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PARSHA INSIGHTS

RELIGIOUS FANATICS

“And it occurred, as he was about to enter Egypt, he said to his wife Sarai, ‘See now, I have known that you are a woman of beautiful appearance. And it shall occur, when the Egyptians will see you, they will say ‘This is his wife!’ then they will kill me...” (12:11-12)

An oft-repeated litany characterizes religious Jews as overly zealous in their observance, or as they say in Yiddish, they’re “far-frumt!”

Of course it goes without saying that everyone who is less religious than me is an atheist and everyone who is more religious than me is a religious fanatic. That’s human nature. But really, do the Orthodox have to be quite so Orthodox? Couldn’t we lighten up just a little around here? Why do we have to be so fastidious, so frum?

The following is a quote from no less than the Vilna Gaon:

“In every generation new barriers need to be erected, for every generation is less than its predecessor and the *eruv rav* (descendants of the Egyptians who left Egypt at the time of the Exodus) grow stronger. Therefore, it is necessary to barricade anew the breaches (in morality) perpetrated by the *eruv rav*. This is what the Torah means when it says “Guard my guardings!” (*Vayikra 29:9*)

The author Jacob Bronowski wrote a famous TV series and book called “The Ascent of Man.” In classical Jewish thought, the reverse is true. From Sinai and onwards, our

story has been the “Descent of Man.” Every generation steps down another rung on the spiritual and moral ladder.

“And it occurred, as he was about to enter Egypt, he said to his wife Sarai, ‘See now, I have known that you are a woman of beautiful appearance.”

How was it possible that only now Avraham recognized Sarah’s beauty? The Arizal says that up till this point in time Avraham had no concept of physicality. He was like Adam before he sinned. However, as he approached Egypt, the world center of decadence, even his lofty spiritual level lessened until he perceived good and evil as the domain of physicality. Sensing this change in himself, Avraham recognized the depths of impurity that was Egypt. He now sensed that it was indeed possible for man to sink to murder in order to satisfy his physical desires.

Like Avraham, the closer we get to our own little Egypt, the larger our cars, our houses and our physical well-being loom in our lives, the more we know that we need to build stronger and stronger fences against a world that celebrates immorality and conspicuous consumption.

And that’s far from being “far-frumt.”

Sources:

- Emet L’Yaakov – the Netivot
- Biur HaGra I’Tikunei Zohar Chadash 83:3 in Mipirushei HaGra al HaTorah
- Thanks to Rabbi Chaim Zvi Senter

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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 Hashem's existence, and thus merits that Hashem appear to him. At the beginning of this week's *Parsha*, Hashem tells Avram to leave his land, his relatives and his father's house and travel to an unknown land where Hashem 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 Hashem. When they reach the land of Canaan, Hashem 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 the Pharaoh, but Hashem 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, Hashem 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 Hashem commanding Avram to circumcise himself and his offspring throughout the generations as a covenant between Hashem and his seed. Hashem changes Avram's name to Avraham, and Sarai's name to Sarah. Hashem promises Avraham a son, Yitzchak, despite Avraham being ninety-nine years old and Sarah ninety. On that day, Avraham circumcises himself, Yishmael and all his household.

ISRAEL Forever

SO WHAT'S NEW?

In the municipal elections held in almost all Israeli cities the other week the campaign issue of some parties was the clash between Jewish tradition and secularism. One anti-religious party even openly promised its potential voters that it would legalize the sale of pork in the religiously observant bastion of Bnei Brak.

There is hardly anything new about this conflict between those who live in *Eretz Yisrael* as to whether to view it as a place where one can best develop his spiritual potential or as a bountiful land which can be exploited for material gratification. In the Torah chapter we will be reading this Shabbat we take note of Avraham's discernment of the materialistic inclination of his nephew Lot which leads him to suggest a separation. True to character, Lot opted for the fleshpots of sinful Sodom, and it was only after this negative influence was removed that G-d appeared to Avraham and invited him to take legal possession of the entire land – west and east, north and south.

