

SHABBAT PARSHAT BESHALACH · 15 SHVAT 5770 · JAN. 30, 2010 · VOL. 17 NO. 16

PARSHA INSIGHTS

LIFE'S RICH TAPESTRY

“Then Moses and the Children of Israel chose to sing this song to G-d.” (15:1)

As a young boy, I remember my mother weaving a tapestry of Gainsborough’s “The Boy In Blue”. It took her forever. One day, shortly before she finished it, I remember picking it up and thinking to myself. “Mommy, forgive me. You’re maybe the best mother in the world, but when it comes to needlework, well, this is a mess! There’s a piece of red sticking out here. Over here, there’s a turquoise thread that seems to go nowhere.” The whole thing looked more like Bauhaus than Gainsborough.

Suddenly, my fingertips detected smooth regular stitching on the other side of the tapestry. I turned the tapestry over and saw the most beautiful sight: an exquisite and precise copy of Gainsborough’s “Boy in Blue”. The stitches were so regular and well formed. The colors all blended so beautifully together. A divine tapestry! All the disjointed threads that I saw on the other side of the tapestry harmonized into a complete and beautiful whole.

Sometimes we can view life’s rich tapestry from the wrong side

Sometimes it’s very difficult to make sense of world events. It’s difficult to believe that the world is being run by Someone. You wonder how things could be part of a Divine coherent plan. You hear about earthquakes and terrible suffering, and you wonder how this can be the handiwork of a Merciful G-d.

Don’t think you’re alone if you feel like that.

You’re in good company. Because one of the greatest men who ever lived felt exactly like you.

Moses, our greatest teacher, himself had his questions about how G-d was “running the show”. In last week’s public Torah reading, Moses went to Pharaoh to ask him to let the Jewish People go. Pharaoh, as you may remember, was not the easiest of negotiating partners. In reply to Moses’ request, Pharaoh told the taskmasters to stop giving the Jews straw. However the Jews were still required to produce the same quantity of bricks as before. Not surprisingly,

the Jews complained bitterly to Moses. So Moses went back to G-d and said, “My L-rd, why have You done evil to this people, why have You sent me? From the time I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your Name, he did evil to this People, but You did not rescue Your people.”

Moses wasn’t just complaining about the problems he was having now with Pharaoh. He was saying that “from the time” — from its very beginning — the whole plan to take the Jews out of Egypt was fatally flawed. He was saying to G-d that he didn’t see any order in what was going on.

When you look at life’s rich tapestry from the wrong side it looks like a complete mess. Moses didn’t see the Divine needlework of the Creator. He was looking at events from the wrong perspective. However the same word that Moses used to complain to G-d, he repeated in G-d’s praise when he saw the perfection of the Divine Plan. The Midrash says that just as Moses erred with the expression “me’az” — “from the time” — so too with that same word, “az”, Moses rectified his mistake.

After the Jewish People emerged from the splitting of the sea, they saw the mighty Egyptian army strewn across the beach like so many broken toy soldiers. It was there that every Jew, from the greatest to the most humble, reached a level of insight into the workings of the world that has never been repeated.

This perception moved Moses and the children of Israel to song. Song in Jewish thought represents the ability to harmonize all the disparate events in our world and plug them back into the One. G-d is One.

“Then — “az” — Moses and the children sang a song.”

That song is part of the prayers we say every single day of the year. Maybe one of the reasons we say it every day is to remind ourselves that when life seems like a bad attempt at modern art, we must know that there is a Supernal Artist weaving life’s rich tapestry.

And not a single thread is without design and beauty.

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Pharaoh finally sends *Bnei Yisrael* out of Egypt. With pillars of cloud and fire, G-d leads them toward *Eretz Yisrael* on a circuitous route, avoiding the *Pelishtim* (Philistines). Pharaoh regrets the loss of so many slaves and chases the Jews with his army. The Jews are very afraid as the Egyptians draw close, but G-d protects them. Moshe raises his staff and G-d splits the sea, enabling the Jews to cross safely. Pharaoh, his heart hardened by G-d, commands his army to pursue, whereupon the waters crash down upon the Egyptian army. Moshe and Miriam lead the men and women, respectively, in a song of thanks. After three days' travel only to find bitter waters at Marah, the people complain. Moshe

miraculously produces potable water. In Marah they receive certain *mitzvot*. The people complain that they ate better food in Egypt. G-d sends quail for meat and provides manna, a miraculous bread that falls from the sky every day except Shabbat. On Friday a double portion descends to supply the Shabbat needs. No one is able to obtain more than his daily portion, but manna collected on Friday suffices for two days so the Jews can rest on Shabbat. Some manna is set aside as a memorial for future generations. When the Jews again complain about a lack of water, Moshe miraculously produces water from a rock. Then Amalek attacks. Joshua leads the Jews in battle while Moshe prays for their welfare.

