

O H R N E T

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PARSHA INSIGHTS

THE BIG LEAGUE

“Moshe replied to G-d, ‘Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and that I should take the Children of Yisrael out of Egypt?’” (3:11)

The lights of Chanuka have faded into darkness. The dreidel lies motionless in the glass-fronted cabinet in the living-room. What have we taken with us from those Chanuka lights?

Surely one of the most important lessons that we can learn from Chanuka is that we are capable of rising to great heights if we really believe in what we are doing. Even the might of an empire cannot stand in the way of someone who is prepared to give up his life for what he believes.

About sixty years ago in a dark horse stable in Auschwitz, a handful of girls gathered around some hastily-prepared Chanuka candles. Soon the group grew in size and the light spread over the entire barracks. In a few minutes several hundred Jewish women were singing that immortal song of contempt for all the tyrants of history: *“Moaz Tzur Yeshuati...”* After they had finished the song they listened quietly to words of Torah filled with trust in the ultimate vindication of G-d’s actions.

Who were these girls that organized that Chanuka in hell? They were pupils of a school in Tarnow founded by an unassuming seamstress named Sarah Shenirer.

Sarah Shenirer was born in 1883 in Krakow, Poland, which was then part of the Austrian Empire. At that time there was no formal system of education for Jewish girls and Sarah was educated in a Polish public school. All around her, Sarah saw the ravages of the so-called “Enlightenment” on the Jewish woman. Jewish girls were well-versed in the latest in Polish poetry, but disdained their own traditions and religion. Yiddish was an embarrassment to them. A question in Yiddish would be answered in Polish. Sarah Shenirer saw a terrible lacuna in the education of Jewish girls. Their brothers were shielded by their immersion in Torah, but, for the girls, there was little or nothing to fend off the blandishments of secularism.

Meanwhile World War I broke out, and Sarah, together with a stream of refugees, left for Vienna. On Shabbat Chanuka Sarah went to the Shtumper Street Synagogue and heard an address by Rabbi Dr. Plesh that summoned her to

her life’s task. Rabbi Dr. Plesh spoke of Mattityahu and the Chashmonaim; of Chana and her seven sons; of Yehudit. A history of dedication and self-sacrifice.

She returned to Krakow full of enthusiasm. With nothing more than faith in G-d and a burning desire to serve Him as best she could, Sarah opened a school for little girls. She rented two rooms. One served as a tailor shop where she “sewed clothes for the body,” and in the other she set up a new kind of “shop” where she began to “sew clothes for young souls.” Sarah knew that much as secular studies might beguile the mind, only Torah and *mitzvot* could nourish the Jewish soul. She began to imbue a generation of girls with a love of G-d and His holy Torah.

She wrote to her brother, a Belzer Chassid living in Czechoslovakia, about her undertaking. At first he ridiculed her. However, when she insisted that nothing would stop her, he invited her to come to Marienbad. He wrote, *“The Belzer Rebbe is here and we shall ask him.”* She invested her last pennies in the trip. Her brother wrote a note to the Rebbe: *“My sister wants to educate B’not Yisrael in the spirit of Judaism and Torah.”* The Rebbe replied with two very important words: *“Beracha v’hatzlachah!”* (Blessing and success!) Those two words gave her all the impetus she needed. And one might add that, at the time, the only help she received.

With twenty-five children whom she had prevailed upon her customers to entrust to her, the Beth Jacob Movement was born.

At first, Sarah’s school provoked contemptuous dismissal as the “undertaking of the seamstress.” However, the educational results of her new school very soon spoke for themselves. The parents of Sarah Shenirer’s pupils saw a new spirit in the hearts of their children. Her girls spoke differently from the pupils of the Polish schools. They did not speak with arrogance and defiance. They showed respect to their parents. They wanted to go to *shul* with their parents. They asked what *beracha* (blessing) to recite for this or that. They were keen to hear stories about the *tzaddikim* and the pious.

Sarah Shenirer, almost single-handed, revolutionized the education of a generation. And all this by a seamstress whose formal education ceased at the age of 13. When she passed away, more than 200 schools had been established, attended

continued on page two

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

SECRET OF SURVIVAL

The beginning of the suffering of our ancestors in Egypt is described in this week's Torah portion as taking place after they were there for "RaBYM" days. This word is seen by one of the commentators as an acronym for the four different exiles experienced by our people after entering Eretz Yisrael: R is for the Roman Empire (4th); B for Babylon (1st); Y for Yavan (Greeks, 3rd) and M for Media (and Persians, the 2nd).

