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PARSHA INSIGHTS

ZERO TOLERANCE

“...Moshe grew up and went out to his brothers...” (2:11)

In the '60s, American Jews played a significant role in the founding and funding of some of the most important civil rights organizations, including the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights (LCCR), the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and the Student Nonviolent Coordination Committee (SNCC). Fully one-third of those who 'traveled south' as volunteers were Jewish, at a time when Jews made up only 3 percent of the population of the United States.

Jews, it seems, have a very low tolerance level for injustice.

Look at every social liberation cause throughout the ages and you will find it filled with Jewish-sounding names: Marx, Lenin, Hoffman, Rubin, Cohn-Bendit – or the most Jewish-sounding name of them all – Moshe Rabbeinu.

In the annals of social awareness, Moshe Rabbeinu ranks number one.

If the Torah chose to mention three incidents in the early life of Moshe, it must be that these incidents epitomize him.

One: Leaving Pharaoh's palace, the twelve-year-old Moshe sees an Egyptian beating a Jew. Moshe kills him on the spot.

Two: The following day, Moshe sees a Jew about to strike another Jew and intervenes. With the death penalty hanging over him for killing the Egyptian, Moshe escapes.

Three: At the well in Midian, seven young women are watering their flocks. Other shepherds turn up with their own flocks and chase them away. Moshe cannot allow this clear injustice; interposing himself, he saves the young women and waters their sheep.

Three stories with a clear common theme: Zero tolerance to injustice.

Moshe could have said to himself, “Let these Midianites fight it out themselves!” but his innate holiness did not allow him to stand uncaringly on the sidelines.

During the civil rights movement in the United States, Jews could have stood back and said, “What's this got to do with us?” Yet, that inherited sense of the fair and the just galvanized Jews to the head of the civil rights movement. That's Moshe's bequest.

Later in the weekly Torah portion Moshe argues with G-d for seven days that he is not the man to lead the Jewish People out of Egypt. Why was Moshe so adamant?

Moshe thought it unjust that his older brother Aharon should be passed over for the number one spot in Israel.

It's really this last incident that is the most telling. It's all too easy to get on our high horses or take to the barricades in the defense of fair play, civil rights and justice when our own interests are not at stake, but to be equally concerned with the rights of others when we stand to lose is the real test of the love of justice.

• Sources: Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe

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POB 18103, Jerusalem 91180, Israel • Tel: +972-2-581-0315 • Email: info@ohr.edu • www.ohr.edu

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PARSHA OVERVIEW

With the death of Yosef, the Book of Bereishet (Genesis) comes to an end. The Book of Shmot (Exodus) chronicles the creation of the nation of Israel from the descendants of Yaakov. At the beginning of this week's parsha, Pharaoh, fearing the population explosion of Jews, enslaves them. However, when their birthrate increases, he orders the Jewish midwives to kill all newborn males. Yocheved gives birth to Moshe and hides him in the reeds by the Nile. Pharaoh's daughter finds and adopts him, although she knows he is probably a Hebrew. Miriam, Moshe's sister, offers to find a nursemaid for Moshe and arranges for his mother Yocheved to fulfill that role. Years later, Moshe witnesses an Egyptian beating a Hebrew and Moshe kills the Egyptian. Realizing his life is in danger, Moshe flees to Midian where he rescues Tziporah, whose father Yitro approves their subsequent marriage. On Chorev (Mt.

Sinai) Moshe witnesses the burning bush where G-d commands him to lead the Jewish People from Egypt to *Eretz Yisrael*, the Land promised to their ancestors. Moshe protests that the Jewish People will doubt his being G-d's agent, so G-d enables Moshe to perform three miraculous transformations to validate himself in the people's eyes: transforming his staff into a snake, his healthy hand into a leprous one, and water into blood. When Moshe declares that he is not a good public speaker, G-d tells him that his brother Aharon will be his spokesman. Aharon greets Moshe on his return to Egypt and they petition Pharaoh to release the Jews. Pharaoh responds with even harsher decrees, declaring that the Jews must produce the same quota of bricks as before but without being given supplies. The people become dispirited, but G-d assures Moshe that He will force Pharaoh to let the Jews leave.

