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PARSHA INSIGHTS

GATHERING LEAVES

"...Go for yourself from your land, from your relatives, and from your father's house..." (12:1)

Autumn always brings with it one of the strangest machines in the world. On my way to work, I cross a small park with some trees. Around this time of the year, the trees shed their leaves littering up the paths with a beautiful mess of gold and ochre.

A street cleaner is dispatched to clear the paths and allow the relentless pace of urban life to proceed unimpeded.

Now, if I were designing a machine to clear the paths of leaves, I would sketch something like a large vacuum cleaner that would gather up the leaves once and for all. However, what this fellow has is totally the reverse: a large – and noisy – blower that doesn't clean the paths. It simply blows the leaves somewhere else from where they can be blown back again any time the wind chooses.

What did the inventor of this tool have in mind when he designed this thing? And this machine is no mere local aberration. I've seen similar devices from London to Los

Angeles.

This weeks Torah portion marks a new beginning; a different way of looking at the world.

The truth obliges.
When you see the
truth of something,
only a dishonest
person can continue
to live unchanged by
his discovery.

When G-d created the world, He first looked into the Torah. Everything that exists in the physical world has a spiritual source in the Torah.

Avraham looked into the world and he saw Torah.

Avraham was called 'the Ivri' – "the one who crossed over". Literally this means that he crossed over the Euphrates to the land of Canaan, but in a deeper sense it means that Avraham changed the way mankind looked at the world - from idol worship to the service of the true G-d.

The truth obliges. When you see the truth of something, only a dishonest person can continue to live unchanged by his discovery.

When Avraham looked at the world, he saw that the way people were living was as illogical as a machine that blows away leaves rather than gathering them up.

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PARSHA OVERVIEW

Ten generations have passed since Noach. Man has descended spiritually. In the year 1948 from Creation, Avram is born. By observing the world, Avram comes to the inescapable Truth of G-d's existence, and thus merits that G-d appear to him. At the beginning of this week's *Parsha*, G-d tells Avram to leave his land, his relatives and his father's house and travel to an unknown land where G-d will make him into a great nation. Avram leaves, taking with him his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, their servants and those whom they converted to faith in G-d. When they reach the land of Canaan, G-d appears to Avram and tells him that this is the land that He will give to his descendants. A famine ensues and Avram is forced to relocate to Egypt to find food. Realizing that his wife's beauty would cause his death at the hand of the Egyptians, Avram asks her to say that she is his sister. Sarai is taken to Pharaoh, but G-d afflicts Pharaoh and his court with severe plagues, and she is released unmolested. Avram returns to *Eretz Yisrael* (Canaan) with much wealth given to him by the Egyptians. During a quarrel over grazing rights between their shepherds, Avram decides to part ways with his nephew Lot. Lot chooses to live in the rich but corrupt city of Sodom in the fertile plain of the Jordan. A war breaks

out between the kings of the region, and Sodom is defeated. Lot is taken captive. Together with a handful of his converts, Avram rescues Lot, miraculously overpowering vastly superior forces, but Avram demurs from accepting any of the spoils of the battle. In a prophetic covenant, G-d reveals to Avram that his offspring will be exiled to a strange land where they will be oppressed for 400 years, after which they will emerge with great wealth and return to *Eretz Yisrael*, their irrevocable inheritance. Sarai is barren and gives Hagar, her Egyptian hand-maiden, to Avram in the hope that she will provide them with a child. Hagar becomes arrogant when she discovers that she is pregnant. Sarai deals harshly with her and Hagar flees. On the instruction of an angel Hagar returns to Avram and gives birth to Yishmael. The Parsha concludes with G-d commanding Avram to circumcise himself and his offspring throughout the generations as a covenant between G-d and his seed. G-d changes Avram's name to Avraham, and Sarai's name to Sarah. G-d promises Avraham a son, Yitzchak, despite Avraham's being ninety-nine years old and Sarah ninety. On that day, Avraham circumcises himself, Yishmael and all his household.

ISRAEL Forever

THE PATRIARCHAL PREVIEW

“Whatever happened with the Patriarchs is a sign of what will happen with their descendants.”

This is the historical perspective that our Talmudic Sages use in explaining the relationship between events recorded in the Torah and those which took place in the later history of our People.

In his commentary on the Torah portion which will be read this week in synagogues throughout the world, Ramban points out how Avraham's flight to Egypt from famine-stricken *Eretz Yisrael* and his troubles there were previews

of what would happen to later generations.

We might suggest another message based on this concept. Avraham was promised the gift of *Eretz Yisrael* only after he had abandoned “his land and his birthplace.” May this not be a hint that Avraham's descendants would gain uncontested possession of this land only by abandoning the influence of the nations of the world to which they were exposed and to dedicate themselves solely to the service of G-d? Only then will they truly gain “the land which I will show you” with no need for futile negotiations.