The significance of this is that Egyptian exile is to be viewed as a forerunner of all the other exiles which were to follow. It was only natural then that the Torah should signal

to us the secret of spiritual survival under the dominion of all these heathen powers. The signal was indeed communicated in an earlier chapter which informs us that, before leaving for Egypt, the Patriarch Yaakov sent his son Yehuda to Yosef in Egypt to set up a yeshiva for the family to study in upon their arrival.

The yeshiva, as a place of learning and a source of halachic authority, has always been the secret of survival for our people. This is an historical lesson which must be internalized and applied by our government in order to guarantee Israel forever.

PARSHA INSIGHTS

continued from page one

by some 25,000 students all over Eastern and Central Europe. The Beth Jacob (Beit Yaakov) network of schools has grown exponentially, and is today the backbone of Torah education for girls.

How often do we hear that little voice in our head that says, "You. You belong in the little league!" "You can't do it." "Who do think you are?" "You're way out of your league!"

Very often we are our own greatest enemies.

In truth, we possess enormous untapped resources. Every one of us is a gold mine that goes down to the depths, but we don't see it. The virtues of others are obvious to us, but because we see ourselves from close up, sometimes we cannot focus on our own virtues.

When G-d told Moshe to take the Jewish People out of Egypt, he said "Who am I?" Rashi explains that Moshe meant "Am I important enough to speak with kings?" The negative

drive in our heart says "Who are you? Who are you fooling?"

We must know that if we sincerely desire to do something, then, with the help of G-d, the sky's the limit. Apart from our hidden resources, apart from the qualities that we possess and of which we are ignorant, we should always remember that G-d runs the world. If G-d decides that He wants us to achieve something, however far above our capabilities, we can raise ourselves above not only what we believe we can do, but even what we actually *can* do.

Only G-d decides who gets into the big league.

Sources;

• Adapted from Rabbi Azriel Brooks' "Kitvei Reshumot" – words of Torah heard from Rabbi Mordechai Zuckerman, zatzal

• "Sarah Schenirer: The Mother of Generations" by Joseph Friedenson (with additions by Chaim Shapiro) ArtScroll/Mesorah Publications Judaiscope Series.

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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 Hashem 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.

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

WHY SHE WENT AHEAD

“I stood in enough lines in Auschwitz and I don't have the strength for any more standing in line!” This was the excited response of the elderly lady to the people standing in line at the checkout counter of an Israeli supermarket who had shouted at her for bringing her groceries to the front of the line and failing to wait her turn.

To substantiate her claim for special consideration, she rolled up the sleeve of her blouse to reveal the concentration camp number tattooed there.

One of those who had previously criticized the line-jumper turned to the lady behind her and blushing said:

“It was worth this embarrassment to learn a lesson not to jump to conclusions about the behavior of others which seems on the surface to be out of order. Instead of shouting at this lady we should have gently asked her for the reason she felt she deserved special treatment, and we would have avoided an unpleasant experience for all of us.”

DON'T TAKE IT LITERALLY

A deviation from the literal meaning of a phrase in the Torah is sometimes mandated by the indication offered by another phrase.

In regard to the purification process required for one who has become ritually impure as a result of contact with the dead, the Torah gives these instructions. On the third and seventh day following such contamination, one who is pure shall sprinkle the mixture of spring water, red heifer ashes and other ingredients known as *mei hanidah* (purification waters) on the impure one. (*Bamidbar 19:19*) A couple of passages later (*ibid. 19:21*) we are told that the one who administered this sprinkling himself becomes ritually impure.

This latter statement, point out our Sages, is not to be understood literally. The one who does the sprinkling actually remains pure, for this passage is referring to the one who carries these purification waters when he is not involved in the purification process. The reason why the Torah referred to this carrier as a sprinkler is to teach us that he contracts ritual impurity only if he carries the amount of purification water which qualifies for the purification process.

Tosefot raises the question as to what compelled the Sages to conclude that the second passage mentioned above could not be understood literally on the basis that it was unimaginable for the sprinkler to become impure. The answer given is that the first passage reads "The pure one shall sprinkle upon the impure one." The need to identify him as being pure despite the rather obviousness of such a requirement indicates that the sprinkler is not only pure to begin with but remains so even after he completes his role.

