

OHRNET

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PARSHA INSIGHTS

A KIND PEOPLE

"Yosef's brothers perceived that their father was dead..." (50:15)

I once saw a cartoon in "Punch" magazine. A man was lying on a psychiatrist's couch looking disturbed. The psychiatrist said to him, "The trouble with you is that you're paranoid. Ask anyone!"

We are sensitive creatures. The smallest unthinking remark can wound us deeply. The Torah gives us a mitzva to be extremely careful not to hurt the feelings of others. On the other hand, we have a mitzva not to assume that other people are trying to do us down. We are commanded to judge the actions of others favorably and this is especially difficult, as with all things, when it applies to ourselves. It's all too easy to "read" the words and actions of others completely wrongly.

When the spies returned from scouting the land of Canaan, they reported negatively that it was "a land that devours its inhabitants." Why? Because everywhere they went, there were funerals going on. Rashi explains that G-d had arranged it that way so that the spies could go about their work unhindered. They, however, took this kindness and misinterpreted it. If we have a mitzva to judge our fellow Jew favorably, how much more should the spies have judged G-d's providential guidance favorably.

Similarly, in this week's Torah portion, after Yaakov's death, the brothers "*perceived that their father was dead,*" meaning they perceived a change in Yosef's attitude toward them. During Yaakov's lifetime, Yosef often invit-

ed the family to dine with him and received them all with great warmth.

With Yaakov's passing, the dinner invitations ceased.

The brothers then assumed that the only reason they had been invited during Yaakov's lifetime was out of Yosef's respect for his father. They thought that with Yaakov's demise, Yosef's latent animosity to them was now surfacing.

They were wrong. Yosef stopped inviting them for another reason entirely. After his father's death, Yosef

was faced with a dilemma. Whenever Yaakov would dine with Yosef, Yaakov would forgo his honor and insist that his son sit at the head of the table as befitted the viceroy of Egypt. After his father's passing, however, Yosef was uncomfortable at the thought of taking precedence over Reuven and Yehuda. On the other hand he could not easily demean his stature as viceroy by taking a "back seat."

To solve the issue he avoided the issue by not inviting them at all.

"When it comes to the feelings of others we must always try and think how this will "read" to the other person, to try and put ourselves in their place as much as possible."

When it comes to the feelings of others we must always try and think how this will "read" to the other person, to try and put ourselves in their place as much as possible. And when we feel slighted by our fellow Jew, we must always remember that one of the distinguishing characteristics of the Jewish People is that we are a kind people, a people whose nature is not to wound or to hurt.

Sources:

• Midrash Tanchuma

After 17 years in Egypt, Yaakov senses his days drawing to a close and summons Yosef. He has Yosef swear to bury him in the Machpela cave, the burial place of Adam and Chava, Avraham and Sara, Yitzchak and Rivka. Yaakov falls ill and Yosef brings to him his two sons, Ephraim and Menashe. Yaakov elevates Ephraim and Menashe to the status of his own sons, thus giving Yosef a double portion that removes the status of the first-born from Reuven. As Yaakov is blind from old age, Yosef leads his sons close to their grandfather. Yaakov kisses and hugs them. He had not thought to see his son Yosef again, let alone Yosef's children. Yaakov begins to bless them, giving precedence to Ephraim, the younger, but Yosef interrupts him and indicates that Menashe is the elder. Yaakov explains that he intends to bless Ephraim with his strong hand because Yehoshua will descend from him, and Yehoshua will be both the conqueror of Eretz Yisrael and the teacher of Torah to the