ISRAEL *Forever*

NEEDED – MORE CHILDREN

One of the major points of conflict between the religious and secular publics in Israel is the ideal size of a family. While religious Jews see in every child a blessing from Heaven, to the secularists it is viewed as an economic burden.

This is the background for the ongoing battle over how much the government should spend on child allowances.

It was Pharaoh, we learn in this week's Torah portion, who resorted to the most repressive measures to ensure

that the Hebrew population in his land would not increase. His effort was an exercise in futility because Heaven decreed that His chosen people would grow despite everything.

In light of Israel's demographic problem as a result of its Arab population, it would seem to make sense for the government to promote an increase in the size of Jewish families by providing financial incentives. More Jews born in Israel is what will preserve Israel as a Jewish state 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

THE SEWERS OF ANCIENT JERUSALEM

In his "The War of the Jews", historian Josephus Flavius writes that numerous people in Jerusalem fled from the invading Roman legions into the subterranean drainage channel which served the city.

A recent archeological excavation has uncovered this channel in the City of David. Its walls reach a height of three meters in some places, an



indication that those who fled to this sewer were able to actually live there until they could escape from the city through its southern end.

What particularly impressed the channel's discoverers was the planning on a grand scale which the city's rulers did in order to develop a system that drained the rainfall and prevented flooding.

PARSHA Q&A ?

1. Why does the verse say "And Yosef was in Egypt?"
2. "...And they will go up out of the land." Who said this and what did he mean?
3. Why did Pharaoh specifically choose water as the means of killing the Jewish boys? (Two reasons.)
4. "She saw that he was good." What did she see "good" about Moshe that was unique?
5. Which Hebrew men were fighting each other?
6. Moshe was afraid that the Jewish People were not fit to be redeemed because some among them committed a certain sin. What sin?
7. Why did the Midianites drive Yitro's daughters away from the well?
8. How did Yitro know that Moshe was Yaakov's descendant?
9. What lesson was Moshe to learn from the fact that the burning bush was not consumed?
10. What merit did the Jewish People have that warranted G-d's promise to redeem them?
11. Which expression of redemption would assure the people that Moshe was the true redeemer?
12. What did the staff turning into a snake symbolize?
13. Why didn't Moshe want to be the leader?
14. "And G-d was angry with Moshe..." What did Moshe lose as a result of this anger?
15. What was special about Moshe's donkey?
16. About which plague was Pharaoh warned first?
17. Why didn't the elders accompany Moshe and Aharon to Pharaoh? How were they punished?
18. Which tribe did not work as slaves?
19. Who were the: a) *nogsim* b) *shotrim*?
20. How were the *shotrim* rewarded for accepting the beatings on behalf of their fellow Jews?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

1. 1:5 - This verse adds that, despite being in Egypt as a ruler, Yosef maintained his righteousness.
2. 1:10 - Pharaoh said it, meaning that the Egyptians would be forced to leave Egypt.
3. 1:10,22 - He hoped to escape Divine retribution, as G-d promised never to flood the entire world. Also, his astrologers saw that the Jewish redeemer's downfall would be through water.
4. 2:2 - When he was born, the house was filled with light.
5. 2:13 - Datan and Aviram.
6. 2:14 - *Lashon hara* (evil speech).
7. 2:17 - Because a ban had been placed on Yitro for abandoning idol worship.
8. 2:20 - The well water rose towards Moshe.
9. 3:12 - Just as the bush was not consumed, so too Moshe would be protected by G-d.
10. 3:12 - That they were destined to receive the Torah.
11. 3:16,18 - "I surely remembered (*pakod pakadeti*)."
12. 4:3 - It symbolized that Moshe spoke ill of the Jews by saying that they wouldn't listen to him, just as the original snake sinned through speech.
13. 4:10 - He didn't want to take a position above that of his older brother Aharon.
14. 4:14 - Moshe lost the privilege of being a *kohen*.
15. 4:20 - It was used by Avraham for *akeidat Yitzchak* and will be used in the future by *mashiach*.
16. 4:23 - Death of the firstborn.
17. 5:1 - The elders were accompanying Moshe and Aharon, but they were afraid and one by one they slipped away. Hence, at the giving of the Torah, the elders weren't allowed to ascend with Moshe.
18. 5:5 - The tribe of Levi.
19. 5:6 - a) Egyptian taskmasters; b) Jewish officers.
20. 5:14 - They were chosen to be on the Sanhedrin.

