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PARSHA INSIGHTS

THE DISEASE TO PLEASE

"...we were like grasshoppers in their eyes..." (13:33)

Two actors are sitting in a beat-up coffee shop on Sunset Strip. One is telling the other about the jobs he almost got, the jobs his agent messed up on, the jobs he should have got but he was too old, he was too young, too dark, too tall, too short. He carries on like this for about twenty minutes. Then he pauses and says to the other, "Okay, that's enough about me. Now you talk about me for a while."

I remember a school friend who used to spend a good ten minutes on his hair in the mirror trying to achieve a spontaneous effect.

It's not just that narcissism is a very obvious and unattractive aspect of conceit, but it places someone in a world of reaction instead of action.

When we fall prey to the desire for the approbation of others, every decision becomes tainted with the disease to please. Rather than consider what is right, we may be equally or even more concerned about how it will look, how it will read to others.

Our age has even invented a profession for people whose job is to gauge and garner the approval of the masses – the Spin Doctor. Just like a doctor, the Spin Doctor diagnoses and prescribes. He diagnoses how a political decision will be received and he prescribes how to get the masses to swallow the medicine.

The task of the Jewish People is to be the emissaries of G-d in this world.

G-d's imprimatur is pure unvarnished truth.

As the verse states, "G-d is a G-d of Truth." The Hebrew word for "truth" is *emet*. *Emet* consists of the first, the middle, and the last letter in the Hebrew alphabet. Truth is only true if it is true at the beginning, in the middle and at the end. If you 'spin' it to the side anywhere along the line – it's not what the Torah calls true.

"We were like grasshoppers in their (the giants') eyes..."

The Kotzker Rebbe identifies this line in this week's Torah reading as the root of the spies' sin. Why were the spies thinking about how they looked to the giants?

As the emissaries of the Jewish People – and as Jews themselves – they should have had no interest other than to bring back an accurate report about the Land. Who cares about what other people thought about them?

The mere fact that they viewed themselves from the outside skewed their judgment and led them to create a world of illusion - a self-produced movie - which resulted in the greatest debacle in Jewish history.

All because of a little preening in the mirror.

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PARSHA OVERVIEW

At the insistence of *Bnei Yisrael*, and with G-d's permission, Moshe sends 12 scouts, one from each tribe, to reconnoiter Canaan. Anticipating trouble, Moshe changes Hoshea's name to Yehoshua, expressing a prayer that G-d not let him fail in his mission. They return 40 days later, carrying unusually large fruit. When 10 of the 12 state that the people in Canaan are as formidable as the fruit, the men are discouraged. Calev and Yehoshua, the only two scouts still in favor of the invasion, try to bolster the people's spirit. The nation, however, decides that the Land is not worth the potentially fatal risks, and instead demands a return to Egypt. Moshe's fervent prayers save the nation from Heavenly annihilation. However, G-d declares that they must remain in the desert for 40 years until the men who wept at the scouts' false report pass

away. A remorseful group rashly begins an invasion of the Land based on G-d's original command. Moshe warns them not to proceed, but they ignore this and are massacred by the Amalekites and Canaanites. G-d instructs Moshe concerning the offerings to be made when *Bnei Yisrael* will finally enter the Land. The people are commanded to remove *challa*, a gift for the *kohanim*, from their dough. The laws for an offering after an inadvertent sin, for an individual or a group, are explained. However, should someone blaspheme against G-d and be unrepentant, he will be cut off spiritually from his people. One man is found gathering wood on public property in violation of the laws of Shabbat and he is executed. The laws of *tzitzit* are taught. We recite the section about the *tzitzit* twice a day to remind ourselves of the Exodus.

ISRAEL Forever

LESSON OF THE SPIES

One of the greatest tragedies in human affairs is the tendency of some people to place personal interest above the welfare of the public.

Such a tragedy is recorded in this week's Torah portion. The spies sent by Moshe to explore Eretz Israel brought back a slanderous report, which discouraged the people and resulted in this entire generation perishing in the wilderness.

One of the explanations offered for the motivation of the spies to discourage entering the land promised to our peo-

ple is that these "distinguished heads of the Children of Israel" might lose their respected positions once the land was settled and new leadership arose.