Jewish People. Yaakov summons the rest of his sons in order to bless them as well. Yaakov's blessing reflects the unique character and ability of each tribe, directing each one in its unique mission in serving Hashem. Yaakov passes from this world at age 147. A tremendous procession accompanies his funeral cortege up from Egypt to his resting place in the cave of Machpela in Chevron. After Yaakov's passing, the brothers are concerned that Yosef will now take revenge on them. Yosef reassures them, even promising to support them and their families. Yosef lives out the rest of his years in Egypt, seeing Ephraim's great-grandchildren. Before his death, Yosef foretells to his brothers that Hashem will redeem them from Egypt. He makes them swear to bring his bones out of Egypt with them at that time. Yosef passes away at the age of 110 and is embalmed. Thus ends Sefer Bereishet, the first of the five Books of the Torah. *Chazak!*

ISRAEL Forever

THE DIVIDEND OF DANGER

While Jews throughout the world pray for the security of their brothers in Eretz Yisrael and all who live there long for the day when peace will come, there is something to be said about the dividend of danger. "There is no atheist in a foxhole" it has been widely said, and there is no doubt that danger raises everyone, regardless of his religious level, to a deeper sense of dependence on Heaven.

In this week's Torah portion we read of the aged and ailing Patriarch Yaakov bowing in respect to his son Yosef, the virtual ruler of Egypt. He bowed, however, in the direction of the head of the bed he was on. This was a lesson, as Rashi points out in his commentary, that the Divine Presence rests at the head of a sickbed and must be acknowledged with respect.

The Divine Presence is actually Omnipresent for "the world is filled with His glory". Why is the head of the

sickbed then singled out?

When the Talmudic Sages speak of the location of the Divine Presence they are actually referring to the human perception of this divinity. Everyone but the atheist outside the foxhole will tell you he believes in G-d, but no one perceives His presence as intensely as the sick person, who senses at every moment that his life depends on Divine mercy. It is to this profound awareness that Yaakov paid tribute.

This, too, is the dividend of danger in every form. The daily miracles of thwarted terrorist acts remind us that "the Guardian of Israel does not slumber nor sleep" and the ongoing insecurity brings us closer to our Creator. When we come close enough there will no longer be a need for the danger and we will be able to enjoy a peaceful and comfortable Israel forever.

לע"נ
מרת לאה בת ר' יצחק אייזיק ע"ה
ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

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THE THREE STEPS

Three passages in different parts of Tanach dovetail to reveal a fascinating historical incident that explains our custom of taking three steps back when concluding our silent prayer of *Shmoneh Esrei*.

After enjoying the miraculous delivery from the Assyrian forces of Sanncherib, the righteous King Chizkiyahu became mortally ill. He prayed to G-d for a recovery and was given a Heavenly sign by the Prophet Yishayahu that his prayers were accepted (*Melachim II 20:1-11*). That sign consisted of ten hours of daylight being added to the day. The significance of those ten hours emerges from another passage (*Yeshayahu 38:8*) in which the prophet explained to the king that these were the hours withdrawn from the day his wicked father, Achaz, died and were now restored. The sun suddenly set ten hours before its time on that day in order that there would not be a lavish burial and eulogies.

This unexpected lengthening of the day for Chizkiyahu created a panic in the royal household of Babylon. The king, Merodach Baladon ben Baladon, was in the custom of dining three hours into the day and then sleeping until the ninth hour. When he arose that day the sun had retreated ten hours distance in the heavens and it was morning. Assuming that his servants had negligently allowed him to oversleep until the next morning he became so incensed that he wished to kill them. They then explained to him that it was still the same day which had been miraculously extended for the recovery of King Chizkiyahu. So impressed was he by this miracle that he sent a gift and letter of greeting to Chizkiyahu (*Yeshayahu 39:1*). The letter was thus addressed: "Peace greetings to King Chizkiyahu, peace greetings to the City of *Yerushalayim*, peace greetings to the great G-d."

Nebuchadnetzer, who would eventually become king and destroy the *Beit Hamikdash*, was the chief royal scribe at that time, but was away when this letter was written. Upon his return he asked his underlings how they had addressed the letter. "Is this how you address such a letter?" he challenged them. "You give G-d recognition as the Supreme Force and you list him last!" In response to his insistence that the order be switched they suggested that, as the critic of their effort, he personally pursue the messenger carrying the letter and change it. After taking four steps in that direction he was halted by the Angel Gavriel. Had he not been halted, noted Rabbi Yochanan, the power he would have gained from displaying such honor to Heaven might have enabled him to destroy.