לע"נ

מרת חיה שרה בת ר' מרדכי ע"ה
ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

- Vows taken in the form of *neder* or *nedavah*
- If it is advisable to make a vow
- Shimon Hatzadik and the righteous *nazir*
- The righteous Jews who longed to bring a sin offering
- The “sin” of abstaining from wine
- The *kinuy* form of a vow
- When the vowelization of a letter makes the difference in regard to a vow
- Vow based on reference to a valid or disqualified sacrifice or a day of mourning
- The tithing of breads accompanying a thanks-offering
- Difference between vow and oath
- Vows that have no effect
- A vow concerning speaking, walking or sleeping
- Forbidding a wife to visit her parents before the holiday or making a vow regarding their relations

THE HOLY HAIRCUT

“I never ate from the flesh of an *asham* atonement sacrifice offered by a *nazir* who had become spiritually impure,” declared the sage and *kohen gadol* Shimon Hatzadik, “except for one case.”

His reluctance was based on the fear that a *nazir* who contracted such impurity through contact with the dead and was compelled to painfully restart his period of abstinence might be regretful of his initial vow and thus compromise the sincerity of his sacrifice.

The exception he mentioned was a handsome young man from the south with beautiful locks of hair who had become impure and came to the *Beit Hamikdash* to have his hair removed and to offer the required sacrifice. Shimon Hatzadik asked him why he had taken upon himself a vow to become a *nazir*, which would eventually lead to having such beautiful hair removed even if he completed his period of abstinence without a break of impurity.

“I was a shepherd for my father,” the youth explained. “One day I went to a spring to draw water and saw my reflection in the water. My evil inclination suddenly tempted me to take advantage of my looks and indulge my passions.”

He then went on to describe how he rebuked himself for even considering a path that would spiritually destroy him, and vowed to remove this dangerous hair for Heaven’s sake by vowing to be a *nazir*. Shimon Hatzadik was so impressed by this youth’s piety that he kissed him on his head and said to him, “May there be more nazarites like you in Israel.”

The question that arises from this touching story is why the young man with the beautiful hair did not simply go to a barber for a haircut to remove this temptation. The answer, of course, is that on the way to the barber he was likely to change his mind and give in to temptation. The only solution was to immediately take upon himself a vow of *nazirut* which would eventually force him to eliminate his hair and the problems that accompanied it.

• *Nedarim* 9b

WHAT THE Sages SAY

“What sin is the *nazir* accused of by the Torah? Only for afflicting himself by abstaining from wine. Can we then not deduce from this that one who fasts and denies himself everything is considered a sinner?”

• *Rabbi Elezar Hakapar* - *Nedarim* 10a

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ROLLING IN DOUGH

From: Anonymous

Dear Rabbi,

I own and run a kosher bakery in a small but growing religious Jewish community. I thought initially that the business would be a lot more lucrative than it has turned out to be. Sometimes it gets me down that I have to work such long, difficult hours to barely make ends meet (which I do, thank G-d). What should I do?

Dear Anonymous,

Some people roll in dough, and others roll dough. You certainly have the liberty to change jobs, but since that may not necessarily help, and as long as you remain a baker, I'd like to share a few ideas with you.