• *Niddah 9a*

THE TRANSPOSED SANCTUARY

A famous synagogue is mentioned in our *gemara* as the one on whose roof a halachic dialogue took place between the Sage Shmuel and his disciple Rabbi Yehuda. It was called "The Synagogue of *Shaf Veyativ* in the city of Nehardoa."

In his commentary here Rashi defines these Aramaic words as the name of a place within the precincts of the great Babylonian metropolis Nehardoa.

Rashi elsewhere (*Mesechta Avodah Zara 43b*) offers another explanation based on the passage "For your servants desired its stones and favored its earth." (*Tehillim 102:15*)

When the first phase of the Babylonian Exile took place with the forced departure of King Yochanya and his elite company of government ministers and Torah scholars (*Melachim II 24:10-16*), these exiles took along with them stones and earth from the *Beit Hamikdash* in Jerusalem. With these sacred materials they laid the foundation for the synagogue they built in Nehardoa. According to this approach the words *Shaf Veyativ* mean that it was transported from Jerusalem and settled in Nehardoa.

This was indeed a dramatic demonstration of how much these exiled Jews loved the stones and earth, as was foreseen by the author of the Psalms of Tehillim. But it also achieved for the builders of this synagogue and the following generations which prayed there a special connection with G-d. "Where is the Divine Presence in Babylon?" asks the *gemara* (*Mesechta Megilah 29a*) and the answer given is "in the Synagogue of *Shaf Veyativ* in Nehardoa."

Maharsha points out that while this synagogue hosted the Divine Presence in the manner that the *Beit Hamikdash* did, every synagogue that has a quorum of Jews praying in it is also graced with that sanctity.

• *Niddah 13a*

LOVE OF THE LAND - THE LEGENDS

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

THE MASADA THAT ALMOST WAS

Almost two thousand years after the fall of Masada to the Romans, plans were being made by the Jewish community in Palestine to make a similar stand against the Nazi army advancing towards them.

Barriers were erected on Mount Carmel in Haifa to serve as obstructions against the tanks of Rommel's Afrika Corps should they break through the British defenses at El Alamein and invade Palestine. Although the



Jewish community put aside its differences with the British over the notorious White Paper, the colonial authorities refused to supply it with arms for self-defense for fear that they would not be returned.

In the end General Montgomery's forces turned back Rommel's army and all that remains of the "almost Masada" are some rusty iron rails driven into the ground in the Dania quarter of Haifa.

MARRIAGE CUSTOMS

From: Name Withheld in New York

*Dear Rabbi,
My son is marrying, G-d willing, in June and we have heard of a pre-marriage ceremony called "The Breaking of the Plate." Would you be so kind as to share the significance of this ceremony as well as the actual performance (ritual).
Thank you.*

Dear Name Withheld,

Firstly, Mazal Tov! When a couple decides to marry, they announce the occasion with an engagement party. In Yiddish this event is called a *vort*, which means a "word." At the *vort* the man and woman traditionally give their "word" and formally commit to marry.

There is a custom to break a ceramic plate at the *vort*. This symbolizes the seriousness of their commitment to each other: Just as breaking the plate is final, so too the engagement is final and not easily terminated. Breaking the plate also tempers the intense joy of the occasion, similar to the glass that is broken under the *chupah*. It reminds us that

the Temple is not yet rebuilt [readers, see below].

Customarily, the couple's mothers are the ones who break the plate. They hold the plate together and drop it onto a hard surface. It's important to wrap the plate well to ensure that no one gets hurt from the broken pieces. Some have the custom to make a necklace for the bride from the broken pieces after taking the necessary safety precautions. Others give the broken pieces to eligible "singles" as if to say, "May a plate be broken for you soon." Some break the plate at the wedding just before the *chuppa*.

From: David F. Scott

I have a question for your "Ask the Rabbi" series. At a Jewish wedding the groom places the glass under his foot and smashes it into several pieces. What is the significance of this act? I have a friend who is soon to be married and he asked me this question.

Dear David,

It says in the verse, "If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its skill. Let my tongue adhere to my palate if I fail to recall you, if I fail to elevate Jerusalem above my foremost joy" (Psalms 137). Therefore, even at times of

continued on page six

WHAT'S THE RIGHT THING TO DO?

