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PARSHA INSIGHTS

DEAR DIARY...

"Yehuda – you, your brothers shall acknowledge..." (49:8)

I feel sorry for the historical biographers of the present generation; their job isn't going to be easy. A golden source of biographic information has always been the subject's letters. Winston Churchill's war correspondence gives us unparalleled insight, not only on the course of the war, but into the man himself. The same is true of any historical figure. A careful investigator may deduce much insightful information from what is said, and what is not said, to whom and when.

E-mail has put an end to all that.

I remember some forty-five years ago the present writer together with all his school friends waiting anxiously for the daily distribution of mail after school breakfast; whatever nourishment those breakfasts lacked was made up for in the letters from home. Two or three pages of news, love, and encouragement — not to mention a goldmine for biographers — have been replaced by:

"hi. how are you? i'm fine atb. luv. Me. *This e-mail has been checked for viruses and for significant content and has been cleared of both.*"

I wonder if the rise and fall of the written word is evident in that other great biographic storehouse — the diary.

The diary, what a wonderful invention! The innermost loves and fears of the heart committed to paper, locked between a leather binding by a small padlock.

Dear Diary...

That ultimate non-judgmental ear listening with inexhaustible patience to our every hope and frustration.

"Yehuda – you, your brothers shall acknowledge..." (49:8)

The Targum Onkelos translates this phrase as "...Yehuda, you admitted (your liaison with Tamar) without hesitation; thus your brothers will admit (i.e. acknowledge) you as king."

The essential character trait of kingship is honesty – even when it hurts.

We all have strengths and weaknesses. However all our strengths emanate from a single perfect trait, and all our weaknesses from a single negative characteristic. If we develop that

single complete part of us, we could perfect our entire character.

Let's say you're instinctively honest like Yehuda. If you don't recognize that virtue, over the course of time deceitful situations will challenge your innate honesty, tarnishing and eroding it until lying will become more comfortable than the truth.

However, if we make ourselves aware of our cardinal virtue and guard it, we can mobilize that strength to combat our negative traits.

For example, it's six o'clock in the morning: time to get up. You don't like getting up and you're just about to cancel the *nudnik* button on your alarm, when your innate honesty compels you to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous early-morning-rising and leave the button where it is.

Or let's say you don't like giving charity very much or helping out other people; your innate honesty will compel you to realize that you must help others less fortunate than yourself. To do less would be less than honest.

"Shimon and Levi are comrades... accursed is their rage..." (49:5)

Yaakov's blessing to Shimon and Levi reads more like a curse. However, Yaakov was alerting them to their fundamental qualities. Their strongest positive trait was brotherhood; their strongest negative one was anger.

Fine, you will say, but how do I recognize my strongest trait in order to develop it, especially if I've left my personality like an untended field?

"Dear Diary..."

For a couple of weeks, keep a daily accounting of your traits as they manifest themselves in each different situation in which you find yourself. After a while you'll notice the positive trait that surfaces most often, and when you recognize that strength, you can begin to develop it until your entire character becomes elevated.

Few things can be as dear as a diary.

• Based on Rabbi Yerucham Lebovitz and Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe

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PARSHA OVERVIEW

After 17 years in Egypt, Yaakov senses his days drawing to a close and summons Yosef. He has Yosef swear to bury him in the Machpela Cave, the burial place of Adam and Chava, Avraham and Sara, Yitzchak and Rivka. Yaakov falls ill and Yosef brings to him his two sons, Ephraim and Menashe. Yaakov elevates Ephraim and Menashe to the status of his own sons, thus giving Yosef a double portion that removes the status of firstborn from Reuven. As Yaakov is blind from old age, Yosef leads his sons close to their grandfather. Yaakov kisses and hugs them. He had not thought to see his son Yosef again, let alone Yosef's children. Yaakov begins to bless them, giving precedence to Ephraim, the younger, but Yosef interrupts him and indicates that Menashe is the elder. Yaakov explains that he intends to bless Ephraim with his strong hand because Yehoshua will descend from him, and Yehoshua will be both the conqueror of *Eretz Yisrael* and