LOVE OF THE LAND - THE PLACES

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

SHECHEM – THE FIRST STOP

When the Patriarch Avraham entered the land promised to him and his descendants, his first stop, we learn in this week's Torah portion, was at Shechem. There he prayed, say our Sages in the



Midrash, for the success of his great-grandchildren in their battle against their enemies. Shechem today is the Arab city of Nablus whose only reminder of a Jewish past is the tomb of Yosef located there.

PARSHA Q&A ?

1. What benefits did G-d promise Avraham if he would leave his home?
2. "And all the families of the earth will be blessed through you." What does this mean?
3. Who were the souls that Avraham and Sarah "made?"
4. What were the Canaanites doing in the Land of Canaan when Avraham arrived?
5. Why did Avraham build an altar at Ai?
6. What two results did Avraham hope to achieve by saying that Sarah was his sister?
7. Why did Avraham's shepherds rebuke Lot's shepherds?
8. Who was Amrafel and why was he called that?
9. Verse 14:7 states that the four kings "smote all the country of the Amalekites". How is this possible, since Amalek had not yet been born?
10. Why did the "palit" tell Avraham of Lot's capture?
11. Who accompanied Avraham in battle against the four kings?
12. Why couldn't Avraham chase the four kings past Dan?
13. Why did Avraham give "ma'aser" specifically to Malki-Tzedek?
14. Why didn't Avraham accept any money from Sodom's king?
15. When did the decree of 400 years of exile begin?
16. What did G-d indicate with His promise that Avraham would "come to his ancestors in peace"?
17. How did G-d fulfill His promise that Avraham would be buried in "a good old age"?
18. Why did the Jewish People need to wait until the fourth generation until they returned to Eretz Canaan?
19. Who was Hagar's father?
20. Why did Avraham fall on his face when G-d appeared to him?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

1. 12:1 - He would become a great nation, his excellence would become known to the world, and he would be blessed with wealth.
2. 12:3 - A person will say to his child, "You should be like Avraham."
3. 12:5 - People they converted to the worship of G-d.
4. 12:6 - They were in the process of conquering the land from the descendants of Shem.
5. 12:8 - He foresaw the Jewish People's defeat there in the days of Yehoshua due to Achan's sin. He built an altar to pray for them.
6. 12:13 - That the Egyptians would not kill him, and would give him presents.
7. 13:7 - Lot's shepherds grazed their flocks in privately owned fields.
8. 14:1 - Amrafel was Nimrod. He said (*amar*) to Avraham to fall (*fel*) into the fiery furnace.
9. 14:7 - The Torah uses the name that the place would bear in the future.
10. 14:13 - He wanted Avraham to die trying to save Lot so that he himself could marry Sarah.
11. 14:14 - His servant, Eliezer.
12. 14:14 - He saw prophetically that his descendants would make a golden calf there, and as a result his strength failed.
13. 14:20 - Because Malki-Tzedek was a *kohen*.
14. 14:23 - Hashem had promised Avraham wealth, and Avraham didn't want Sodom's king to say, "I made Avraham wealthy."
15. 15:13 - With the birth of Yitzchak.
16. 15:15 - That his father, Terach, would repent and become righteous.
17. 15:15 - Avraham lived to see his son Yishmael repent and become righteous, and he died before his grandson Esav became wicked.
18. 15:16 - They needed to wait until the Amorites had sinned sufficiently to deserve expulsion.
19. 16:1 - Pharaoh.
20. 17:3 - Because he was as yet uncircumcised.

A digest of the topics covered in the seven weekly pages of the Talmud studied in the course of the worldwide Daf Yomi cycle along with an insight from them

TALMUDigest

AVODAH ZARAH 65 - 71

- Definition of a *geir toshav*
- The Sage Rava and the indulging Bar Sheishech
- Benefiting from transporting of forbidden wine
- Forbidden wine falling on fruit or grain
- Selling to a non-Jew something forbidden to Jews
- When a forbidden matter is mixed with permitted one
- The status of odors from forbidden matter
- Forbidden matter absorbed in vessels
- The rodent in the vat of beer
- When a non-Jew is not suspected of touching wine
- Troops that enter a city and their impact on its wine
- When is ownership finalized by a non-Jewish buyer

THE HOL(E)Y GRAPES

Although our study of the Weekly Daf is limited to the Babylonian Talmud, we find that our commentaries will occasionally cite something from the Jerusalem Talmud as clarification.

A case in point is the ruling of the *mishna* regarding wine, prohibited for use because of its contact with a non-Jew, which fell upon grapes. If the grapes were whole there is no fear that they absorbed any of the wine and they can be

simply rinsed in order to permit them for consumption. If, however, they have splits in them, they are forbidden for use by a Jew because we assume that they absorbed some forbidden wine.

Tosefot cites the Jerusalem Talmud, which limits this ruling to grapes which are still part of a cluster. If they have been removed from the cluster, the holes created by the removal of their stems makes them vulnerable to the absorption of the forbidden wine.

