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PARSHA INSIGHTS

BURIED TREASURE

"And G-d has distinguished you today to be for Him a treasured people..." (26:18)

I must be very innocent. I always thought of the Olympic athletes as being locked up in the Olympic Village dedicating every ounce of their energy to winning that elusive Gold Medal; that the atmosphere of the Olympic Village was somewhere between a private school for girls in the fifties and an open prison.

This picture could not be further from the truth.

Apparently, the Olympic Village was a hotbed of immorality, and the Greek celebration of the physical did not end on the playing field.

I couldn't help being struck by an amazing parallel.

It says in the book of *Kohelet* (Ecclesiastes), "This opposed to this, G-d created."

G-d creates everything in this world together with its polar opposite. Light and dark. Hot and cold. Good and evil.

The closing ceremony of the Olympics in London

was a staggering display of theatrics that the ancient Greeks would certainly have applauded. It took place in front of 100,000 people. That number struck a chord with me, because it was also 100,000 people

who had come together a mere eleven days prior to celebrate the completion of the twelfth seven-year cycle of the completion of the Daf Yomi, the daily learning of one page of the Babylonian Talmud.

And interestingly enough, it appears that the greatest problem that faced the organizers of that elevated event was how to ensure the modest separation of men and women to ensure the holiness of the occasion. A problem that apparently was not very high on the list of the organizers of the Olympics.

Jews may not be perfect, and sometimes it's difficult to see why we are a 'treasured people.' But then sometimes something comes along shows that buried treasure.

G-d creates everything in this world together with its polar opposite. Light and dark. Hot and cold. Good and evil.

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PARSHA OVERVIEW

When *Bnei Yisrael* dwell in the Land of Israel, the first fruits are to be taken to the Temple and given to the *kohen* in a ceremony expressing recognition that it is G-d who guides Jewish history throughout all ages. (This passage forms one of the central parts of the Haggadah that we read at the Passover Seder.) On the last day of Pesach of the fourth and seventh years of the seven-year *shemita* cycle, a person must recite a disclosure stating that he has indeed distributed the tithes to the appropriate people in the prescribed manner. With this *mitzvah*, Moshe concludes the commandments that G-d has told him to give to the Jewish People. Moshe exhorts them to walk in G-d's ways because they are set aside as a treasured people to G-d. When *Bnei Yisrael* cross the Jordan River they are to

make a new commitment to the Torah. Huge stones are to be erected and the Torah is to be written on them in the world's seventy primary languages, and they are to be covered with a thin layer of plaster. Half the tribes will stand on Mount Gerizim and half on Mount Eval, and the *levi'im* will stand in a valley between the two mountains. There the *levi'im* will recite 12 commandments and all the people will say "amen" to the blessings and the curses. Moshe then details the blessings that will be bestowed upon *Bnei Yisrael*. These blessings are both physical and spiritual. But if the Jewish People do not keep the Torah, Moshe details a chilling picture of destruction, resulting in exile and wandering among the nations.

ISRAEL Forever

THE PERENNIAL SCAPEGOAT

When earthquakes recently struck Iran, it came as a surprise that no one in the Moslem world blamed Israel.

Jews, after all, have been the perennial scapegoat for everything. Once it was the accusation that Jews poisoned the wells and caused the plague of the Black Death in medieval Europe. In later times the economic problems of nations were purported to be the result of "Jews having all the money."

In most recent times there were Arab spokesmen who blamed Israel for the terrorist murder of 16 Egyptian soldiers in Sinai.

Now it is Israel's turn to be the scapegoat for the destruction of Iran's nuclear development. But this time there may be an ironic twist to the scapegoat role. It may well be that as a last resort Israel will attack the nuclear plants that threaten its security and that of the entire world. Even though Israel may thus do what almost all civilized nations want done, it will probably end up being blamed for doing the world's dirty work.

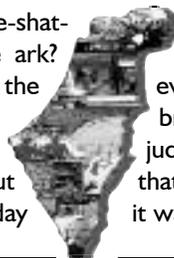
In the face of all that Jews are blamed for, we can take comfort in the knowledge that Heaven knows the truth, and we pray that Heaven will guide Israel's leaders in making the right decision that will secure Israel forever.

LOVE OF THE LAND

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

SAFE FROM THE FLOOD

Where did the dove find a leaf in a deluge-shattered world to bring to Noach in the ark? From Eretz Yisrael, answers Rabbi Levi in the Midrash. While vegetation was destroyed along with everything else in the world by the fierce rains of the deluge, the Prophet Yechezkel says about Eretz Yisrael that "it was not rained upon in the day



of fury" (*Yechezkel* 22:23).