Are we to see another separation between the descendants of Avraham who follow in his ways and those who wish to fill the land with the Sodomite fleshpots of forbidden foods and unrestricted marriage? The current government effort to transfer authority over the rabbinical courts in Israel to the Justice Ministry headed by the most outspoken champion of secularism has elicited a warning from religious leaders in this country that such a move will lead to a sharp split in the nation with the religious community maintaining its own records on who has been married or divorced according to Halacha.

What is new about this situation is that this time around it is not Avraham suggesting that Lot leave for greener pastures but rather it is Lot who is exploiting political power to force Avraham to seek isolation. It is our hope that the Prime Minister will wake up to the seriousness of the situation and will take the action necessary for maintaining a united Israel forever.

PARSHA Q&A ?

1. What benefits did Hashem 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 Hashem indicate with His promise that Avraham would "come to his ancestors in peace?"
17. How did Hashem 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 Hashem 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 Hashem.
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.

WRITING ON THE DOORPOST

“**A**nd you shall write them (the words of the *Shma*) on the *mezuzot* (doorposts) of your houses and of your gates” (*Devarim* 6:9).

Thus does the Torah command us in the *mitzvah* of *mezuzah*. A literal reading of this passage could lead us to assume that we are obligated to actually etch these words on the doorposts themselves. How then did the Torah communicate that the intention is to write the two *Shma* chapters with ink on parchment and attach it to the doorpost?

Two sources are mentioned for this. One is based on the rule of *gezeirah shavah* – an equation between two disparate chapters which contain a similar term. The term “writing” used in regard to this *mitzvah* also appears in the chapter (*Devarim* 24:3) about writing a *get* divorce document. Just as that document can be written only on parchment so too must the *mezuzah* be written on parchment, not on the doorpost itself.

Rabbi Ashi, however, adds a point based on the word *uchesavtam* which can be read as two words meaning “write” and “perfect”. Since it is impossible to do perfect writing on a doorpost, he concludes, the intention of the Torah was for the writing to be done on parchment.

These two sources, concludes the *gemara*, are interdependent. If not for Rabbi Ashi’s point we would assume that the Torah literally insisted on writing on the doorposts themselves. But this alone would have ruled out only writing on the doorposts because it is impossible to do perfect writing in that position. There would still remain the possibility of doing such perfect writing on a detached stone and affixing it to the doorpost. The comparison to the writing of the *get* eliminates this option and leaves us with the *mezuzah* on parchment.

• *Menachot* 34a

A PROBLEM OF PRECEDENCE

“**Y**ou shall bind them as a sign on your arm and they shall be as *totafot* between your eyes” (*Devarim* 6:8).

• *Menachot* 36a

In its commandment to wear *tefilin* the Torah issued an explicit order to first put on the *tefilin shel yad* – the *tefilin* of the arm – and afterwards the *tefilin shel rosh* – the *tefilin* of the head. What happens if someone mistakenly first takes out of his *tefilin* bag the *shel rosh*?

This question arises because of the rule that we do not “skip over *mitzvot*” and if we have come in contact with an object for performing a *mitzvah* we are obligated to give it precedence to another awaiting our performance. The most common example of this is the situation of a Jew on a weekday morning putting on a *talit* and *tefilin*. The rule is that he must put on the *talit* first so that he will be moving up to a higher level of sanctity when he puts on the *tefilin* (*Shulchan Aruch Orech Chaim* 25:1).

But should he accidentally take the *tefilin* in his hand before taking out his *talit* he must give the *tefilin* precedence in order not to be guilty of “skipping over *mitzvot*”.

This rule applies, however, only when the order of the *mitzvot* is not explicitly dictated by the Torah. Since the Torah insisted that *tefilin* must first be placed on the arm the consideration of not skipping over *mitzvot* must be put aside if he took the *shel rosh* in his hand and it must be put aside until the *shel yad* is worn.

Such a conflict should, however, be avoided. This is why the *gemara* elsewhere (*Mesechta Yoma* 33b) cautions that when one takes off his *tefilin* he should place them in his bag in such a manner which will guarantee that he first encounters the *shel yad* and performs the *mitzvot* in the proper order. There are two opinions among halachic authorities as to how this is achieved. One view is to have a long, narrow bag in which the *shel rosh* is placed in back and the *shel yad* in front to assure that it will be first encountered. Another opinion is that it is preferable to place the two side by side (See *Magen Avraham* in *Orech Chaim* 28 and *Tarei Zahav* in *Orech Chaim* 25).