ISRAEL Forever

A SONG FOR OUR TIME

The Shabbat in which we read *Parshat Beshalach* is known as *Shabbat Shirah* (The Shabbat of Song) because it contains the song of praise to Heaven sung by Moshe and the Children of Israel upon experiencing the miracle of the crossing of Yam Suf.

A particular phrase of that Divinely-inspired song calls attention to the "terror which gripped the dwellers of

Philistia" (*Shmot* 15:14).

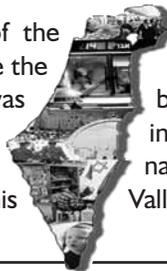
At a time when those who today call themselves Palestinians seek to sow terror, we must take comfort in the knowledge that, like the Philistines of old, they too will eventually be gripped with terror as the Creator who gave us *Eretz Yisrael* secures Israel forever.

LOVE OF THE LAND - THE PLACES

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

KEFAR BLUM – TRIBUTE TO A PRISONER

When Leon Blum, the Jewish leader of the Socialist Movement in France and twice the prime minister of his country, was interned in a German camp during World War Two, some people in Palestine decided to encourage him by naming a new kibbutz in his



honor.

Kfar Blum was thus founded in November 1943 by mostly immigrants from English-speaking countries in the eastern part of Upper Galilee. It is famous for its nature house exhibiting plant and animal life in the Hula Valley.

לע"נ

הרה"ח ר' שמואל בן ר' יהודה ז"ל

ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

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PARSHA Q&A ?

1. What percentage of the Jewish People died during the plague of darkness?
2. Why did the oath that Yosef administered to his brothers apply to Moshe's generation?
3. Why did the Egyptians want to pursue the Jewish People?
4. Where did the Egyptians get animals to pull their chariots?
5. What does it mean that the Jewish People "took hold of their fathers' craft" (*tafsu umnut avotam*)?
6. How did G-d cause the wheels of the Egyptian chariots to fall off?
7. Why were the dead Egyptians cast out of the sea?
8. To what future time is the verse hinting when it uses the future tense of "Then Moshe and *Bnei Yisrael* will sing"?
9. Why are the Egyptians compared to stone, lead and straw?
10. The princes of Edom and Moav had nothing to fear from the Jewish People. Why, then, were they "confused and gripped with trembling?"
11. Moshe foretold that he would not enter the Land of Israel. Which word in the parsha indicates this?
12. Why is Miriam referred to as "Aharon's sister" and not as "Moshe's sister"?
13. The Jewish women trusted that G-d would grant the Jewish People a miraculous victory over the Egyptians. How do we see this?
14. Which sections of the Torah did the Jewish People receive at Marah?
15. When did *Bnei Yisrael* run out of food?
16. What lesson in *derech erez* concerning the eating of meat is taught in this week's Parsha?
17. How did non-Jews experience the taste of the manna?
18. The Prophet Yirmiyahu showed the Jewish People a jar of manna prepared in the time of Moshe. Why?
19. Which verse in this week's parsha alludes to the plague of blood?
20. Why did Moshe's hands become heavy during the war against Amalek?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

