



SHABBAT PARSHAT VAERA · 1 SHVAT 5767 · JAN. 20, 2007 · VOL. 14 NO. 14

PARSHA INSIGHTS

TAKE IT TO YOUR HEART

“Whoever among the servants of Pharaoh feared the word of Hashem chased his servants and his livestock to the houses. And whoever did not take the word of G-d to heart – he left his servants in the field.” (9:20).

Translation is a risky business. When you translate a concept into another language, you put it into a set of cultural assumptions that may well be inimical to the concept itself.

A case in point is the Hebrew concept of *yirat Hashem*. Literally translated *Yirat Hashem* means “fear of G-d”. Within the cultural framework of the English language, the adjective “G-d-fearing” conjures up visions of the Pilgrim Fathers, characters with names like Jebedyah and Obadyah; Amish picket fences and Shaker furniture. “G-d-fearing” is not an adjective that sits well in the mouth of the modern English-speaker. It is our culture’s assumption that we should be free from fear.

In the view of Judaism, however, *Yirat Hashem*, fearing G-d, is the beginning of wisdom.

But what does G-d-fearing mean? Does it mean having the haunted look of a severe paranoid, or that getting out of bed in the morning becomes an existential challenge?

This week’s parsha reveals the essence of *Yirat Hashem*.

In the seventh plague, the Torah describes the Egyptian reaction to the news that G-d would cause lethal hail to fall on the land. *“Whoever among the servants of Pharaoh feared the word of Hashem chased his servants and his livestock to the houses. And whoever did not take the word of G-d to heart – he left his servants in the field.” (9:20).*

Ostensibly, the opposite of “feared the word of Hashem”

in the first sentence should be “*And whoever did not fear the word of G-d...*” Why then is the opposite of fearing Hashem called “*not taking the word of G-d to heart?*”

The essence of *Yirat Hashem* is paying attention.

Try this experiment.

How many times a day do you glance at your wrist-watch? Let’s say you look at the time twice an hour, maybe three times. Let’s assume that you get up at seven and go to bed at twelve midnight. So, on average, you look at your watch some 50 times a day - 50 times a day, seven days a week. Let’s say your watch is two years old. So you’ve looked at your watch approximately 35,000 times.

Now, without looking, can you tell me what’s written on the face of your watch? Chances are that you left something out, or got something wrong.

You can look at the same thing, day in, day out, but if you don’t pay attention, you’ll never really see it.

It’s the same with *Yirat Hashem*. You can know there’s a G-d, believe the Torah’s true, even do all the *mitzvot*, but never achieve an awareness of G-d.

You can think that being an angry person is a very bad thing, but unless you internalize this awareness until it becomes instinctive, you will carry on being Mr. Angry for the rest of your life.

Every day we say in the prayer, Aleinu, “... You should know this day and take to your heart that Hashem is the only G-d – in heaven above and on the earth below – there is none other.”

The essence of fearing G-d is not just “to know this day”, but also “to take it to your heart.”

• Based on the *Sfat Emet* and other sources

OHRNET magazine is published by OHR SOMAYACH Tanenbaum College

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

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PARSHA OVERVIEW

G-d tells Moshe to inform the Jewish People that He is going to take them out of Egypt. However, the Jewish People do not listen. G-d commands Moshe to go to Pharaoh and ask him to free the Jewish People. Although Aharon shows Pharaoh a sign by turning a staff into a snake, Pharaoh's magicians copy the sign, emboldening Pharaoh to refuse the request. G-d punishes the Egyptians and sends plagues of blood and frogs, but the magicians copy these miracles on a small-

er scale, again encouraging Pharaoh to be obstinate. After the plague of lice, Pharaoh's magicians concede that only G-d could be performing these miracles. Only the Egyptians, and not the Jews in Goshen, suffer during the plagues. The onslaught continues with wild animals, pestilence, boils and fiery hail. However, despite Moshe's offers to end the plagues if Pharaoh will let the Jewish People leave, Pharaoh continues to harden his heart and refuses.

ISRAEL Forever

ALL WORK AND PLAY MAKES ISRAEL A DULL NATION

When Moshe and Aharon approached Pharaoh with a message from G-d to allow the Hebrew slaves to spend three days in the desert offering sacrifices to Him, the response was to impose an even heavier burden of slave labor upon our ancestors. "They are idle and therefore they cry out for the opportunity to sacrifice," complained the cruel Egyptian despot who saw the danger of free time inviting thoughts of freedom.

In his classic *Mesillat Yesharim*, Rabbi Moshe Luzzato compares the strategy of Pharaoh mentioned in this week's Torah portion with that of the *yetzer hara* (evil

inclination), which keeps a person so busy that he does not have time to think of his real purpose in life.