Common practice is to place them side by side with the *shel rosh* on the right and the *shel yad* on the left. It is advisable, however, to try to place them in such a manner that the *shel yad* protrudes slightly more so that it will be the first to be encountered.

[Editor's note: this is part two of a series on Burial and Cremation]

From: Shirley in Denver

Dear Rabbi,

The Torah says that man must return to dust. Does this necessarily mean burial, or could cremation also be acceptable?

Dear Shirley,

Last week I discussed the obligation of burial. This week I'll discuss the prohibition against cremation.

In Judaism, burning of the human body is considered a disgrace. Regarding the execution of the wicked Achan and his sons and daughters the verse states: "And all Israel stoned him with stones, and burned them in the fire....So G-d rescinded His anger" (*Joshua 7:25*). Similarly, the righteous King Yoshiyahu "executed the priests of idol worship upon their altars and burned their bones upon them" (*2 Kings 23:20*). The Talmud relates how after evil Yehoyakim suffered a "donkey's burial", his skull was eventually found and degradingly burnt. Burning the human body is so disgraceful that G-d declared, "I will not turn away [Moav's] punishment, because he burned the bones of the King of Edom into lime" (*Amos 2:1*).

Not only is burning the body a disgrace, it is explicitly forbidden. The Talmud asserts, "Anything that requires burial [Rashi: including a dead body] shall not be burned". Further, our Sages noted "one who says 'burn me [after death] and give my field to a certain person', the field may not have to be given" since it is forbidden to cremate him in the first place. Therefore, one who is intentionally cremated not only uproots a positive Torah requirement to bury, and transgresses a negative Torah prohibition of leaving a body unburied as we explained last week, but also transgresses a prohibition against cremation. In addition, just as the soul suffers great agony when its departure from the body is unnecessarily prolonged (as when the body is put in a mausoleum), so too the soul suffers tremendously from the extremely abrupt process of cremation.

Furthermore, one who has his body cremated will not merit resurrection — a fundamental belief of Judaism expressed in Maimonides' 13 Principles of Faith: I believe with complete faith that there will be a resurrection of the dead, when the wish emanates from the Creator. One explanation is that cremation destroys even the extremely hard "luz" bone from which a buried body is reconstituted. This may be understood by an analogy: while a planted seed fully rots and even provides nutrient for the sprout, a burnt seed doesn't even sprout. In truth, cremation is less a physical impediment to resurrection than a spiritual one. G-d can do anything He chooses, and in fact all Jews who were

burned against their will throughout history will certainly merit resurrection. Rather, one who willfully has his body cremated asserts his disbelief in the future reunification of body and soul. Regarding this our Sages warn, "One who rejects the idea of resurrection will have no part in it".

There are two interesting exceptions. After the inhabitants of Yavesh Gilad learned that the Philistines hanged the bodies of King Saul and his sons to the wall of Beit Sha'an, they "walked all night, and took the bodies of Saul and his sons from the wall of Beit Sha'an, and they came to Yavesh and burnt them there. And they took their bones and buried them under the tamarisk tree at Yavesh" (*1 Samuel 31:12-13*). Rabbi David Kimchi comments "although some explain that Saul and his sons were not literally burnt, but rather fires or incense were lit in their honor, it is more likely that [by the time the bodies were found] the flesh had become infested and it would be a dishonor to bury them as such, so they burned the flesh and then buried the bones". Nevertheless, the hasty manner in which Saul was buried was later a cause of a three-year famine (*2 Samuel 21:1*).

Another exception is in the prophecy of Amos, "And it shall come to pass if there remain ten men in one house [who hid and were saved from the sword], they shall die [by plague]. And a man's uncle, *u'masarfo*, shall take him up to bring the bones out of the house" (*Amos 6:10*). Some explain *u'masarfo* to mean "his maternal uncle", while others explain that the uncle will take his remains "from the fire" of the enemy. However, Radak explains the phrase to mean "he that burns him", meaning as a result of the plague, one's relative will have to come and burn the flesh of his kin before removing the bones from the house for burial in order to prevent an epidemic.

