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PARSHA INSIGHTS

THE TASTE OF HOSPITALITY

“...he (Lot) made a feast for them and baked matzot, and they ate.” (19:3)

Once there was a Jewish traveling salesman who found himself in a largely non-Jewish town on Friday afternoon. His business had delayed him way beyond his expectations and there was now no way he could get home for Shabbat. He had heard that there was just one Orthodox family in town where he could spend Shabbat, and as the sun was starting to set, he made his way there.

The owner of the house opened the door to him. “Can I stay here for Shabbat?” asked the traveling salesman. “If you like” replied the host. “The price is \$200.” “\$200!” exclaimed the traveling salesman, “that’s more than a first-class hotel!” “Suit yourself.” replied the host.

Realizing that he had no option, the salesman reluctantly agreed. In the short time left before Shabbat the host showed the salesman his room and the kitchen and the other facilities for his Shabbat stay.

As soon as the host had left the room, the salesman sat down and thought to himself. “Well, if this is going to cost me \$200 I’m going to get my money’s worth.” And for the whole of the Shabbat he availed himself unstintingly of the house’s considerable facilities. He helped himself to the delicious food in the fridge. He had a long luxurious shower before and after Shabbat. He really made himself “at home”.

After he had showered and packed, he made his way downstairs and plunked two crisp \$100 bills down on the table in front of his host.

“What’s this?” inquired the host. “That’s the money I owe you,” replied the salesman. “You don’t owe me anything. Do you really think I would take money from a fellow Jew for the mitzvah of hospitality.” “But you told me that Shabbat here costs \$200.”

“I only told you that to be sure that you would make yourself at home.”

The cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were notorious for their lack of hospitality. Not only were the inhabitants of these cities indifferent to guests but they were actively hostile. Hospitality in Sodom and Gomorrah could be a capital offence.

When Lot welcomed the two angels (who looked like humans) into his home, he prepared a good meal for them as he had seen his uncle Avraham do. It was Pesach, so he baked for them *matzot*. Lot instructed his wife *Eeris* to put some salt in the food. *Eeris* was a native of Sodom; on the rare occasions that she cooked for guests, she never put in salt — not because she was concerned that her guests might be suffering from hypertension but so the food would be bland and tasteless.

If Sodom represents the nadir of hospitality, then the opposite of that behavior represents the highest hospitality. We see from *Eeris*’ behavior that hospitality is not just providing food for our guests. Let’s face it; a person can survive without salt. What characterized *Eeris*’ inhospitality was the desire that her guests should have absolutely no pleasure from the food. Thus, when we do the mitzvah of bringing guests into our home, we should do everything we can to make sure they enjoy themselves — even if it seems that it’s going to cost them.

• Based on the Midrash

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PARSHA OVERVIEW

Three days after performing *brit mila* on himself, Avraham is visited by G-d. When three angels appear in human form, Avraham rushes to show them hospitality by bringing them into his tent, despite this being the most painful time after the operation. Sarah laughs when she hears from them that she will bear a son next year. G-d reveals to Avraham that He will destroy Sodom, and Avraham pleads for Sodom to be spared. G-d agrees that if there are fifty righteous people in Sodom He will not destroy it. Avraham “bargains” G-d down to ten righteous people. However, not even ten can be found. Lot, his wife and two daughters are rescued just before sulfur and fire rain down on Sodom and her sister cities. Lot’s wife looks back and is turned into a pillar of salt. Lot’s daughters fear that as a result of the destruction there will be no husbands for them. They decide to get their father drunk and through him to perpetuate the human race. From the elder daughter, Moav is born, and from the younger, Ammon. Avraham moves to Gerar where Avimelech abducts Sarah. After G-d appears to Avimelech in a dream, he releases Sarah and appeases Avraham. As

promised, a son, Yitzchak, is born to Sarah and Avraham. On the eighth day after the birth, Avraham circumcises him as commanded. Avraham makes a feast the day Yitzchak is weaned. Sarah tells Avraham to banish Hagar and Hagar’s son Yishmael because she sees in him signs of degeneracy. Avraham is distressed at the prospect of banishing his son, but G-d tells him to listen to whatever Sarah tells him to do. After nearly dying of thirst in the desert, Yishmael is rescued by an angel and G-d promises that he will be the progenitor of a mighty nation. Avimelech enters into an alliance with Avraham when he sees that G-d is with him. In a tenth and final test, G-d instructs Avraham to take Yitzchak, who is now 37, and to offer him as a sacrifice. Avraham does this, in spite of ostensibly aborting Jewish nationhood and contradicting his life-long preaching against human sacrifice. At the last moment, G-d sends an angel to stop Avraham. Because of Avraham’s unquestioning obedience, G-d promises him that even if the Jewish People sin, they will never be completely dominated by their foes. The parsha ends with the genealogy and birth of Rivka.