Maharsha and other commentaries point out that in *midrashic* sources it is recorded that he took only three steps, steps that gave him the power to destroy the *Beit*

Hamikdash. This is why we conclude our central prayers by taking three steps back in honor of G-d and praying for the restoration of the *Beit Hamikdash*.

• *Sanhedrin* 96a

A SONG AND ITS ECHO

"Sing each day, sing each day!" was the counsel given by the great sage Rabbi Akiva. Rashi's explanation of this double phrasing is that he meant to urge one who studies Torah to steadily review what he has learned, even if it is as familiar to him as a song. His reward will be the joy and song he will enjoy in the World to Come.

The subsequent support for Rabbi Akiva's point brought by Rabbi Yitzchak bar Avudimi causes one of the commentaries to offer an alternative explanation. This sage cites a passage from *Mishlei* (16:26): "The soul that strives will benefit from that striving because he has focused his mouth [on Torah study]." His explanation is that while a person studies Torah in one place, the Torah strives for him elsewhere (the Torah comes before its Master and begs Him to reveal to the learner the secrets of the Torah and its scope – and why? – because he has forced himself and focused his mouth on studying Torah – Rashi.)

In line with this beautiful idea, Maharsha thus explains Rabbi Akiva's advice about singing: If you will sing each day in your study of Torah, the Torah will sing to you each day as its secrets are revealed to you.

A second interpretation is offered by the same author based on an earlier comparison in our *gemara* made by Rabbi Yehoshua ben Korcho between one who studies but fails to review, and one who plants and does not reap. The Hebrew word for singing "*zameir*" also means to reap the fruit of a grape vine. If you not only learn Torah but reap its fruits as well through review, then the Torah will also reap profits for you elsewhere.

• *Sanhedrin* 99b

The Weekly Daf

by RABBI MENDEL WEINBACH

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PARSHA Q&A ?

1. Why is kindness towards the dead called “*chesed shel emet*” — kindness of truth?
2. Give three reasons Yaakov didn’t want to be buried in Egypt.
3. How do you treat a “fox in his time” (i.e., a commoner who rules)?
4. “When I was coming from Padan, Rachel died on me... I buried her there on the way to Efrat...” Why did Yaakov say all this to Yosef?
5. Initially, why was Yaakov unable to bless Efraim and Menashe?
6. What does *pillalti* mean?
7. What does “*Shechem*” mean as used in this week’s Parsha? (two answers)
8. Which individual is called “the *Emori*?” Why? Give two reasons.
9. What did Yaakov want to tell his sons but was unable to?
10. What privileges did Reuven lose due to his rash actions?
11. What congregation from Yaakov’s offspring did Yaakov not want to be associated with?
12. What did Yehuda do after he heard Yaakov rebuke Reuven, Shimon and Levi? Why?
13. What does milk do to teeth?
14. Why is Yissachar like a “strong-boned donkey?”
15. With what resource did both Yaakov and Moshe bless Asher?
16. In Yosef’s blessing, Yaakov said, “They embittered him...” Who are “they”?
17. Which descendants of Binyamin “will divide the spoils in the evening”?
18. From whom did Yaakov buy his burial place?
19. What oath did Yosef make to Pharaoh?
20. Which two sons of Yaakov did not carry his coffin? Why not?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week’s Questions!

