

SHABBAT PARSHAT VAYESHEV · 21 KISLEV 5768 · DEC. 1, 2007 · VOL. 15 NO. 9

PARSHA INSIGHTS

INCLINED TO RECLINE

And Yaakov dwelled...."

My father, *olav hashalom*, always used to remark, "If you want something done, ask a busy man." When we have little or nothing that demands our attention, merely getting out of bed may pose an existential challenge.

We are here in this world to do three things: to serve Hashem; to do the *mitzvot* and to cope with challenges. In fact, one way or another, everything in life is a challenge. Some challenges, however, are easier to spot than others.

For example, it's a fairly obvious challenge when you are the father of a family subsisting on food stamps to keep your fingers out of an open bag with several \$100 bills smiling at you.

Other challenges are subtler. It always amazes me how beautiful people preen themselves in the mirror — as if they had something to do with their beauty! It's not enough that G-d has given them life and all its blessings, but on top of that He has blessed them with an extra gift of good looks. Why should they pat themselves on the back because their features are symmetrical? Did they do anything? Their challenge is to see that their beauty is an extra gift from G-d.

An even more subtle challenge is success in business. It's all too easy to fall prey to the myth of the self-made man. Just as no man in the history of humanity has managed to create himself out of dust, no executive has had anything to do with his success — except for turning up for work in the morning.

Everything is from Heaven. I know some very brilliant people who are washing bottles, and some pretty dim ones who are driving Ferraris. Intelligence and success are but distant relations.

There once was a wise businessman who made a vast fortune. Someone asked him to what he attributed his success. "90% *mazal* (luck) and 10% *seichel* (intelligence), and if I'd had less *seichel* I'd have made a lot more money."

What other people call "luck" — Jews call "*hashgacha*" (Divine Providence).

Yaakov is called the "choicest" of the fathers of the Jewish People, and yet he had by far the hardest life. He grew up with a brother who wanted to kill him. Because of this he fled to his uncle who cheated him on a daily basis. On his way back home his daughter was kidnapped and violated, and when he finally arrived home he is told that his favorite son has been torn limb from limb by a wild animal.

After a life of such stress, to seek some repose, some shelter from the storm, would not seem unreasonable — and yet the Torah criticizes Yaakov for his desire for tranquility.

Why?

After all, Yaakov wasn't planning to put his feet up and watch an old movie with a cup of hot chocolate. Yaakov was the embodiment of diligent Torah study. He desired serenity only to attain a more profound depth and clarity in his Torah learning.

Sometimes we can skimp on our learning or become lax in our mitzvah observance because our lives are full of pressure.

Pressure is life's default position; that's the way things are supposed to be.

Life is a battlefield, and just as a soldier needs to function under fire, so too a Jew has to perform despite life's vicissitudes — and sometimes because of them.

Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe used to comment that his most creative moments in Torah thought were when the phone was ringing off the hook, students needed his attention, and he had one foot out the door to the airport.

When we make that extra effort to function under fire, G-d gives up that little extra help that lifts our lives from prose to poetry.

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Yakov settles in the land of Canaan. His favorite son, Yosef, brings him critical reports about his brothers. Yaakov makes Yosef a fine tunic of multi-colored woolen strips. Yosef exacerbates his brothers' hatred by recounting prophetic dreams of sheaves of wheat bowing to his sheaf, and of the sun, moon and stars bowing to him, signifying that all his family will appoint him king. The brothers indict Yosef and resolve to execute him. When Yosef comes to Shechem, the brothers relent and decide, at Reuven's instigation, to throw him into a pit instead. Reuven's intent was to save Yosef. Yehuda persuades the brothers to take Yosef out of the pit and sell him to a caravan of passing Ishmaelites. Reuven returns to find the pit empty and rends his clothes. The brothers soak Yosef's tunic in goat's blood and show it to Yaakov, who assumes that Yosef has been devoured by a wild beast. Yaakov is inconsolable. Meanwhile, in Egypt, Yosef has