The waters that enveloped the rest of the world did eventually flood Eretz Yisrael as well, but left intact the branches of the trees they covered. Noach was able to judge from the leaf brought to him from an olive branch that the floodwaters had receded throughout the world and it was safe to exit the ark.

PARSHA Q&A?

1. When historically did the obligation to bring *bikkurim* begin?
2. *Bikkurim* are from which crops?
3. How does one designate *bikkurim*?
4. Who shakes the basket containing the *bikkurim*?
5. What does “*v’anita v’amarta*” mean?
6. Which Arami “tried to destroy my father?”
7. When during the year may *bikkurim* be brought? Until when are the special verses recited?
8. Someone declaring that he separated *terumah* and *ma’aser* says: “And I didn’t forget.” What didn’t he forget?
9. What were the Jewish People to do with the 12 stones on Mt. Eval?
10. Six tribes stood on Mt. Eval and six on Mt. Gerizim. Who and what were in the middle?
11. Who “causes the blind to go astray”?
12. How does one “strike another secretly”?
13. Eleven curses were spoken on Mt. Eval. What is the significance of this number?
14. Why are sheep called “*ashterot*”?
15. How is the manner of expressing the curses in *Parshat Bechukotai* more severe than in this week’s *parsha*?
16. What is meant by “the Jewish People will become a proverb”?
17. Why did all the curses expressed in 48:16-44 befall the Jewish People?
18. “In the morning you shall say, ‘If only it were (last) evening’ and in the evening you will say, ‘If only it were (this) morning.’” Why?
19. To which tribe did Moshe give the Torah first?
20. How long does it take to understand the depth of one’s teacher’s wisdom?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week’s Questions!

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

1. 26:1 - After the Land was conquered and divided.
2. 26:2 - The seven species for which *Eretz Yisrael* is praised: wheat, barley, grapes, olives, figs, dates, and pomegranates.
3. 26:2 - When he sees the first fruit ripen on a tree, he binds a piece of straw around it to mark it as *bikkurim*.
4. 26:4 - The *kohen* places his hands under the hands of the one bringing it, and they wave the basket together.
5. 26:5 - Speak loudly.
6. 26:5 - Lavan.
7. 26:11 - *Bikkurim* are brought from Shavuot until Chanukah. The verses are recited only until Succot.
8. 26:13 - To bless G-d.
9. 10. 27:2 - Build an altar.
10. 27:12 - *Kohanim*, *levi'im* and the Holy Ark.
11. 27:18 - Any person who intentionally gives bad advice.
12. 27:24 - By slandering him.
13. 27:24 - Each curse corresponds to one of the tribes, except for the tribe of Shimon. Since Moshe didn’t intend to bless the tribe of Shimon before his death, he did not want to curse them either.
14. 28:4 - Because they “enrich” (*m’ashiro*) their owners.
15. 28:23 - In *Bechukotai* the Torah speaks in the plural, whereas in this week’s Parsha the curses are mentioned in the singular.
16. 28:37 - Whenever someone wants to express the idea of extraordinary suffering, they will use the Jewish People as an example.
17. 28:47 - Because they did not serve G-d with gladness when everything was abundant.
18. 28:67 - Because the curse of each hour will be greater than that of the previous hour.
19. 29:3 - To the Tribe of Levi.
20. 29:8 - 40 years.

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Based on the Talmudic Sages found in the seven pages of the Talmud studied each week in the Daf Yomi cycle

BERACHOT 37 - 43

“Immediately after showing hospitality to Torah scholars one’s home will be blessed.”

This advice from the Sage Abaye is based on two historical precedents.

In his effort to persuade Yaakov to stay with him for additional years, Lavan said to him, “G-d has blessed me on account of you.” (*Bereishet* 19:27)

When Yosef was sold into slavery in Egypt he was appointed to head the house of his master Potiphar. From then on “G-d blessed the Egyptian’s house on account of Yosef.” (*Bereishet* 39:5)

• *Berachot* 42a

“It is preferable for one to allow himself to be cast into a fiery furnace rather than embarrass someone publicly.”

This directive from Rabbi Yochanan in the name of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai is based on the action of Tamar who was sentenced to death by fire for suspected adulterous relations with someone outside of Yehuda’s family. Although she would have been able to save herself by revealing that it was Yehuda himself who had relations with her while she was disguised as a harlot, she maintained her silence rather than embarrass him and was saved from death only by his admission.