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

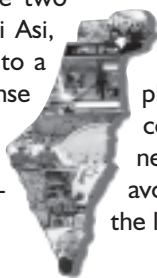
1. 47:29 - Because the giver expects no reward from the recipient.
2. 47:29 - a) Egypt’s ground was to be plagued with lice; b) At the time of the resurrection, those buried outside Israel will suffer; c) So the Egyptians wouldn’t make him into an idol.
3. 47:31 - Bow to him.
4. 48:7 - Yaakov thought Yosef harbored resentment since Yaakov had not buried Yosef’s mother, Rachel, in the *Ma’arat HaMachpela*.
5. 48:8 - The *Shechina* departed from him.
6. 48:11 - “I thought.”
7. 48:22 - a) The actual city of Shechem; b) A portion.
8. 48:22 - Esav. a) He acted like an Emorite; b) He trapped his father with words (*imrei pi*).
9. 49:1 - When *mashiach* will come.
10. 49:3 - Priesthood and Kingship.
11. 49:6 - Korach and his congregation.
12. 49:8 - He drew back. He was afraid that Yaakov would rebuke him for the incident with Tamar.
13. 49:12 - It makes them white.
14. 49:14 - Just as a donkey bears a heavy burden, so the tribe of Yissachar bears the yoke of Torah.
15. 49:20 - Oil-rich land.
16. 49:23 - Yosef’s brothers, Potifar and his wife.
17. 49:27 - Mordechai and Esther.
18. 50:5 - From Esav.
19. 50:6 - Yosef swore not to reveal Pharaoh’s ignorance of Hebrew.
20. 50:13 - Levi, because he would carry the *aron* (holy ark). Yosef, because he was a king.

LOVE OF THE LAND - THE PEOPLE

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

RABBI AMI AND RABBI ASI – NO COMPLAINTS ABOUT THE WEATHER

When it became too hot in the place where two great Talmudic Sages, Rabbi Ami and Rabbi Asi, were engaged in Torah study, they moved to a shadier spot. When the winter cold became too intense where they were studying they moved to a warmer spot. They went to this trouble, explains Rashi (*Mesechta Ketubot 112b*), in order to avoid complaining about the weather in *Eretz Yisrael*.



It must be assumed that these two Sages could have continued their studies where they were despite the heat or cold. Making the move to a more comfortable place probably entailed a loss of precious time which could have been dedicated to intense Torah study. They nevertheless were prepared to make this sacrifice to avoid the temptation of complaining about the weather of the land they loved.

JEWISH LIONS

From S. F.

Dear Rabbi,

Where can I get information on why the lion is found so often on Jewish objects. Thanks.

Dear S. F.,

The lion is the symbol of the Tribe of Judah and it has many important connotations in Judaism.

The lion is, of course, the king of the beasts. Rabbaynu Bechaya (an early classic philosophical commentary on the Torah) explains that the word lion in Hebrew is "aryeh". It is spelled *aleph, resh, yud, heh*. The letters *aleph, yud* and *heh* are all found in the Name of G-d. The *resh* represents the word "ruach", which means spirit. The lion is a symbol of what true kingship is supposed to look like. A Jewish king must contain the dimension of Divinity together with the correct spirit to be able to rule over both himself and others.

Why was Judah and his tribe chosen for royalty? Because Judah had the ability to admit when he had made a mistake and to rectify the mistake. A Jewish king needs to be able to accept that he is not infallible, and that he needs to listen to those who offer him correct advice. King David is the classic example of someone who was able to recognize that he had acted in an incorrect way and to be able to grow spiritually from the process of repentance.

A king leads, unites and serves as an example for others. The attachment of lions to so many Jewish objects may very well be

symbolic. Every Jew should see himself with the responsibilities and obligations of monarchy to lead and unify all people in fulfilling their purpose to G-d and each other.

Yahrzeit Candles

From: R. L.

Hi Rabbi,

Somebody was asking me what you do with the glass once the yahrtzeit candle has been used. I am sure you have some answers.

Dear R. L.,

[Rabbi's note: It is a custom to light Yahrzeit candles each year on the date of passing of a beloved family member and on certain festivals in that person's memory.]