Today there are politicians in Israel who also fail to think in terms of the public welfare and strive only to advance their own careers. It is hoped that the lesson of the spies will teach them that sacrificing the public good for personal gain ends up with nothing gained, while making the public's welfare the supreme consideration will secure Israel forever.

LOVE OF THE LAND

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

TEL AVIV – THE GATEWAY TO ERETZ YISRAEL

The emblem of this city, officially known as Tel Aviv-Jaffa, is a lighthouse and a gate, symbols of the city's historic role as the gateway from the sea to Eretz Yisrael. Jaffa ("Yafeh" in Hebrew means "beautiful") is mentioned as a port in the Book of Yonah, which is read at Mincha on Yom Kippur. Jews began returning to this port in 1840 and subsequent immigration led to the



development of colonies in the area.

The climax of this growth was the establishment in 1908 of Tel Aviv, the major urban center of modern Israel. Tel Aviv was the name of a city in Babylon where exiles from Eretz Yisrael had gathered (*Yechezkel* 3:15), but its Zionist founders gave the new city this name because it was the title of the Hebrew translation of Hertz's "Altneuland".

לע"נ

מרת פייגא בת ר' דוד ע"ה

ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

PARSHA Q&A ?

1. Why is the portion about the spies written immediately after the portion about Miriam's *tzara'at*?
2. To what was Moshe referring when he asked the spies "Are there trees in the land"?
3. Who built Hebron?
4. Which fruits did the *meraglim* bring back?
5. How many people carried the grape cluster?
6. Why did G-d shorten the *meraglim*'s journey?
7. Why did the *meraglim* begin by saying the land is "flowing with milk and honey"?
8. Why did the *meraglim* list Amalek first among the hostile nations they encountered?
9. How did Calev quiet the people?
10. Why did the Land appear to "eat its inhabitants"?
11. Besides the incident of the *meraglim*, what other sin led to the decree of 40 years in the desert?
12. On what day did *Bnei Yisrael* cry due to the *meraglim*'s report? How did this affect future generations?
13. "Don't fear the people of the Land...their defense is departed." (14:9) Who was their chief "defender"?
14. Calev and Yehoshua praised Eretz Canaan and tried to assure the people that they could be victorious. How did the people respond?
15. "How long shall I bear this evil congregation?" G-d is referring to the 10 *meraglim* who slandered the Land. What halacha do we learn from this verse?
16. How is the *mitzvah* of *challah* different from other *mitzvot* associated with Eretz Yisrael?
17. What is the minimum amount of *challah* to be given to a *kohen* according to Torah Law? Rabbinic Law?
18. Verse 15:22 refers to what sin? How does the text indicate this?
19. Moshe's doubt regarding the punishment of the *mekoshesh etzim* (wood-gatherer) was different than his doubt regarding the punishment of the blasphemer. How did it differ?
20. How do the *tzitzit* remind us of the 613 commandments?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

1. 13:2 - To show the evil of the *meraglim* (spies), that they saw Miriam punished for *lashon hara* (negative speech) yet failed to take a lesson from it.
2. 13:20 - Were there any righteous people in the land whose merit would "shade" the Canaanites from attack?
3. 13:22 - Cham.
4. 13:23 - A cluster of grapes, a pomegranate and a fig.
5. 13:23 - Eight.
6. 13:25 - G-d knew the Jews would sin and be punished with a year's wandering for each day of the spies' mission. So He shortened the journey to soften the decree.
7. 13:27 - Any lie which doesn't start with an element of truth won't be believed. Therefore, they began their false report with a true statement.
8. 13:29 - To frighten the Jews. The Jewish People were afraid of Amalek because Amalek had once attacked them.
9. 13:30 - He fooled them by shouting, "Is this all that the son of Amram did to us?" The people quieted themselves to hear what disparaging thing Calev wished to say about the "son of Amram" (Moshe).
10. 13:32 - G-d caused many deaths among the Canaanites so they would be preoccupied with burying their dead and not notice the *meraglim*.
11. 13:33 - The golden calf.
12. 14:1 - The 9th of Av (Tisha B'av). This date therefore became a day of crying for all future generations: Both Temples were destroyed on this date.
13. 14:9 - Iyov.
14. 14:10 - They wanted to stone them.
15. 14:27 - That ten men are considered a congregation.
16. 15:18 - The obligation to observe other *mitzvot* associated with Eretz Yisrael began only after the possession and division of the Land. The *mitzvah* of *challah* was obligatory immediately upon entering the Land.
17. 15:20 - No fixed amount is stated by the Torah. Rabbinic Law requires a household to give 1/24 and a baker to give 1/48.
18. 15:22 - Idolatry. "All these commandments" means one transgression which is equal to transgressing all the commandments - i.e. idolatry.
19. 15:34 - Moshe knew that the *mekoshesh etzim* was liable for the death penalty, but not which specific means of death. Regarding the blasphemer, Moshe didn't know if he was liable for the death penalty.
20. 15:39 - The numerical value of the word *tzitzit* is 600. *Tzitzit* have eight threads and five knots. Add these numbers and you get 613.