Too many Jews in Israel and elsewhere are guilty of submitting to this strategy and are so busy with work and play that they don't stop to think about what is really important in their individual lives and the life of the nation.

Just as our ancestors did not allow Pharaoh's strategy to prevent them from calling out to G-d and thus achieving freedom from slavery, so too must our people today free themselves from workaholism and playaholism and reflect upon what will truly secure Israel forever.

LOVE OF THE LAND - THE PLACES

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

KFAR HARUF – THE NORTH AFRICAN CONNECTION

As any serious student of Talmud is aware, in the back of virtually every volume of the Babylonian Talmud is the commentary of Rabbi Yitzchak Alfassi, better known as **RYF** (Rabbi Yitzchak of Fez in Morocco).

This towering Torah personality, whose



halachic opinions form one of the foundations of the *Shulchan Aruch*, is honored by a community in Eretz Yisrael bearing his name. Interestingly enough, Kfar HaRuf was established by immigrants from that part of the world where Rabbi Alfassi lived, North Africa.

PARSHA Q&A ?

1. Did G-d ever appear to Avraham and say "I am G-d?"
2. What cause did the forefathers have to question G-d?
3. How was Moshe commanded to act towards Pharaoh?
4. How long did Levi live?
5. Who was Aharon's wife? Who was her father? Who was her brother?
6. Why are Yitro and Yosef both referred to as "Putiel?"
7. After which plague did G-d begin to "harden Pharaoh's heart?"
8. Why did Pharaoh go to the Nile every morning?
9. Give two reasons why the blood was chosen as the first plague.
10. How long did the plague of blood last?
11. Why did the frogs affect Pharaoh's house first?
12. What did Moshe mean when he told Pharaoh that the frogs would be "in you and in your nation?"
13. What are "chamarim?"
14. Why didn't Moshe strike the dust to initiate the plague of lice?
15. Why were the Egyptian sorcerers unable to bring lice?
16. What were the Egyptians likely to do if they saw the Jews slaughtering lambs?
17. Why didn't the wild beasts die as the frogs had?
18. The *dever* killed "all the cattle of Egypt." Later, boils afflicted their cattle. How can this be?
19. Why did Moshe pray only after leaving the city?
20. What was miraculous about the way the hail stopped falling?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

1. 6:9 - Yes.
2. 6:9 - Although G-d swore to give them the land, they never actually had control over it.
3. 6:13 - With the respect due a king.
4. 6:16 - 137 years.
5. 6:23 - Elisheva, daughter of Aminadav, sister of Nachshon.
6. 6:25 - Yitro fattened (*pitem*) cows for idol worship. Yosef scoffed (*pitpet*) at his evil inclination.
7. 7:3 - After the sixth plague — *shechin*.
8. 7:15 - To relieve himself. Pharaoh pretended to be a god who did not need to attend to his bodily functions. Therefore, he secretly used the Nile for this purpose.
9. a. 7:17 - Because the Nile was an Egyptian god.
b. 8:17 - Because an invading army first attacks the enemy's water supply, and G-d did the same.
10. 7:25 - Seven days.
11. 7:28 - Pharaoh himself advised the enslavement of the Jewish People.
12. 7:29 - He warned that the frogs would enter their intestines and croak.
13. 8:10 - Piles.
14. 8:12 - Because the dust protected Moshe by hiding the body of the Egyptian that Moshe killed.
15. 8:14 - The Egyptian sorcerers' magic had no power over anything smaller than a barley kernel.
16. 8:22 - Stone the Jews.
17. 8:27 - So the Egyptians would not benefit from their hides.
18. 9:10 - In the plague of *dever* only the cattle *in the fields* died. The plague of *shechin* affected the surviving cattle.
19. 9:29 - Because the city was full of idols.
20. 9:33 - The hailstones stopped in mid-air and didn't fall to the ground.

לע"נ

מרת חיה שרה בת ר' מרדכי ע"ה

ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

- The reward for tithing
- How much rain for individual and for the general public
- The three Heavenly gifts which sustained Jews in the wilderness
- Danger of shaming a teacher of Torah
- The Sage Ulla and the Jews of Babylon
- Rain water from the ocean or the clouds
- When to start praying for rain in *Eretz Yisrael* and elsewhere
- The fast days for rain of the Torah scholars and the public
- Avoiding looking comfortable while others are suffering
- Sage advice regarding travel
- Importance of sharing in the troubles of the community
- The pros and cons of individual fasts
- Fasting only part of a day
- When to make the commitment for an individual fast
- Till when may one eat before a fast
- The series of 13 public fast days for rain
- Washing with cold water on a fast day
- When to say the special "*Aneinu*" prayer in the fast day service
- Expectant and nursing mothers on fast days for rain
- Blowing of the shofar on these fast days
- How long are fast days continued for rain or other dangers
- Other restraints practiced on these days besides fasting
- How the fast day was divided
- The six blessings added to the regular service
- Participation of *kohanim* on duty in these fasts
- Taking the *aron kodesh* outside and the placing of the ashes