There is nothing specific that needs to be done. Any use which is not disrespectful is perfectly acceptable. Plenty a bubby (grandmother) used them as measuring cups. As I young child I remember seeing a Passover recipe at home that read: "One yahrtzeit glass full of matza meal..."

Having said that, I was in a home once where there was a long row of small, beautiful plants on the windowsill. I didn't ask them but I am pretty sure that they were planted in matching Yahrzeit candle holders. I thought that this was of especially beautiful significance. In this way we are reminded and inspired by the "seeds" planted by the deceased in this world, that grew and grow in this world and in the World to Come.

WHAT'S THE RIGHT THING TO DO?

REAL-LIFE QUESTIONS OF SOCIAL AND BUSINESS ETHICS

Switching Rented Homes for the Summer

Question: A family that is renting a home makes arrangements to go away for a vacation by switching homes with another family for this period. The landlord is away and cannot be reached in time to gain his consent. Does the tenant have a right to go ahead with the switch?

Answer: This question, which is obviously relevant only in cases where there is no specific clause in the rental contract forbidding subleasing, is dealt with in *Shulchan Aruch Chosen Mishpat 216:1*. The ruling there is that the tenant may sublease his rented premises till the end of his lease so long as the family to which he is subleasing does not have more members than his own.

It has been suggested that this stipulation does not apply when it is customary for the tenant to bear responsibility for making any repairs necessary in order to return the home in the condition that he received it, since the damage caused by a larger household would anyway be covered by the tenant. Nevertheless, it must be assumed in the case of modern hous-

ing a larger family causes greater wear and tear in the rooms and the plumbing, leaving the home in worse condition even after repairs are made by the tenant.

An even stricter view is mentioned by the *Aruch Hashulchan* who cites an opinion that even when the family subleasing the home is not larger, one it is forbidden to sublease to it. The reasoning for this is that there are people who tend to severely damage the homes they live in. Even the more lenient opinion which is the one cited above from *Shulchan Aruch* will concede that if the tenant is aware that the one to whom he wishes to sublease his home is a rough or quarrelsome person or one who does not maintain a decent standard of cleanliness it will be improper to rent to him.

In conclusion, if there is no explicit permission or prohibition coming from the landlord a switch of apartments – which is really a form of subleasing – can be done only if the other family is not a larger one and does not have a reputation of being potential home wreckers.

• Based on the response of Rabbi Yitzchok Zilberstein, Rabbi of the Ramat Elchanan Community in Bnei Brak

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

THE “PINTELE YID”

What gives everyone in the field of outreach the confidence that alienated and assimilated Jews can be reached is their faith in the “Pintele Yid” – literally the Jewish remnant – residing in the heart of every Jew.

A new best-selling book, “Sandy Koufax: A Lefty’s Legacy”, written by Jane Leavy, calls attention to the “Pintele Yid” in a Brooklyn boy who became a hero to Dodger fans, but an even greater hero to Jews everywhere.

On October 18, 1965, this legendary Los Angeles Dodger lefty was scheduled to pitch the opening game of the World Series against the Minnesota Twins. Koufax was

not observant and did not even have a Bar Mitzvah ceremony. But he refused to pitch that day because it was Yom Kippur.

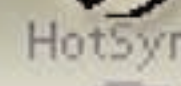
Koufax became a hero for all Jews, even those with the remotest connection to their heritage. One example of his influence is cited by the author in the preface to her book. She was covering the U.S. Tennis Open for the Washington Post in 1983 on Yom Kippur. Then she remembered that 18 years earlier Koufax had declined the opportunity every American kid dreamed of. “I have not worked on the High Holidays since,” she writes. “Sandy Koufax had made himself at home in my soul.”

The “Pintele Yid”.

DID YOU KNOW THAT...

Yeshiva Ohr Yaakov in Zichron Yaakov, headed by Ohr Somayach alumnus Rabbi Shabsie Black, was founded some 28 years ago in an absorption center in rural Givat Ada as a community for the first married students of Ohr Somayach.


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