- Strange births and their effect on ritual purity
- Bird found in the stomach of a slaughtered kosher animal
- The meaning of *shasuah*
- Graveyard stories of the Sage Abba Shaul
- Miscarriage of an incomplete fetus or a “sandal”
- When only the placenta comes forth
- Maintaining silence in presence of teacher
- Miscarriage which produces a fetus of questionable gender
- Applications of the *tefach* (handbreath) measurement

A UNIQUE ANIMAL

“But this shall you not eat from among those that bring up their cud or have a separated split hoof *hashasuah*.” (Devarim 14:7)

What is the meaning of this word *hashasuah*, which appears in the phrase introducing those animals that are forbidden for eating despite having one of the signs of a kosher species?

On the surface this is merely an adjective describing the nature of the split hoof as one that is completely separated. In his commentary, however, Rashi cites the statement in our *gemara* of Rabbi Chanan bar Abba that *hashasuah* is a species

of animal with two backs and two spines which the Torah includes among the forbidden animals.

If such an animal ever existed is a matter of dispute. The Sage Shmuel ruled that such a unique animal was actually mentioned to Moshe by G-d. But if a fetus resembling it is found in a kosher animal, it would be considered kosher just as any other unborn creature found within a slaughtered kosher animal. The Sage Rav, however, states that no such animal ever lived and what Moshe was told was that if a fetus with such strange features was found in a slaughtered kosher animal, it would be forbidden.

• Nidah 24a

WHAT THE Sages SAY

“One can learn the meaning of one Torah passage from another but not from a passage in the Prophets.”

• Rabbi Yochanan - Nidah 23a

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FOR HEAVEN'S SAKE

From: Michael

*Dear Rabbi,
Since the blessings were instituted over the performance of the mitzvot, and the mitzvah regarding Torah is to learn it, why doesn't the blessing state, "Who commanded us to learn Torah"? Why does it rather say, "to be engaged in Torah"? Thanks in advance.*

Dear Michael,

This is a very good question, and there are several possible answers.

For one, perhaps the wording of the blessing intends to convey the idea that, unlike other areas of study, Torah is not merely a purely intellectual exercise, but rather one is to be fully engaged – soul, mind and body – in the learning experience. To be engaged in Torah study in this context means to be enthralled and engrossed in it as opposed to just learning it for the information. An extension of this would mean to be engaged in actually practicing what one learns.

Another explanation for this wording is that "learning" a subject implies mastering it. However, in truth, Torah is not something that a person can wrap his mind around. At most, we can be engaged in trying to learn and comprehend it. But to fully understand it is beyond us. The language "to learn Torah", implying that it can be mastered, would also suggest that once "completed" one could direct his attentions elsewhere, G-d forbid. The phrase "to be engaged in Torah", however, imparts incentive to keep learning.