ISRAEL Forever

THE THREAT OF YISHMAEL

The entire world is finally waking up to the danger posed by the descendants of Yishmael, son of the Patriarch Avraham, to the civilized world.

In this week’s Torah portion we read of the Heavenly promise to Hagar that from her son Yishmael there will come forth “a great nation”. While this prophecy has been vindicated in the development of a large Arab world, there is a prophecy in last week’s portion about the character of that “great nation” which deserves analysis.

When Hagar was informed by a Heavenly angel that she would bear a child whom she would name Yishmael, she was told that “he will be a wild man whose hand will reach everyone and everyone’s hand

will reach him.” The Targum Onkeles explains this as a prophecy that “Yishmael will be a rebel against mankind who will be dependent on all and all will be dependent upon him.”

The abject poverty and political instability which characterize so much of the Arab world and the paradoxical dependence of the rest of the world on Arab oil are vindication of the second half of the prophecy. The first part about rebellion is what fills the headlines.

Israel may be the prime target of the hostility of the descendants of Yishmael but the time has come for the rest of the world to realize that the threat is universal. Perhaps this realization will teach them to appreciate our struggle to secure Israel forever.

לע"נ

חיה צירל ע"ה בת צבי נ"י
ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

PARSHA Q&A ?

1. Why did G-d appear to Avraham after the *brit mila*?
2. Why was Avraham sitting at the entrance to his tent?
3. What were the missions of the three angels?
4. Why did Avraham enjoin the guests to wash the dust off their feet?
5. Why did Avraham ask specifically Yishmael, and not someone else, to prepare food for the guests?
6. Why did the angels ask Avraham where Sarah was?
7. When G-d related Sarah's thoughts to Avraham, He did not relate them precisely. Why?
8. What "cry" from Sodom came before G-d?
9. How many angels went to Sodom?
10. Why was Lot sitting at the gate of Sodom?
11. Lot served the angels *matza*. Why?
12. Why did Lot delay when he left Sodom?
13. Why were Lot and his family not permitted to look back at Sodom?
14. Lot's wife looked back and became a pillar of salt. Why was she punished in this particular way?
15. In what merit did G-d save Lot?
16. Why did Avraham relocate after the destruction of Sodom?
17. Why did Avimelech give gifts to Avraham?
18. Why was Avraham told to listen to Sarah?
19. Why did G-d listen to the prayer of Yishmael and not to that of Hagar?
20. Who accompanied Avraham and Yitzchak to the *akeidah* (binding)?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

1. 18:1 - Avraham was sick, so G-d came to "visit" him.
2. 18:1 - He was looking for guests.
3. 18:2 - To announce Yitzchak's birth, to heal Avraham and to destroy Sodom.
4. 18:4 - He thought they were among those who worship the dust, and he didn't want any object of idolatry in his home.
5. 18:7 - To train him in the performance of *mitzvot*.
6. 18:9 - To call attention to Sarah's modesty, so as to endear her to her husband.
7. 18:13 - For the sake of peace.
8. 18:21 - The cry of a girl who was executed for giving food to the poor.
9. 19:1 - Two; one to destroy the city and one to save Lot.
10. 19:1 - He was a judge.
11. 19:3 - It was Passover.
12. 19:16 - He wanted to save his property.
13. 19:17 - As they, too, deserved to be punished, it wasn't fitting for them to witness the destruction of Sodom.
14. 19:26 - She was stingy, not wanting to give the guests salt.
15. 19:29 - Lot had protected Avraham by concealing from the Egyptians the fact that Sarah was his wife.
16. 20:1 - Because travel in the region ceased and Avraham could no longer find guests.
17. 20:14 - So that Avraham would pray for him.
18. 21:12 - Because she was greater in prophecy.
19. 21:17 - Because the prayer of a sick person is more readily accepted than the prayer of others on his behalf.
20. 22:3 - Yishmael and Eliezer.

