, as opposed to Shabbat, is done by the men?*

Dear Jill,

The main reason women rest while the candles are burning is because after slaving in the kitchen all day to make latkes and doughnuts, they deserve a break. Just kidding (about the reason that is, not about deserving a break).

The main reason is that as opposed to Shabbat where the women work in preparation and light the candles while the men do nothing to help, on Chanuka the men work to light and the women get a chance to relax. Just kidding (about the reason that is, not about men not helping enough for Shabbat).

And now for the real reason...

The very name of Chanuka implies resting, relaxing or refraining from difficult or mundane tasks. How so? Chanuka can be read as two phrases: 'Chanu' and 'ka'. 'Chanu' means "they rested" and 'ka' is comprised of the letters 'kaf' and 'hey' which together have the numerical value of 25. This alludes to the fact that the Jews were relieved of their oppression on the 25th day of the month

of Kislev, which is Chanuka.

Although all Jews experienced respite from Hellenistic repression, women in particular experienced a great relief, and also figured prominently in the redemption of Chanuka itself.

But in what way did women particularly suffer and in what manner did they participate in the miracle?

Despite the Greeks' stated purpose of battling the spirituality of Judaism in the name of "enlightened" Hellenism, one decree in particular was physical: Every Jewish woman who was to be married was to be brought first to the Greek ruler. This very ugly and degrading decree prevented many righteous women from becoming wives, or compromised others before they did.

In this context, the redemption came about through the heroism of a woman. Yehudit, daughter of Yochanan the High Priest and sister of Judah the Maccabee, was especially beautiful and the tyrant ruler desired her. Pretending to acquiesce, she came to him and first fed him cheese dishes which made him thirsty (the source for eating dairy foods on Chanuka). She then brought him wine to quench his thirst. When he became drunk and fell asleep, she beheaded him and displayed the prize above the city walls. When the enemy soldiers saw the head of their decapitated leader, they fled and the Jews were saved.

It is for this reason, then, that women in particular simultaneously rest and reflect on the relief and redemption that the Chanuka lights reflect. And, by the way, it is similarly for this reason that not only men, but also women have a mitzvah to light the Chanuka menorah.

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WHO ANSWERS FIRST?

Question: As a teacher I regularly challenge my class to answer a question which I raise. Sometimes it is a lone hand that is raised, but there are occasions when a flurry of hands go up in the air. This challenges me with making a decision as to which of my responding students to call upon. What is the right thing to do?

Answer: Although there is really no more of a right for one over the others, there is a consideration that you should keep in mind. As a sensitive teacher you are certainly inter-

ested in developing the self-confidence of each and every student. If you notice among the raised hands one that belongs to a student who rarely rises to the challenge, you should certainly show him preference.

But what if the answer he gives is incorrect?

Your response must be that his effort was a good try but didn't provide the full answer, and that perhaps one of the others will be able to complete the answer.

Remember that the way you treat your students can have an impact on them for a lifetime.

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY _____

HOLD BACK THAT NAME

A renowned young Torah scholar in Bnei Brak passed away, leaving behind a widow and many orphans. A short while after his passing a boy was born to his son. As the family prepared for the *brit mila* it was assumed by all that the child would be named for his recently deceased grandfather. Surprisingly, however, this widowed mother had other ideas. The night before the *brit* she asked her son what name he intended to call his child. When he informed her that the name would be that of his father she burst into tears and said that she was opposed. To her shocked son she explained that if the child would bear her husband's name,

every time she would see her grandchild she would be reminded of her tragedy and would cry.

When the question of what to do was posed to HaGaon Rabbi Chaim Kanievsky, he ruled that the mother's objection be respected. In regard to giving a name for the father, this would constitute honoring a parent, something which is done even after death. But in regard to the widow, the issue is causing pain. Whenever one must choose between giving honor or causing pain, he concluded, the decision must be in favor of avoiding causing pain.

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LOVE of the LAND

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“Ima. Ima,” cried little Moishe Holzberg in the middle of a solemn memorial ceremony held in a Mumbai synagogue for the Jews slain in the Chabad House of that city.

RABBI MENDEL WEINBACH

Where are the answers?

Reflections on the Mumbai Massacre

There was no answer to his call because both parents of Moishe, who turned two during that fateful weekend, were among the victims of that massacre.

There are no real answers to the questions that inevitably arise when tragedy strikes an individual or a community.

Every tragedy, whether it is as minor as the loss of savings and employment because of the current financial crisis or as major as the Mumbai 9/11, is a challenge to our faith in G-d. An awareness that everything that happens is Heavenly decreed eliminates the need to find answers to questions such as “Why couldn’t it have been avoided?” A firm belief that “Whatever the Merciful G-d does is for the best” makes it foolish to seek answers to the question, “Why did it happen to such righteous Jews?”

One question, however, will certainly be asked and it deserves an answer. “How long must we suffer?”

A scene described in the Torah addresses this question.