• *Avodah Zara 65b*

What the SAGES Say

“In response to Bar Sheishech’s taunt that Jews have no pleasures comparable to that of non-Jews, the response should have been the passage in *Yeshayahu* (64:3): “The eye has not seen what any deity beside You shall do for ‘he who waits for Him’.”

• *Rav Papi - Avodah Zarah 65a*

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THE FIRST JEW

From Holly:

Dear Rabbi,
Who were the first Jews? Adam and Eve?

Dear Holly,

This is a very insightful and interesting question.

Adam and Eve were not Jewish. They were mankind in its inception and they were given the right and responsibility to use all their spiritual powers to effect their own perfection by cleaving to G-d and following His ways. G-d instructed them to uphold six basic commandments alluded to in the Torah verses. If they had been done correctly, they would have acquired for themselves and their progeny the desired, elevated and universal perfection of humanity.

After Adam and Eve rebelled against G-d, humanity gradually plummeted to a very low spiritual state where theft, immorality, murder and idolatry became commonplace. These events are described in the Torah, culminating in the Flood. Noah preserved the potential for perfection in man and received a seventh commandment that completed G-d's code for mankind, and thereby came to be known as the Noahide Laws. Unfortunately, Noah's descendents also fell short of the mark and continued the antediluvian decadence after the Flood. Nevertheless, the Torah delineates righteous individuals throughout the generations after the Flood. While they were not Jewish per se, they did pursue G-d's mission for man by cleaving to G-d and following His ways as mandated to Adam and Noah. One such couple was Abraham and Sarah, who despite coming from non-Jewish, idolatrous families, nevertheless made great efforts to break through the prevailing climate of impurity to regain the pre-sin purity of Adam and Eve.

Although ancient Jewish sources posit that through their great spiritual effort and intuition Abraham and Sarah each gained foreknowledge of the Torah before it was given, they did not formally convert and were therefore not formally Jewish. However, they did re-acquire for themselves and their progeny a unique potential to attain G-d's initial intention for humanity.

While Ishmael benefited by being fathered by Abraham, born of the marginal maidservant Hagar, he and his descendents became marginal to these developments. In addition, as described in the Torah, both Ishmael and Esau

excluded themselves from the process by rejecting the righteous ways of the patriarchs and matriarchs, their parents and grandparents. Therefore only Isaac and Rebecca, Jacob (Israel) and his wives and then the sons of Jacob and their wives continued the dynamic of Adam and Eve, Abraham and Sarah.

But still no Jews. So how and when did the Jews become Jewish?

According to Torah law, a person becomes Jewish by: 1] declaring willingness to keep all the commandments, 2] by immersing oneself in a specifically defined body of water (mikveh), and 3] for men, this is preceded by circumcision. When the Children of Israel left Egypt and received the Torah at Mount Sinai these criteria were met. All males who left Egypt were circumcised, having kept this command given by G-d to Abraham for his descendents.

The Torah verses then describe the Israelites' commitment to keep the Torah and subsequent immersion (Exodus 19): "In the third month of the children of Israel's departure from Egypt, on this day they arrived in the desert of Sinai...Moses ascended to G-d, and the Lord called to him from the mountain, saying, 'So shall you say to the house of Jacob and tell the sons of Israel...' And now, if you obey Me and keep My covenant, you shall be to Me a treasure out of all peoples, for Mine is the entire earth. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of princes and a holy nation.' Moses came and summoned the elders of Israel and placed before them all these words that the Lord had commanded him. And all the people replied in unison and said, 'All that the Lord has spoken we shall do!' ...So Moses descended from the mountain to the people, and he sanctified the people [by having them immerse in the mikveh and temporarily refrain from marital contact]." The verses then go on to describe the awesome experience of the revelation of Torah at Sinai.

This event marked the mass, formal conversion of the descendents of the patriarchs and matriarchs to Judaism. Ancient sources associate it with the termination of the impurity of the original sin from off the Jewish people, which elevated them to the level of Adam and Eve before the sin. By choosing G-d, they became the Chosen People, whose mission was to be a light unto the nations, leading all of humanity back to G-d's initial, universal plan: that all mankind should be as one nation under G-d, indivisible, with spirituality and righteousness for all.

MIND YOUR MANNERS

Question: Is there any connection between the level of religiosity and politeness?

Answer: According to a study made by the Jerusalem Institute for Market Studies, there definitely is a connection. The most polite people in Israel, the study found, are the Torah observers, leaving behind those who define

themselves as traditional or secular.

In a statement to the Jerusalem Post, Robert Sauer, president of the JIMS, offered this insight:

“The results of the survey are disturbing, for they suggest that the public educational system is not fulfilling its basic function.”

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY _____

NEVER GIVE UP HOPE

When a lady in New York lost a ring in the ocean she gave up hope of ever getting it back.

Thirty years later a woman in Puerto Rico flushed the ring out of the ocean, thousands of miles from where it

was first lost. She noticed that the name of the owner was etched onto the ring and set about locating her.

To those involved in outreach to alienated Jews, this serves as a reminder never to give up hope on a Jew lost to his people.

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