"DOING BUSINESS" WITH HEAVEN

The Midrash tells this most inspiring story about "doing business" with Heaven. A wealthy Jew was blessed each year with a bumper crop of one thousand *kur* (a large measure) from which he dutifully separated 100 *kur* in accordance with the Torah command to tithe. On his deathbed he called his son and urged him to faithfully continue this pattern of tithing. The son did so the first year following his father's passing. The next year the field again produced its great bounty but this time the son couldn't bring himself to give away ten percent as a tithe. The result was that the field produced only a hundred *kur*. His relatives thus explained to him what had happened:

"When you inherited the field you were the landowner and G-d was the priestly recipient Who could designate to

whom it should be given. Now that you failed to tithe, G-d is the landowner and you are the priestly beneficiary receiving only ten percent of what the field used to produce."

Tosefot cites this Midrash in regard to what Rabbi Yochanan states as an explanation of the double language used by the Torah (*Devarim* 14:22) in commanding a Jew to tithe: "Tithe, you shall *tithe all* the crops which your field produces each year." The letters of the Hebrew word *assair* can be read to mean "tithe" or "become wealthy", so that the above passage can be read as "tithe in order to become prosperous".

This Divine promise of reward for tithing is not limited to agricultural produce. Our Sages saw in the word *all* used in this passage an indication that it extends to tithing monies gained in business and any other income.

• *Ta'anit* 9a

WHAT THE SAGES SAY

"Whoever takes upon himself to fast (when it is not required and when he is not physically fit to do so) is considered a sinner. This is based on the fact that if the Torah refers to the *nazir* who abstains from wine as a sinner, how much more so does this apply to one who abstains from all food and drink."

• *The Sage Shmuel - Ta'anit* 11a

THE “SHIN” SIDE STORY

From: Alex in LA

Dear Rabbi,

Would you please explain to me what the significance of the two “shins” on the head tefillin is, and why one has four arms instead of the usual three?

Dear Alex,

The presence of the shins on the head tefillin has many explanations. I’ll discuss just a few here.

The two shins together spell “sas” meaning joy. We must view the awesome mitzvah of tefillin as a privilege that we are honored and happy to perform. Since the tefillin symbolize Torah and mitzvot, we are reminded in general to learn Torah and do all the commandments with joy. It’s not coincidental that the shins are on the tefillin of the head, the seat of thought. Often, happiness is a result of our state of mind. Re-arranging our thoughts can help us see things in a new light, which may bring us joy. Thus, re-arranging the letters for the Hebrew word for thought - “machshava”- yields “besimcha” - a state of joy.

Also, “shin” stands for “shefa” meaning bounty. The shins on the tefillin symbolize conduits channeling Divine energy from above to below. In Judaism, this is viewed as an inverted tree where the roots are fixed on high and draw spiritual sustenance down to the physical world of creation. Since man is the pinnacle of physical creation he is like the trunk of the inverted tree, dis-

seminating this influence into the physical world. Therefore the shins are like roots reaching on high, through which Divine energy is brought down and focused in our minds. From there it is channeled to our arm, the instrument of activity. This symbolizes the dissemination of Divine energy into the world through our interaction with the surroundings.

The three and four headed shins are understood as referring to important sevens such as the seven days of the week, the seven-branched menorah, the seven divisions of holy and secular knowledge, the seven patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Aaron, David and Joseph) or alternatively, the three patriarchs and four matriarchs.

Furthermore, the head tefillin, referred to as a crown, together with the three and four armed shins having seven points, corresponds to the ten sefirot. These sefirot channel Divine energy from on high and in turn are projected onto our bodies. Thus, the tefillin that we wear are integrated into this pattern of the sefirot in our body. The head tefillin corresponds to keter. It rests on our minds, between the right and left hemispheres of the brain, corresponding to chochma and bina, respectively. The knot of the head tefillin is placed at their juncture on the brain stem, corresponding to da’at. The hand tefillin is tied to either the right or left arm, the place of chesed and gevurah. The box of the hand tefillin rests upon the heart, the place of tiferet. The straps at each side reach the thighs, corresponding to netzach and hod. They fence in the groin, infusing the areas of yesod and malchut with positive Divine energy originating from the head tefillin, which is in turn “rooted” by the shins on high.

continued on page six

WHAT’S THE RIGHT THING TO DO?