The Patriarch Yaakov, on his way out of Eretz Yisrael, has a prophetic dream in which he sees a ladder with its feet on the ground and its top reaching heaven, with angels of G-d going up and down the ladder. The Midrash explains that these angels were the guardian angels of the Four Kingdoms that would ascend to dominate Israel. Each angel climbed a number of rungs corresponding to the years that the Jewish People would be under their dominion and then descending as that exile ended. Babylon’s angel climbed 70 rungs before coming down. The angel of Persia – Media climbed 52, and that of Greece 130. But the angel of Edom, the final exile, kept on climbing,

and Yaakov was frightened that there would be no end to their exile. G-d, who stood above Yaakov in the dream, assured him that no matter to what heights of power the enemies of Israel would reach, they would inevitably be brought down to destruction.

The difference between the first three exiles and the final one, of which Yishmael Islamic extremism is a subsidiary, is that no definitive time has been set for its termination. This is symbolized by Yaakov failing to see the guardian angel of that exile descending, causing him to ask, “How long will this last?”

Our tradition is that although Heaven has indeed set a time beyond which this exile cannot last, there is also the possibility of Jews hastening its end through their merits.

Perhaps our answer to the question of how long we must suffer from terrorism, nuclear-armed enemies and all the other threats to our people and the entire world depends on our perpetuating the holy work of those martyrs who lost their lives in Mumbai. The outreach efforts of the Chabad *shlichim* Rabbi Gavriel and Rivkah Holzberg, may G-d avenge their blood, must be intensified by all the outreach organizations throughout the world. The heroic efforts of Rabbis Teitelbaum and Kroman for providing supervision of the manufacture of kosher food in far-away places should inspire all Jews to be more careful in regard to what they may or may not eat.

The answer to how long our suffering will last depends on us. In this light we must view the Mumbai tragedy as an alarm to wake up to our responsibilities, an arousal that will hopefully prevent something like the recent tragedy ever happening again.

It's that time again. . .

Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

Everybody loves Chanuka. The smell of the burning candles mixed with the aroma of frying latkes is quite intoxicating. The thought of the presents that will be unwrapped and the looks of glee on the faces of the children (and sometimes the adults too) is enough to make any parent smile with anticipation. In fact, one of my childhood memories of Chanuka is that I and my siblings all chipped in together to buy an enormous box of assorted chocolates for our parents (a kind of role-reversal, I suppose, children buying presents for parents). Of course, we had our own agenda. Together with wanting to give a special present we also wanted to be able to help eat it together with them!

But what is it that makes Chanuka so popular? After all, the chance to gorge on oil-saturated foods doesn't seem to be such a compelling reason (please don't misunderstand me, I am just as keen on latkes as the next person), and there are many other occasions in the year when we can both give and receive gifts. So what is it about Chanuka that has everyone so filled with anticipation and excitement?

Perhaps the answer can be found in a statement of the Rabbis: "When a person comes to perform a mitzvah he should do so with a joyful heart". The message is simple. If we want to connect to G-d, if we want to feel a spiritual awakening, we must do it with verve and energy. We must *want* to do it, not feel that we *have* to do it. And, maybe, that is what makes Chanuka so unique. We wait for this time of the year to light the Chanuka lights (and, yes, eat the latkes too) and to see the looks of joy light up our childrens' faces as they also perform the mitzvah.

Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler, one of the greatest Jewish thinkers from the last generation, explains this idea in the following way. The feelings of sanctity and holiness are supposed to grow as the days of Chanuka pass by. That is why we add a new light for every day until we reach the climax of the holiday on the last night, with eight Chanuka lights pouring out their pure and bright message to the world. We are supposed to build and grow and reach a level of understanding of the Divine Providence that will support us and carry us through the travails of the year.

Unfortunately, being human, in reality there is a tendency not to feel like this. We may tend to become somewhat blasé as we repeat the same procedure night after

night after night. Prepare the lights. Light the lights. How can we combat those feelings of merely going through motions and perfunctory performance of the mitzvah of lighting that can creep into our spiritual lives? I think that the answer lies with our children.

There is a story told about the son of a famous Rabbi who was rather a boisterous child. Once his father was contemplating the mystical significance of the Chanuka lights and was so distressed at the fact that we no longer have the Holy Temple and the Golden Menorah that he began to cry bitter tears. Where was his son while this was happening? Outside running around wildly, laughing and singing. One of his father's followers came and asked the boy whether he really thought it fitting that while his father was crying his heart out he was running around without a care in the world.

The boy replied, "Why shouldn't he cry? After all he has a son like me! But I have every reason to be carefree and full of joy because I have a father like him!"

That exuberance is something that we are sorely in need of. The childrens' enthusiasm doesn't wane. In fact, it is quite the opposite. They wait with bated breath for each new night, and they count the lights with a certain thrill, because they know that each new night brings a novelty with it. That is something that we need to try and emulate.

The French have a phrase to describe the thrill of life: "joie de vivre". We also have a phrase that describes the real thrill of living, the essence of life. It is called "*Avodat Hashem*". The dedication of ourselves, not to hedonistic pleasures, but to closeness to G-d and to trying to become better people. Chanuka seems to be a very apt place to begin the task. Let's learn from our children. Let's learn how to overcome our ennui. Let's relearn how to be enthusiastic about life. Let's conjure up that feeling of exhilaration that children have when running around wildly, laughing and singing.

Then let's apply that to the way we approach our relationship with G-d.

I am not suggesting that, when we light the Chanuka lights this year, we need to physically dash around the room hooting loudly and driving the "adults" to distraction.

But, perhaps, in your mind, it's not such a bad idea.