been sold to Potiphar, Pharaoh's Chamberlain of the Butchers. In the Parsha's sub-plot, Yehuda's son Er dies as punishment for preventing his wife Tamar from becoming pregnant. Onan, Yehuda's second son, then weds Tamar by levirate marriage. He too is punished in similar circumstances. When Yehuda's wife dies, Tamar resolves to have children through Yehuda, as this union will found the Davidic line culminating in the *Mashiach*. Meanwhile, Yosef rises to power in the house of his Egyptian master. His extreme beauty attracts the unwanted advances of his master's wife. Enraged by his rejection, she accuses Yosef of attempting to seduce her, and he is imprisoned. In jail, Yosef successfully predicts the outcome of the dream of Pharaoh's wine steward, who is reinstated, and the dream of Pharaoh's baker, who is hanged. In spite of his promise, the wine steward forgets to help Yosef, and Yosef languishes in prison.

ISRAEL Forever

PROMISES, PROMISES

The major obstacle to a realistic solution of the Israel-Arab crisis is the failure of the Palestinians to keep their promises of containing terror in exchange for all the goodwill gestures and possible concessions made by Israel.

In this week's Torah portion the imprisoned Yosef asks the chief butler to the king of Egypt to intercede with the ruler to free him. Our Sages tell us that for putting his faith

in this Egyptian's promise rather than in G-d he was punished by Heaven with an extra two years in prison.

"Blessed is the man," says King David (*Tehillim* 40:5), "who puts his trust in G-d and looks not to the boasters." This reference to the Egyptians may well be applied today to their Palestinian brothers and should serve as a reminder to Israel's leaders to rather put their faith in G-d to guarantee the security of Israel forever.

LOVE OF THE LAND - THE WISDOM

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

SHECHEM — TOMB OF YOSEF

The hero of this week's Torah portion and the ones following it is the righteous Yosef. Although he lived only 17 of his 110 years in Eretz Yisrael, he insisted on being buried in the Holy Land.

His wish was fulfilled by the Children of Israel carrying his remains with them for forty years on their



way to the Promised Land and burying them near Shechem in the field that his father Yaakov had bought many years before.

Because Shechem is today populated by Arabs there has been considerable tension between the residents and Jews who have come to pray at the tomb of the righteous Yosef.

PARSHA Q&A ?

1. "These are the offspring of Yaakov: Yosef...." Give three reasons why Yosef is considered Yaakov's main offspring.
2. What was praiseworthy about the fact that Yosef's brothers did not speak to him in a friendly manner?
3. How do we see from Yosef's dream about the sun, moon and stars that all dreams contain some untrue element?
4. Who brought Yosef down to Egypt?
5. Where was Reuven when Yosef was sold?
6. In addition to the brothers, who else knew that Yosef was alive?
7. Why didn't G-d reveal prophetically to Yaakov that Yosef was alive?
8. For how long did Yaakov mourn the loss of Yosef?
9. Verse 37:35 states "his father wept." To whom does this refer?
10. Who was Tamar's father?

11. In what merit did Tamar deserve to have kings as her descendants?
12. Why is the word "hand" mentioned four times in connection to the birth of Zerach?
13. Why does the Torah relate the incident with Potiphar's wife immediately after the incident of Yehuda and Tamar?
14. How did Potiphar "see" that G-d was with Yosef?
15. Who in this week's Parsha pretended to be sick?
16. Why were the butler and the baker imprisoned?
17. For how long were the butler and the baker in prison?
18. How did the baker know that Yosef had correctly interpreted the butler's dream?
19. What prompted the butler and baker to tell Yosef their dreams?
20. How was Yosef punished for asking the butler for help?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

1. 37:2 - (a) Yosef was the son of Rachel, Yaakov's primary wife. (b) Yosef looked like Yaakov. (c) All that befell Yaakov befell Yosef.
2. 37:4 - They did not act hypocritically.
3. 37:10 - The moon represented Rachel. Since she had already died, it was impossible for that element of the dream to come true.
4. 37:28 - A caravan of Midianites.
5. 37:29 - He was attending to Yaakov.
6. 37:33 - Yitzchak.
7. 37:33 - Because the brothers had issued a ban against revealing the truth to Yaakov, and G-d, so to speak, abided by their ban.
8. 37:34 - Twenty-two years.
9. 37:35 - Yitzchak, who wept because of Yaakov's suffering.
10. 38:24 - Shem.
11. 38:26 - In the merit of her modesty.