1. 13:18 - Eighty percent (four-fifths).
2. 13:19 - Yosef made his brothers swear that they would make their children swear.
3. 14:5 - To regain their wealth.
4. 14:7 - From those Egyptians who feared the word of G-d and kept their animals inside during the plagues.
5. 14:10 - They cried out to G-d.
6. 14:25 - He melted them with fire.
7. 14:30 - So that the Jewish People would see the destruction of the Egyptians and be assured of no further pursuit.
8. 15:1 - Resurrection of the dead during the time of *mashiach*.
9. 15:5 - The wickedest ones floated like straw, dying slowly. The average ones suffered less, sinking like stone. Those still more righteous sunk like lead, dying immediately.
10. 15:14 - They felt horrible seeing Israel in a state of glory.
11. 15:17 - "*T'vi-aimo...*" — "Bring them" (and not "bring us").
12. 15:20 - Aharon put himself at risk for her when she was struck with *tzara'at*. (See *Bamidbar 12:12*)
13. 15:20 - They brought musical instruments with them in preparation for the miraculous victory celebration.
14. 15:25 - Shabbat, Red Heifer, Judicial Laws.
15. 16:1 - 15th of Iyar.
16. 16:8 - One should not eat meat to the point of satiation.
17. 16:21 - The sun melted whatever manna remained in the fields. This flowed into streams from which animals drank. Whoever ate these animals tasted manna.
18. 16:32 - The people claimed they couldn't study Torah because they were too busy earning a livelihood. Yirmiyahu showed them the manna saying: "If you study Torah, G-d will provide for you just as he provided for your ancestors in the desert."
19. 17:5 - "And your staff with which you smote the river...."
20. 17:12 - Because he was remiss in his duty, since he, not Yehoshua, should have led the battle.

- Problem of empty space between text of document and signature of witnesses
- Erasure in text or by signatures
- Subtle use of the evil tongue
- When a tied document is written instead of a regular one and vice versa
- How many witnesses are required on either document
- Deciphering the amount of the loan written in a document in unclear fashion
- When there is a conflict between amount written on top and one written on bottom
- The Sage who outwitted a suspected forger
- Who pays for the writing of a document
- Whether an exaggerated commitment is binding
- Certifying a loan document or a document of sale which became erased
- Can one party impose on the other the need to guard a receipt

THE HAPPY BUYER

When a field is being sold it is the buyer who must pay the scribe to write the document of sale. This ruling of the *mishna* seems superfluous since the responsibility for paying for the writing of a document is always that of the party gaining the greater benefit, as we see in the cases of a divorce document or a loan.

The explanation given by the *gemara* for stating this rule is that it applies even in a case in which the seller derives a great benefit from getting rid of a field he doesn't want

because there is something wrong with it. To dismiss the idea that in such a case the seller should be responsible for paying the scribe, the *mishna* declares that it is nevertheless the responsibility of the buyer whose benefit is still greater.

Rashi offers two sources for this approach that the buyer is always happier than the seller. One is a passage in the Book of Yechezkel (7:2), which speaks of the buyer rejoicing and the seller mourning. The other source is this folk saying: "If you bought, you gained; if you sold, you lost." (*Bava Metzia* 51a)

• *Bava Batra* 168a

What the SAGES Say

"Most people are vulnerable to sinning in money matters, a minority sin in sexual matters and all of them in subtle form of *lashon hara* (evil speech)."

• *Rabbi Yehuda in the name of the Sage Rav - Bava Batra* 165a

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NOMENCLATURE

From: Allison

*Dear Rabbi,
I need to give my daughter a Hebrew name. Someone I know said not only must the name be Hebrew but it must be Jewish as well. So on all these baby name websites that show Hebrew names for girls, many of them that I like, he said I cannot use because although they are Hebrew, they are not Jewish. For instance, my first choice would be the name Magdalena, which I have seen on many websites, but this person said this name is associated with the New Testament and therefore I cannot use it. What are your thoughts on this? Thanks in advance.*

Dear Allison,

I would take the point one step further. Namely (pun intended), a Hebrew name, by definition, refers specifically to a Jewish name and not just a name that may have a connection to modern or even ancient Hebrew.

This would exclude even names that are used in modern Israeli Hebrew but are not Jewish names, and all the more so it excludes names as the one you mention which, even if originating from the name of an ancient Israelite town, is not a Jewish name at all. On the contrary, as a reference to Mary Magdalene (i.e. of Magdal, on the shore of the Sea of Galilee), this is a specifically Christian name. In addition, its association with a woman of ill-repute – albeit reformed – wouldn't make this a great first choice.

And of course, in either of the above-mentioned cases, spelling such names in Hebrew letters doesn't change their essential non-Jewish character.