REAL-LIFE QUESTIONS OF SOCIAL AND BUSINESS ETHICS

THE MISMATCHMAKER

Question: As a professional matchmaker I once suggested a certain young man for the daughter of a friend. I provided him with the name of the boy and the yeshiva in which he studied. My friend's investigations about the candidate indicated that he was a good catch and it wasn't long before I was invited to the engagement party. When I was introduced to the *chatan*, I was shocked for he was not the one I had suggested but rather another boy with the same name in the same yeshiva! Of course I have no intention of harming this match by revealing my error, but I would like to know whether I am entitled to my matchmaker fee for indirectly bringing about this *shiduch*.

Answer: When such a question came before Rabbi Chaim Kanievsky of Bnei Brak, he ruled that the matchmaker had no claim and could view his role in the successful match as nothing more than a cog in a Divine plan. He illustrated this point with a story.

A Jew who had lost his wife hired a girl to take care of his young children. She did her work faithfully each day and then returned to her home. One day she bought a raffle ticket

which she told her employer about. Even before she became aware of it, he learned that she had won a big prize. He then decided to propose marriage to her so that he would share in her good fortune and only later tell her about her windfall. His plan seemed to work perfectly until he told his new young wife that she was a wealthy woman. To his shock she informed him that before the prize was announced, she had sold her ticket to a friend.

When her disappointed husband discussed with his local rabbi the idea of a divorce, he was soundly scolded:

"Look how many things G-d had to do to get you to marry this girl. He took away your first wife, brought this girl to take care of your children, persuaded her to buy a lottery ticket, and even arranged for her to win a big prize. After all of this was arranged so that you should marry her, how can you even contemplate divorce?"

The moral of the story, concluded Rabbi Kanievsky, is that in this case the matchmaker's role was only a part of a Divine plan and a fee is due him only when he was the agent who directly made the match.

Ask the Rabbi in Italy

Chazak and yashar koach! Your article in the Ask! column about the environment is really a very good summary of the Jewish attitude toward the subject. May I ask your permission to translate it into Italian and publish it in the Jewish monthly of the Jewish Community of Rome? Obviously, I will indicate its source. Todah rabbah in advance.

• Rabbi David G. Di Segni

Ohrnet replies: Thank you. Permission granted. Would you please send us a copy of the issue of your publication in which it appears for our records?

Contacts

Greetings from a former enrollee in one of your crash course, circa 1982 (most helpful!) I'm writing on behalf of a highly intelligent 49-year-old who's just embarking on Shabbat observance and is interested in meeting like-minded people. Whom would you recommend this person contact? Thanks!

• A. Katz

Ohrnet replies: Good to hear from you! It really depends on

where the person is geographically. If you let us know we will do our best to try and find the proper contact.

RE: Ethics - What's the Time?

What have we become if we feel that we are unable to help someone out with a simple request like telling them the time, especially a child? I am afraid that we are so concerned with lofty thoughts and *mitzvot* (no pun intended). The child and the parents have already been judged for not providing a wristwatch. I enjoy your responses. However I don't understand the questions at times. Have we forgotten how to be good people?

• Gigi M. in Tzufim, Israel

FYI, in certain neighborhoods, that Q is a prelude to robbing you of your wristwatch...so let's limit the response to when an apparently good kid asks the Q. Thanks!

• All the best from Michael P

Ohrnet replies: Both your points are important and well-taken. It seems that the question is highly dependent upon the location and circumstances under which the child is asking the time.

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continued from page five

"utmost joy" such as a wedding, we smash a glass in order to recall the Temple and the glory of Jerusalem during The Temple era and regret its destruction.

On the other hand, the fact that we break the glass at this time of union between husband and wife as they unite to build a new home, symbolizes and expresses our hope that G-d and the Jewish people will also soon unite to rebuild the Temple and restore their former intimacy and glory.

Another reason is based on the Talmud in Berachot: "[The Torah] says 'Serve G-d with fear and rejoice with trembling'... Rav Ashi made a wedding for his son. When he saw that the Rabbis were getting 'carried away' in their

rejoicing, he brought out a crystal glass and broke it before them and they became more solemn."

The authors of the Tosefot state that this is the source for the breaking of the glass at weddings. We learn from this that even at an occasion of great rejoicing, one must take measures to ensure that the celebration remains within bounds of propriety and holiness.

Sources:

- Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 560:2
- Berachot, pages 30b-31a
- Tosefot - Berachot, 31a, "Aissi...."

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