REAL-LIFE QUESTIONS OF SOCIAL AND BUSINESS ETHICS

SLOWING DOWN THE EXPRESS LINE

Question: The supermarket in which I shop has an express checkout counter for people purchasing six items or less so that they will not have to wait for a long time in the lines of heavy shoppers. I find it very frustrating when I wish to take advantage of this service and observe shoppers with many more than the stated limit taking unfair advantage to check out quickly at my expense. What is the right thing to do?

Answer: Your frustration is understandable but let us examine your options.

Reprimanding your fellow customer will most likely be an exercise in futility because he or she probably doesn’t take

seriously the sign limiting the service to six items. Calling this violation to the attention of the clerk at the express checkout counter will probably not achieve much either because she is in the middle of making up the bill for her current customer and has no time to listen to your complaint.

The only reasonable option is to let the supermarket manager know that his establishment will lose credibility if the limit announced at the express checkout counter is not adhered to, and that it is therefore important for him to enforce this rule by stressing to his clerks that they must turn away from that line anyone who exceeds the six-item limit.

OLD BOOTS AND NEW ONES

Rabbi Simcha Wasserman was not only a great Torah educator and pioneer in Torah outreach, but also a bridge to the Torah legacy of pre-war Europe. He inspired his many disciples with stories about the Chafetz Chaim and his own great father, Rabbi Elchanan Wasserman, the Rosh Hayeshiva of Yeshiva Baranovich who perished in the Holocaust. The following story about father and son is taken from "Reb Simcha Speaks" by Yaakov Branfman and Akiva Tatz (ArtScroll):

"Once my father zt"l had to travel from Baranovich and I was accompanying him to the station; we were walking together and I was carrying a small suitcase. He was wearing

new boots that my mother had bought for him, which he had refused to wear until my mother gave away his very old and worn shoes to the girl who carried the water buckets through the snow, explaining to my father that the girl had no shoes and therefore needed them. Only then had he agreed to wear the new ones. I could see that something was bothering him. After a while he said, 'These boots are bothering me.' My father never spoke without a specific reason, so I knew that I was about to learn something. 'What is bothering me is that they have laces, and I reckon that it is going to cost me half a minute a day to tie and untie them.' He was teaching me the value of time."

Ask! YOUR JEWISH INFORMATION RESOURCE - WWW.OHR.EDU

EULOGY TO BABYLON AND BEYOND

From Jill in Texas,

What is Judaism's and Israel's take on Saddam's demise?

Dear Jill,

The last day of this civil calendar year coincides with the tenth day of the Hebrew calendar month of Tevet, a day on which observant Jews throughout the world fast.

They fasted in an effort to somewhat relive the trauma that their ancestors experienced almost two and a half millennia ago in the hope that they will thus learn from the mistakes made by those Jews which brought such sharp Heavenly retribution upon them.

What was that trauma?

On the tenth of Tevet the army of the king of Babylon initiated the siege of Jerusalem which eventually led to the destruction of the *Beit Hamikdash* and a mass exile to Babylon. That exile lasted for seventy years before Jews were given the opportunity to return to their land and rebuild their *Beit Hamikdash*.

But Babylon was no longer a power at that time. The Babylonian Empire had come to a bloody end when the Persian and Median armies slew its last king Balshatzer and laid waste his country.

Any Jew familiar with the history of his people cannot miss making the connection between the hanging of Saddam

Hussein, ertswwhile ruler of the modern version of Babylon – Iraq – one day before Jews fasted because of the siege of Jerusalem which his Babylonian predecessor initiated.

But the historical connection doesn't end here. Babylon was replaced on the world stage by the Persian Empire whose sound and fury gave way to the Hellenistic forces. Persia, in its modern form of Iran, is again generating much sound and fury with its development of a nuclear potential in defiance of the international community. As history repeated itself with the fall of a Babylonian dictator so too will the boasting of his Persian counterpart about wiping the Jewish State off the map prove to be nothing more than a scary bubble, soon to burst.

To our profound regret, there are Jews whose myopia has misled them into identifying with this bubble by participating in the conference which the Iranians organized for denying the Holocaust. They have been condemned by every segment of Jewry and all of the explanations they offer the media for their shocking behavior are no more than childish babble.

Whatever criticism many Jews may have of Zionism and the Jewish State which it produced is something that must be kept "within the family". Locking arms with those pledged to destroy the Jewish Homeland is self-hatred of the worst sort and those who joined the Iranians in their anti-Semitic demonstration represented no-one but themselves, and they are nothing more than a sad reflection of Babylon, Bubble and Babble.

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LOVE of the LAND

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