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- Using human or animal as a wall for permitting entry from beyond the Shabbat *techum* limit or for making a *succah* kosher
- Returning from outside the *techum* limit if one went for the right cause
- When arms are taken up for defense on Shabbat
- Falling asleep on the road and waking up after start of Shabbat
- How ownerless objects or those belonging to a non-Jew are considered in regard to how far they can be taken on Yom Tov or on Shabbat where there is an *eiruv*
- Guidelines on whose opinion to follow in a dispute of the Tannaic Sages
- Are the *amot* arm-lengths standard or relative to each person's body?
- The fish trap separating the *techum* areas of two cities
- Three courtyards open to each other and to the avenue
- Dividing the food portions contributed for a neighborhood *eiruv* or denying others access to one's portion
- Two ways of looking at the idea behind the neighborhood *eiruv*
- Making an *eiruv* for walking without placing food, only designating a defined spot like a tree or fence
- Can actions which cannot be done simultaneously be effective if done consecutively?

WHICH IS THE BETTER EIRUV?

A Jew who wishes to walk on Shabbat as on a holiday beyond the *techum* (boundary of 2,000 cubits) can make an *eiruv techumim* by placing, before the beginning of the holy day, the minimal amount of food for two meals at a site within the

techum. He thus establishes this spot as his virtual home for Shabbat and may walk 2,000 cubits from there in any direction on Shabbat.

What if he is traveling and has no food with him and Shabbat will begin before he reaches the city he is headed for? The *mishna* offers him two options. One of them is for him to simply designate the spot he is at when Shabbat begins as his virtual Shabbat home, which will entitle him to walk 2,000 cubits in any direction on Shabbat. Is this option of making an *eiruv* without food just by establishing a virtual Shabbat home through a physical presence when Shabbat enters also available to a Jew who is at home on Friday and has the ability to make the *eiruv* with food? This is a matter of dispute. According to the explanation of Rabbi Nachman (51a) the dispute centers around whether the Sages placed a priority on an *eiruv* consisting of food at the spot designated as a virtual Shabbat home or on physical presence there when Shabbat begins. Rabbi Meir's position is that the preferred method is the use of food and the option mentioned in the *mishna* is a special dispensation for the food-less traveler (referred to in our *mishna* as a "poor man" because of his present lack of resources for the *eiruv*). The Jew who is in his home before Shabbat (referred to in our *mishna* as a "wealthy man" because he has the ability of supplying food for the *eiruv*) is not entitled to this privilege and must have food delivered to the site he has chosen.

Rabbi Yehuda, on the other hand, contends that the Sages gave priority to the physical presence at the *eiruv* site and only sanctioned the option of placing food there on Friday as a way of relieving the *eiruv* maker of the trouble involved in providing a physical presence at the outset of Shabbat. The option of a food-less *eiruv* is therefore available to the "wealthy man" in the city as well as to the "poor man" on the road.

WHAT THE SAGES SAY

"If one Sage has a more lenient position may he scoff at one who has a more stringent one!?"

The *gemara's* rejection of this being the cause for Rabbi Yossi ben Rabbi Chanina's laughing upon hearing the position of Rabbi Chiya

• *Eiruvin* 48a

DOES G-D HAVE FREE WILL?

From: Yra Harris

*Dear Rabbi,
Does G-d have free will?*

Dear Yra,

Yes, G-d has free will. G-d chose to create, when to create and how to create. G-d chooses to maintain and regulate all that exists every moment. This involves myriad, changing considerations at all times, and G-d considers them all instantaneously, deciding according to Divine Will what to do next — how and in what way to influence every macro and micro dimension of everything in existence.

One might mistakenly think that since G-d is perfect, everything that G-d does must be perfect, precluding G-d's ability to exercise free will. This is incorrect for several reasons. First, G-d chooses what to do. The fact that G-d does it perfectly does not detract from Divine Free Will. Furthermore, G-d can choose to do something "imperfectly". For example, our Sages taught that G-d intentionally created man with the need for circumcision in order to enable man to act as a partner in perfecting and elevating the world — much as one elevates relatively useless wheat by making it into bread (Tanchuma, Tazria, ch.5; see Ohr HaChaim, Lev. 12:3 for a deeper meaning).

One might argue that if G-d has free will, G-d should be able to will Himself out of existence. Since presumably G-d "cannot" will Himself out of existence, G-d

does not have free will. This is also incorrect. The fact that man is not able to will himself away does not detract from his free will. The same applies to G-d. In any case, this is just a more sophisticated version of the illogical question, "Can G-d create a stone which He can't lift?" The reason we are inclined to answer "No" to this question is not because of G-d's limit to create, but rather because there can be no such stone that He can't lift. Here too, the fact that G-d "cannot" will Himself away is not because He lacks free will, but rather because His eternal existence is intrinsically imperative.