Another interesting explanation is based on the idea that we are rewarded for actual Torah study, even if we don't ultimately understand what we've tried to learn. This is generally not the case with secular studies. For understandable

reasons, if you don't know the material, fail the test, or are unable to apply what you've learned, no matter how hard you tried, you just won't make it. That's not so with Torah. Of course, learning and understanding as much as possible is the goal, and one must make every effort to do so. But if after all the effort, one just doesn't get it, G-d gives an "A" for effort. The explanation for this is based on what I wrote above. Namely, the Torah is truly vast, complex and beyond comprehension, so compared to what there is to know, that which we "learn" is next to nothing. So, in a sense there's little difference between "understanding" and not understanding. So ultimately, it's engaging in the sincere, heart-felt desire and effort to understand that counts.

One last explanation is that the wording "to be engaged" implies that our Torah study should be taken at least as seriously as the work or profession in which we are engaged. For example, before opening his doors for business a store owner would choose very carefully where to locate his store so that he would have access to the best merchandise and exposure to those who most appreciate it. He would think long and hard to design business strategies to ensure maximum gain and minimum loss. He would make sure his store is clean and well-organized, with the merchandise properly shelved, well-labeled, accessible and appealing.

So too we must endeavor that our Torah study be in places and among people conducive for learning. We must plan our time to maximize Torah study and minimize distractions from it. And every effort must be made to learn in an organized fashion so that our Torah learning is clear, precise, and presentable.

Of course, let us not forget the continuation of the blessing you cite, "*HaArev Na*" where we ask G-d to make our Torah learning sweet in our mouths and sweet for our descendants and that we all merit to learn Torah with elevated and uplifting intentions for the sake of Heaven.

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WHAT'S THE RIGHT THING TO DO? _____

REAL-LIFE QUESTIONS OF SOCIAL AND BUSINESS ETHICS

THE PRETENDED PLEDGE

Question: In my new capacity as executive director for a Day School in the States I am about to run an annual fundraising dinner. Some people on my board of directors have suggested that we have some “dummy” pledges made at the outset of the scheduled appeal in order to inspire some of the wealthier participants to up their pledges. I have some hesitations about the honesty of such a move. What is the right thing to do?

Answer: There is a story in the latest volume of “*Aleinu Leshabeach*” in Hebrew about a fundraising dinner held half a century ago for the construction of a building to house the growing yeshiva that the great Rabbi Aaron Kotler, *zatzal*, had established in Lakewood.

The sum needed for this project was \$100,000, a very large sum of money in those days. At the dinner two guests announced that they were willing to contribute a total of \$75,000 on the condition that a particular guest not noted

for his generosity would contribute \$5,000. The latter took sharp exception to this effort to coerce him into making a pledge that he declared he was incapable of fulfilling.

A recess was called and an emergency conference was held. One of the yeshiva’s supporters had suggested to the reluctant guest that he could raise the \$5,000 instead of giving his own and could thus make the pledge which would gain for the yeshiva the big sum offered by the others. When this plan was presented to Rav Kotler, however, he rejected it. The gentlemen who made the condition had in mind that this fellow must give his own money and it would be dishonest to pretend otherwise. One cannot build a Torah institution on dishonesty, ruled the Rosh Hayeshiva, and forfeited the \$75,000 pledge.

Anyone who visits the impressive campus of America’s largest yeshiva today in Lakewood sees the vindication of this policy.

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY _____

A SEARCH FOR TEFILLIN IN KATMANDU

How do you get a hold of a pair of *tefillin* in Katmandu? This was the dilemma facing a young American Jew who sent an e-mail to Rabbi Yaakov Lubow, an outreach director at Yeshivat Ohr Somayach in Jerusalem.

Rabbi Lubow had met Jonathan at a Jewish Learning Exchange program in Connecticut. When he called him a few months later he learned that the young college student who had so recently been introduced to his Jewish roots was planning “to visit Nepal and the Far East to study the Tibetan exile in view of our own.” The response of the rabbi was

“they say that the further you remove yourself from Judaism the closer it brings itself to you.”

Jonathan’s communication confirmed the wisdom of Rabbi Lubow’s words. The only trouble was that he thought it was a simple matter to borrow *tefillin* wherever he would be, so he left his own pair at home “thinking that they were too expensive and delicate to attempt to travel with”. With nothing but a *kippa* and a *siddur* for his spiritual nourishment, he appealed to Rabbi Lubow for any idea of how he could find a pair of kosher *tefillin* in that part of the world.

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