The first thing is to remember that a person's livelihood comes from G-d. Of course, we are encouraged and required to make every reasonable effort to earn a living. But ultimately, the extent to which our endeavors succeed or not depends on G-d.

In your case, as you say, thank G-d, while not rolling in dough, at least you're making ends meet. You are also providing an invaluable service to the local Jewish community by providing them kosher bread and baked goods which they probably would not be able to attain otherwise. What's more, as the community continues to grow (partly a function of the availability of the staples of Jewish life, like kosher bread) so will your clientele and income. For these reasons, I think you should keep up the good work.

But there are other considerations as well. Although you may have had in mind rolling in fiscal dough, and

thereby view your business as non-lucrative, G-d may have put you in a position to amass great spiritual wealth.

Think about all the blessings people make over the kosher food you provide. You have a great part in all that praise of G-d. Our Torah sources say that the world is sustained in the merit of small children whose mouths, free of sin, utter words of Torah and prayer. The cookies you bake are not just pieces of "carbs" and "cals". They store of energy which small children use to fuel the world. The greatest of Jewish sages took pride in preparing something for Shabbat. By baking challah for your community you are fulfilling this prized mitzvah many times over, not to mention the spiritual merit of maintaining the kosher laws and enabling others to do so as well.

The following story is told of Rabbi David of Lelov: Once the baker of the town was feeling down about having to work so hard through the night only to earn a few piasters. Rabbi David Lelover (apparently through Divine insight) visited the bakery in the middle of the night in order to lift the baker's spirits. He said, "In truth, we all want to serve G-d. Sometimes we get confused and think the purpose we do things is for money. But that's just the yeast in the dough! [by which the Rabbi was referring to the teaching of our Sages which compares the evil inclination to yeast which causes lowly dough to haughtily rise]".

The Rabbi was trying to remind the baker that he was a baker not only to earn a living, but more importantly, to provide for the needs of His people. This is what G-d set up the baker in business for, and this was the baker's service of G-d. The baker's own narrow self-interest limited his calculation of profits. Given the larger picture, he was able to see that through rolling dough he was rolling in spiritual dough.

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ANSWERING A KNOCK ON THE DOOR

Question: What should one do if there is a knock on the door for *tzedaka*, and you have nothing at all or just a small coin on hand? Is it better to open the door and apologize for little or nothing, or just not answer the door? What is the right thing to do?

Answer: Generally speaking your problem is touched upon in *Shulchan Aruch (Yoreh Deah 249:4)* where we learn: "If a poor man asks for money and one does not have anything to give him he should not reprimand him nor raise his voice to him but should rather speak kindly to him and show his kind-heartedness to indicate that he would like to give but cannot

do so."

In addition to these words of the Beit Yosef the Rama writes: "It is forbidden to turn away the poor man with nothing, even if all he has to give him is a simple dried fig."

Applying these rulings to your situation we must assume that the poor man knocking on your door is equivalent to one asking for money. It is then proper to answer the door and offer the little you have, or nothing at all, along with the explanation spelled out in the *Shulchan Aruch*. It is also a good idea to express empathy for a person reduced to knocking on doors for help and to offer a blessing for an improvement in his situation.

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY _____

HONESTY PAYS

On trial for his life as an accused rebel against the Czarist regime in Russia, Rabbi David Luria, famous for his commentary on the Midrash, found himself in a peculiar situation.

The judges trying him conversed with one another in French so that the Russian defendants would not be privy to their secret discussions regarding the case before them. Unknown to them, Rabbi Luria spoke French fluently and

would therefore be in a position to arrange his arguments according to the thinking of the judges. But he felt that this would not be honest and so he put his hands to his ears.

When the judges asked for an explanation of this strange act, the rabbi replied in French that he did not wish to dishonestly overhear their secret discussions. They were so impressed by this extraordinary display of honesty that they decided he was innocent.

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