12. 38:30 - To allude to his descendant, Achan, who sinned with his hand by taking four things from the spoils of Jericho.
13. 39:1 - To teach us that just as Tamar acted with pure motives, so did Potiphar's wife.
14. 39:3 - Yosef mentioned G-d's name frequently in his speech.
15. 39:11 – Potiphar's wife.
16. 40:1 - The butler was imprisoned because a fly was found in the king's goblet, and the baker was imprisoned because a pebble was found in the king's bread.
17. 40:4 - Twelve months.
18. 40:5 - The baker dreamed the interpretation of the butler's dream.
19. 40:6 - Yosef asked them why they looked troubled.
20. 40:23 - He remained in prison an additional two years.

לענין

מרחת חזיה טרחה בת ר' מרדכי ע"ה
ת.ג.צ.ב.ה.

- Dividing the deceased husband's funds between his wives
- Dividing the profits when one partner invested more than the other
- Two documents of sale bearing the same date
- The mother who gifted two sons the same property
- The wife who waived her claim to the property mortgaged for payment of her *ketubah* while the other wife did not
- A gift made to one recipient on condition that after him it should go to another designated party

- Obligations of the heirs towards the widow
- The disciple's obligations towards his teacher
- The widow who failed to demand support from the heirs and the one who sold the inherited property for her support
- Selling her *ketuba* rights for support
- When the agent buys a bargain who gains the difference
- When the agent or the one who sent him is guilty of embezzlement of sacred property
- Other dimensions of the law of agency

SERVING THE MASTER

The disciple of a Sage has a responsibility to serve his teacher as a slave serves his master. This ruling of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi is followed by a warning from Rabbi Yochanan that the teacher who denies his disciple the ability of serving him is guilty of withholding kindness from him.

To what form of service is Rabbi Yochanan referring?

One approach is that he is referring to the actual physical service such as that mentioned by Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi. This is based on the concept mentioned in Pirkei Avot (4:12) by Rabbi Elazar bar Shamma that "respect for your teacher must be like respect for Heaven". Denying the disciple this opportunity to express his respect for Heaven in this tangible way is therefore considered a withholding of kindness.

A different approach is that the service mentioned by Rabbi Yochanan is participating with the Sage in the study and application of halacha. Regarding such denial Rabbi Shimon Chasida has stated (*Sanhedrin* 91a) that one who withholds the teaching of halacha from a disciple is cursed even by the children still in their mothers' wombs. The meaning of service in this approach is learning the halachic process from the teacher. Although this seems to negate the physical service mentioned in the first approach there is actually a connection between the service mentioned by Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi and that of Rabbi Yochanan. The reason for the disciple's obligation to physically serve his teacher is that he should always be near to him and thus learn halacha from him.

• *Ketubot* 96a

WHAT THE Sages SAY

"The teacher who denies his disciple the opportunity to serve him is guilty of removing from him the fear of Heaven."

• *Rabbi Nachman bar Yitzchak - Ketubot* 96a

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THE SILENT TREATMENT

From: Dave in Detroit

Dear Rabbi,

I'm not Orthodox, and I'm not even religious. I am getting interested in finding out more about Judaism, though. Some things make sense to me, others I'm working through. Some practices seem meaningful to me, others I'm still searching for meaning. However, I recently had an experience that was a bit of a setback. I went to an Orthodox Temple wanting to see what it's like, what goes on there and what the people are like. I went at the time I've seen people going in, but I must have entered at the time the prayers were going on. I tried not to disturb, but I didn't know my way around, where to go, or how to pray. So I approached a few people, one after the other, and they all either ignored me, grunted or otherwise made me feel unwanted. To be honest with you, Rabbi, I never thought I'd be treated that way by other Jews, and I'm not sure I'll ever go into an Orthodox Temple again. Would you please help me through this?

Dear Dave,

I totally empathize with you and regret that you had such a bad experience your first time at an Orthodox synagogue.

I assure you that there are a lot of great, friendly and interesting Orthodox Jews in Detroit who are also interested in you and in your interest in Judaism. I can put you in touch with some.