So you see, choosing a name is not a matter of aesthetic phonetics, but rather the meaning and context are of great importance. What's more, when we choose a "Hebrew"

name, we are conferring an influence from the Holy Tongue onto the soul of the person being named. It is of utmost importance, then, that this name be a holy name and one used by our people from time immemorial. Customarily, the name should be after one of our righteous ancestors like Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, Leah or one of the many others. It can also be after a righteous grandparent or great-grandparent.

If such a name is "too" Jewish for you, you can always use a "regular" name for daily life while reserving the Hebrew name for religious contexts. This practice is not only of modern times, but was practiced for generations in many of the European countries. Needless to say, even in such a case, one must avoid patently obvious non-Jewish names for the "regular" name.

Even if you are not observant, it should be very important to you that your child maintains her connection to the Jewish People, and this has a lot to do with the name you give her. I recommend you ask a competent rabbi for suggestions, or fill me in on more details if you'd like me to help in a more specific manner.

In any case, avoid the generic baby-name sites (which are often way off in their presentation of what they call "Hebrew" names), but rather try googling a religious Jewish name site instead. You can also check indexes of Tanach for names (for example, the Koren Tanach).

If part of Magdalene's draw is the "M", some traditional names to consider are Miriam (the prophetess sister of Moses and Aaron) and Michal (the daughter of King Saul and wife of King David). More modern, but acceptable, names are Malka (which means queen) and Moriah (the name of the Holy Mount of Jerusalem and also related to the fragrance myrrh). Another possible repository for traditional Jewish names would be from Yiddish, if that interests you. In any case, look into the Hebrew names of your daughter's ancestors since naming after righteous relatives is a wonderful way of both preserving their memory and also maintaining spiritual continuity from generation to generation.

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LISTENING PATIENTLY

Question: I am frequently approached by friends and neighbors with problems they think I can solve for them. In some cases I am tempted to cut them short because I lack the expertise or experience necessary for advising them. What is the right thing to do?

Answer: When one has a heavy heart, say our Talmudic Sages, he should unburden it by speaking to others.

The person who approaches you as a non-professional advisor is not necessarily looking for a brilliant solution. Just talking to you about the problem makes the worried person feel better.

But don't underestimate your ability to actually help solve the problem. Perhaps you have been chosen by Providence to serve as the successful advisor and will therefore gain Heavenly assistance in coming up with a solution.

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY _____

ONE WOMAN'S LEGACY

In an age of birth control and zero population growth it is comforting to see that there are still heroic women who endow their people with a bounty of offspring.

Yitta Schwartz passed away recently in the Satmar community of Kiryat Yoel in New York at the age of 94, leaving behind five generations of descendants – at least 2,500 people!

A survivor of the Bergen Belsen concentration camp, she moved to Antwerp with her husband and their six children after the war before settling in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn. She bore 11 more children after the war and had about 170 grandchildren, all of whose names she knew.

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“It Can’t Happen Here”?

Reflections on the Haiti Earthquake from a Torah Perspective

BY RABBI MENDEL WEINBACH

“Sometimes things happen in faraway places, in distant islands, so that we should be aroused to self-improvement because of their fear that such tragedy could strike them as well.”

Thus wrote the great Talmudic commentator, Rabbeinu Nissim, some seven hundred years ago in one of his sermons.

The tragedy of the earthquake in Haiti, which caused death and injury to hundreds of thousands and left three million homeless, certainly sent a tsunami of emotional shock waves throughout the world. It is gratifying to see the tremendous efforts being made by so many nations, including Israel, to help the victims of the earthquake. But compassion and humane aid, as vital as they are, must not be the only reaction of mankind to so monumental a tragedy.

Can it not be expected of man to learn from this totally

unexpected disaster that despite all of his technological progress he is still not in command; that what he cowardly calls “natural disaster” is really a demonstration that the Creator of the world is very much still in command?

Upon experiencing an earthquake one is obligated by halacha (Jewish law) to say either a blessing in which he declares that G-d is the Creator of the world, or one that expresses his recognition of G-d’s power felt throughout the world. (*Mesechta Berachot 59a; Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 127*)

Such a blessing is the immediate reaction of a Jew, and the recognition it expresses should be that of all mankind. But it must be followed by serious reflection on the fallacy of the human conceit that “it can’t happen here”.

It is to be hoped that every person will learn the lesson of which Rabbeinu Nissim wrote, and will be inspired to make himself a better person in a better world.

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