In conclusion, aside from extreme exceptions, cremation is absolutely forbidden, causes the soul great pain and bars it from reincarnation. And more, regarding one who chose cremation, his relatives do not sit *shiva*, do not say Kaddish, are not required to bury the remains, and even if the remains are buried, they are not buried in a Jewish cemetery.

Sources:

- *Sanhedrin 82a*
- *Beit Yitzchak, Yoreh De'ah 2, 155*
- *Achiezer 3, 72:4*
- *Temurah 34a; Rashi, "dam nidah"*
- *Jerusalem Talmud, Ketuvot 11:2, Korban HaEida*
- *Iggrot Moshe 3, 143*
- *Bereishet Rabba 28; Tosafot, Bava Kama 16b; Kaf HaChaim 300*
- *Gesher HaChaim 1:16, 2:13*
- *Sanhedrin 90a*
- *Radak, 1 Samuel 31:12*
- *2 Samuel 21:1, Rashi; Yevamot 78b*
- *Amos 6:10; Rabbi Yehuda ibn Karesh in Ibn Ezra; Targum Yonatan and Rashi*
- *Beit Yitzchak, Gesher HaChaim, Rabbi Pinchas Schienberg*

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

REUNION OF BROTHERS

Avraham Yassin, a Lebanese convert to Judaism residing in a northern Israel community, was recently reunited with his brother Achmed. The latter fled Lebanon together with his four young sons and asked for political asylum.

Both brothers had collaborated with the Israeli forces in southern Lebanon. After 20 years of such service, Avraham crossed over to Israel, converted and is now studying in a yeshiva. Achmed remained behind secure in the knowledge

that his collaboration was unknown.

When his wife recently reported him to the Lebanese police as a past collaborator he began to feel the Hizbullah breathing down his neck. When a summons came from the police he feared for his life and fled with his sons. After the security forces in Israel determined that he was on the level, they allowed Achmed and his sons to join their converted relative while their request for asylum is being considered.

LOVE OF THE LAND - THE NAMES

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

ERETZ CANAAN

The name most commonly used in the Torah for the Jewish homeland is Eretz Canaan. The occupants of the land before its conquest by the Israelites were seven nations, foremost of whom were the Canaanites.

Founder of his nation was Canaan, the grandson of Noach who cursed him that he and his descendants would forever be a slave to the descendants of Noach's other sons, Shem and Yephet. The Canaanites and the other nations lost their claim to the land they inhabited because of their sinful ways but it was Noach's



curse which helped win a lawsuit over possession of the land.

During the reign of Alexander of Macedon who ruled over this part of the world, the Canaanites laid claim to the land which the Torah itself describes as the land of Canaan their ancestor. Citing the same biblical source, a Jewish sage reminded them that they had been condemned to slavery by their ancestor Noach and that the property of a slave is legally that of the owner. The Canaanites had no rebuttal and fled in shame.

WHAT'S THE RIGHT THING TO DO?

REAL-LIFE QUESTIONS OF SOCIAL AND BUSINESS ETHICS

TOUGH (KID) STUFF

Question: My son recently came home from elementary school that he attends with a complaint that some of his classmates are "picking on him". He is afraid to report them to the teacher because this may incite them to vengeance. What is the right thing for me to do in order to help him?

Answer: A couple of factors must first be kept in mind. Childhood quarrels such as the one you describe often result from petty prejudices or imagined grievances. It is also difficult to know for certain that your son is completely innocent. The ideal solution is to make contact with the parents of the classmates in question and to try to work out a reconciliation between the youngsters through adult guidance.

The problem facing your son can also be turned into a

valuable educational experience. Life can be filled with situations of social hostility of which he is receiving a foretaste at a very young age. You must therefore guide him in breaking down the barriers that separate him from those classmates and expose him to what he views as unjust harassment. Parents can certainly help in such an effort by inviting those classmates to their home for a meal or activity in which they must be polite to their host's child and thus foster a new relationship. King Solomon has already advised us to feed our enemy and there is the famous Talmudic dictum that hospitality has the power to turn enemies into friends.

Only if such efforts fail because of the violent nature of your son's classmates should you resort to involving the school authorities or consider transferring schools.