The synagogue you visited may have been an exception, but it was probably more an issue of timing or an unintentional lack of sensitivity to where you were coming from that resulted in the treatment (or lack thereof) that you received.

Let me explain.

It sounds like you entered the prayers at the main part and height of the service. This is the standing prayer that is

recited silently, during which one is not allowed to speak.

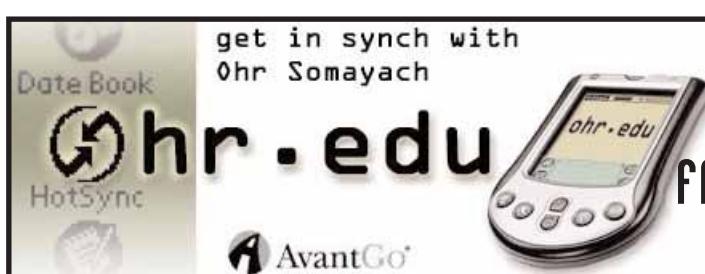
All prayer, and particularly this part of prayer, is taken very seriously. This is the part in which one is literally talking to G-d, the Master of the Universe — a personal and prized audience with the Boss. Just as a person would not interrupt a conversation or meeting with an earthly king or judge (one could get thrown out of court for just letting a cell phone ring, let alone actually answering), all the more so one may not interrupt his counsel with G-d by engaging in another conversation.

Therefore, if you approached people during their personal silent prayer, they may not have noticed you were speaking to them. Many people pray with their eyes closed and try to tune out distractions.

Others who may have noticed you probably regretted not being able to help you, but felt it was not the type of emergency that warrants interruption and figured they'd talk to you after that part of the prayer was over (about 10 minutes). They may have grunted or gesticulated to that effect but the meaning was lost in translation. By the time they could approach you, you may have already made your bee-line for the exit door.

Finally, there may have been someone there who, while not in his standing silent prayer, may have been engaged in the prayers leading up to it. Generally, one may not interrupt his prayer there either. However, technically, one is allowed to respond (between paragraphs) to someone's "shalom". The scenario you describe would seem to be tantamount to saying "shalom" such that they should reply, at least briefly, in order to welcome and help you. Still, since this is not so common, people may not have known to, or felt unsure about answering.

I encourage you to try again, but call first to explain your interest and ask what event they recommend you attend for your first visit. If you go for prayers, it would be best to go for afternoon or evening prayers first, particularly Friday afternoon before the Sabbath. If you get there a little early, you'll surely find someone to welcome you and help you with whatever you'd like.



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WHAT'S THE RIGHT THING TO DO? ---

REAL-LIFE QUESTIONS OF SOCIAL AND BUSINESS ETHICS

HOLD THAT CALL!

Question: Some of the people who participate in the daily services in our synagogue pay no attention to the signs warning worshippers to turn off their cellphones upon entering the sanctuary, and the ringing of their phones severely disrupts the sanctity of the prayers. What is the right thing to do to solve this problem?

Answer: You might take a cue from Rafi Sulamina, a trustee in a synagogue in the old city of Tsefat. Annoyed by the ringing of the phones, and especially by the brazen attitude of

those who answered the calls in the midst of services, he posted large signs announcing a fine of ten shekels to charity for anyone whose phone rings during services.

Some synagogues in the US have found another way to solve this problem. They have installed a newly developed system (in a legal manner) that prevents calls from cellphones coming in or going out within a defined area.

Whatever step you take we wish you success in putting an end to this flagrant desecration of synagogue sanctity.

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY ---

THE LAST SERMON

After finally arriving in Israel years ago following a perilous journey from her hometown in Syria, the young lady had many stories to tell about narrowly escaping border patrols and bribing some Arab civilians to smuggle her across the border.

One particular story did not deal with her heroic adventures but rather with the profound impression made upon her by the last sermon she heard from the rabbi of her community.

The rabbi called attention to the fact that women and girls

in the neighborhood of the synagogue made it a practice to be present on the balconies and porches of their homes when the men were leaving the synagogue on Shabbat. He explained that this was not the modest way for women to behave and called for an improvement in the community's standards of *tzniut*.

Little wonder then that the girl who heard this sermon was moved to join a seminary on her arrival in order to live up to what the rabbi preached.

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