• *Berachot* 43b

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LOW ON STEAM

From: Menachem

*Dear Rabbi,
I became observant, learned in yeshiva for a while, eventually got married, and ultimately had to go to work to support my family. I remember my time at the yeshiva so positively, and I felt that I was doing something really valuable and worthwhile. Now, I just don't feel that I'm really contributing much to the world, other people, or my own people for that matter. I work, earn a living, support and raise my family, but beyond that I'm lacking that spirit of idealism that I used to have. Do you have any advice?*

Dear Menachem,

I'm sure you know that the ultimate purpose for learning Torah is to fulfill it. So much so that although one who is in the middle of performing a particular mitzvah is exempt from fulfilling other mitzvot, one who is in the middle of learning and is presented with a mitzvah that can't be fulfilled by others must stop his learning in order to perform it! This is because the whole purpose of learning is to live it. And that's what you're doing by being observant and also working!

In addition, may I also remind you that supporting your family is not just a mundane requirement – it's a spiritual obligation of the highest magnitude. It also helps ensure that your children receive the type of education and lifestyle conducive to perpetuating and conveying the Torah for generations to come. And rather than burdening the community to support you and yours, you surely help support others and theirs. So these are all great things!

Furthermore, as an observant Jew in the workplace, you have numerous opportunities to sanctify G-d's name — some of which you are probably aware. Yet there are many others that one is not even aware of. This applies to both fellow Jews, and also non-Jews. This is one of the ways in

which you can fulfill the mandate to be “a light among the nations”. Without going into all the details, just living a Torah-true lifestyle in every way makes you an emissary for G-d to the world and all people in all that you do.

Last, being where you are also places you in contact with Jews who are totally unaffiliated and may have no contact with Torah Judaism other than through you. That's a unique opportunity to either directly or indirectly share the beauty of the Torah, its teachings and its lifestyle with them.

There was once a student in our yeshiva whose situation was quite similar to yours. After learning and getting married, he went to work as a physical therapist in a nursing home. One day while helping maneuver an elderly patient he had been treating, he heard her say, “Oy”. He thought that a bit odd because she didn't have a Jewish name. He asked if she was familiar with that word and where it came from. They had a long talk in which she revealed that she was actually from a Jewish family, but married a non-Jewish man, “converted” to his religion, and so raised her children. She expressed regret for having done so and seemed upset about her prospects for “the future”.

The physical therapist told her that while he had no intention to criticize another religion, and that surely her husband and children were fine people, it is true that Jewishly speaking she missed out on a lot. But he encouraged her by saying that it's never too late and that G-d would welcome her attempt to find Him through the religion of her ancestors. He asked if she wanted to recite the “Shema”. She said yes, and as she repeated after him word for word, he became so choked up that he had to pause in the middle, when, to his great surprise, he heard her finish off in Hebrew “the L-rd is our G-d, the L-rd is One.”

They continued to have ongoing discussions until one day he noticed that the cross which had been hanging over her bed had been taken down. He never mentioned anything to her about it. But one day not long after that, upon arriving to treat her, he found her bed was vacant – she had moved on. But not before he had managed to share his Judaism with her.

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“DID YOU COME TO VISIT ME?”

Question: I recently went to the hospital to visit a close friend and after I left him learned that another friend was hospitalized as well. When I went to his room he beamed with joy and asked me if I had come specially to visit him. What is the right thing to do in such a case?

Answer: While it is forbidden to deceive outright the one you did not really come to visit, there are two things you can do. One is to avoid answering the question and allow the asker to misinterpret your silence as an affirmative reply. If this is difficult, you can diplomatically reply that he is cer-

tainly worthy enough for one to take the trouble to come and visit him. This too fits into the formula presented by the Talmud (*Mesechta Chullin* 94) for avoiding a direct deception but allowing for self-delusion.

It should also be noted that if the patient is seriously ill and a “white lie” that you intentionally came to visit him will bring him the comfort that can improve his condition, then it is permissible to deviate from the truth if the other options are not feasible.

• Based on the ruling of Rabbi Yitzchak Zilberstein, rabbi of the Ramat Elchanan community in Bnei Brak

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

WHY HE MISSED THE BUS

As the bus to Bnei Brak approached the young man at the Beit Shemesh stop, he put his hand in his pocket to take out the 13 shekels he had prepared for paying the fare. He was shocked to find only three shekels and decided to forgo that bus and go home to get the rest of the money.

No sooner had the bus pulled out than a neighbor pulled up in his car and asked him why he didn't get on the bus. Upon hearing his explanation he informed him that he was

driving to Bnei Brak and would be glad to give him a lift. They rode for a while behind the missed bus and suddenly saw it swerve off the road and fall into a deep gorge, an accident that resulted in injuries to many passengers.

Realizing that he had almost been on that bus the young man began to weep. He put his hand in his pocket to get a handkerchief to wipe his tears and what did he find hiding in it? The missing ten shekels!

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