There are many instances in which we find G-d exercising free will. Several sources speak about G-d's deciding to create or not, and along what lines — initially according to strict judgment until G-d "changed His mind" and decided to create with considerations of mercy as well (Rashi, Gen. 1:2). G-d suffered mankind's injustice until he finally decided to bring the flood. In Abraham's dialogue with G-d about saving Sodom and Gomorrah, He shows willingness to "change His mind" if the conditions could be met. G-d chose the descendants of the Patriarchs as His people to settle the Land of Israel, yet he decided to send them to Egypt before eventually deciding when and how to redeem them. The examples are virtually endless.

In short, G-d constantly reviews and decides if and how to maintain every most colossal and miniscule dimension of creation. And He continuously determines and expresses anew in which way to interact with that creation — with judgment or mercy, punishment or reward, concealment or revelation, and a myriad other of multi-faceted attributes.

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

REPAYING A DEBT

Outstanding among the many outpourings of generous relief for the victims of the hurricane Katrina disaster was the anonymous gift made by a Holocaust survivor.

A 90-year old man walked into a U.S. diplomatic office, presented an envelope containing 1,000 Euros (about \$1,240) and declared that he was contributing this to the U.S. for hurricane relief as a way of repaying

his debt to the Americans for liberating him from a concentration camp.

"This is a selfless act by somebody who is repaying what was a deeply felt debt of gratitude to the United States," said State Department spokesman Sean McCormack. "This is a person who is not seeking any publicity for this act, which in the time we live makes it even more extraordinary."

PUTTING OUT THE FIRE

Question: I sometimes see two neighbors getting into a heated argument over some trivial matter. What is the right thing to do to calm them down and restore good relations?

Answer: A Talmudic Sage was once directed by the Prophet Eliyahu to two men whom he described as "Citizens of the World-to-Come". When he asked these fellows of rather ordinary appearance what it was that they did to deserve such a title, they responded that they had a special talent for making people happy which they utilized for cheering up depressed people and for putting out the fire of a quarrel between two parties.

Even if you are not blessed with the talent of these men, you are certainly capable of adopting their strategy. Two people quarrelling with each other tend to forget that there are more important things in life than the

matter about which they are so worked up. Your intervention with a light touch may succeed in helping them see things in the right proportion and inspire them to abandon their quarrel.

You must also bear in mind that no one wants to feel like a loser. It is therefore crucial to give both parties the feeling that they are right. Although this is an illogical proposition you will be pleasantly surprised to see how two people weary of fighting are prepared to clutch at this straw to save their pride.

The other strategy for restoring peace is the one which was used by Aharon Hakohen. Our Sages tell us that when he became aware of discord between two parties he approached each of them separately and told him a "white lie" that the other party was very upset with the rupture in their relations and was anxious to make up. When the two eventually ran into each other, they were happy to be friends again.

LOVE OF THE LAND - THE MITZVOT

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

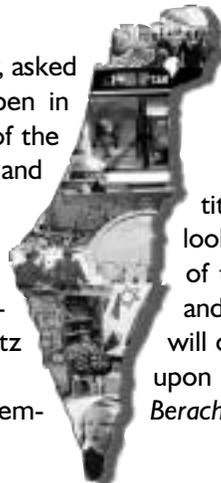
TERUMAH AND MA'ASER AND EARTHQUAKES

The Prophet Eliyahu, of blessed memory, asked Rabbi Nehorai why earthquakes happen in Eretz Yisrael. The reply was because of the sin of failing to do the separating of *terumah* and the tithing of the *ma'aser*.

He based this on the apparent conflict between two passages:

"The eyes of the L-rd, your G-d, are constantly looking with care upon it (Eretz Yisrael)." (*Devarim* 11:12)

"He (G-d) gazes upon the earth and it trem-



bles, touches the mountains and they erupt." (*Tehillim* 104:32)

How do we reconcile these two passages?

When Jews do the will of G-d and do their tithing as they should G-d's eyes "are constantly looking with care upon the Land" from the beginning of the year till the end of the year" (*Devarim* *ibid.*) and it suffers no harm. But when Jews fail to do the will of G-d and do not tithe as they should "He gazes upon the earth and it trembles." (*Talmud Yerushalmi Berachot* 9:2)

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