the teacher of Torah to the Jewish People. Yaakov summons the rest of his sons in order to bless them as well. Yaakov's blessing reflects the unique character and ability of each tribe, directing each one in its unique mission in serving G-d. Yaakov passes from this world at age 147. A tremendous procession accompanies his funeral cortege up from Egypt to his resting place in the Cave of Machpela in Chevron. After Yaakov's passing, the brothers are concerned that Yosef will now take revenge on them. Yosef reassures them, even promising to support them and their families. Yosef lives out the rest of his years in Egypt, seeing Efraim's great-grandchildren. Before his death, Yosef foretells to his brothers that G-d will redeem them from Egypt. He makes them swear to bring his bones out of Egypt with them at that time. Yosef passes away at the age of 110 and is embalmed. Thus ends Sefer Bereishet, the first of the five Books of the Torah. *Chazak!*

ISRAEL Forever

THE WEeping OF RACHEL

As he approached the end of his days on earth, the Patriarch Yaakov implored his son Yosef to ensure that he be buried in the tomb of his ancestors in Eretz Yisrael. Sensitive to the fact that he did not do the same for Yosef's mother, Rachel, Yaakov explained that he was Divinely commanded to bury her where he did.

Rachel's tomb was located on the route upon which the Babylonian conqueror Nevuzradan would lead his Jewish

captives to Babylonian exile. Rachel then came up from her grave to tearfully plead for Heavenly mercy. Her prayers were answered in the prophecy "Your children will return to their Land."

Our ancestors did indeed return to Eretz Yisrael from Babylonian exile, and they will certainly return from their current exile. As we study this week's Torah portion which records this promise we gain confidence in Israel forever.

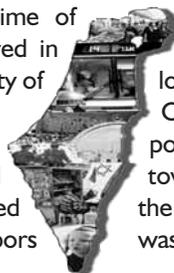
LOVE OF THE LAND - THE WISDOM

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

NECHEMIAH'S WALL

Remnants of a wall dating back to the time of Nechemiah have apparently been discovered in an archeological dig in Jerusalem's ancient City of David.

In the Book of Nechemiah (6:16) it is recorded that this wall around the city to which Jews had returned from Babylonian captivity was completed in only 52 days despite the threats of hostile neighbors



who had occupied the area around Jerusalem.

This part of the two and a half millennia-old wall is located outside Sha'ar Ha'ashpatot (Dung Gate) and the Old City walls facing the Mount of Olives. Based on rich pottery found during a dig under a previously uncovered tower which had hitherto been assumed to date back to the Hasmonean period, it is now assumed that the tower was part of the wall built centuries before by Nechemiah.

PARSHA Q&A ?

1. Why is kindness towards the dead called “*chesed shel emet*” — kindness of truth?
2. Give three reasons Yaakov didn't want to be buried in Egypt.
3. How do you treat a “fox in his time” (i.e., a commoner who rules)?
4. “When I was coming from Padan, Rachel died on me... I buried her there on the way to Efrat...” Why did Yaakov say all this to Yosef?
5. Initially, why was Yaakov unable to bless Efraim and Menashe?
6. What does *pillalti* mean?
7. What does “*Shechem*” mean as used in this week's parsha? (two answers)
8. Which individual is called “the *Emori*”? Why? Give two reasons.
9. What did Yaakov want to tell his sons but was unable to?
10. What privileges did Reuven lose due to his rash actions?
11. What congregation from Yaakov's offspring did Yaakov not want to be associated with?
12. What did Yehuda do after he heard Yaakov rebuke Reuven, Shimon and Levi? Why?
13. What does milk do to teeth?
14. Why is Yissachar like a “strong-boned donkey”?
15. With what resource did both Yaakov and Moshe bless Asher?
16. In Yosef's blessing Yaakov said, “They embittered him...” Who are “they”?
17. Which descendants of Binyamin “will divide the spoils in the evening”?
18. From whom did Yaakov buy his burial place?
19. What oath did Yosef make to Pharaoh?
20. Which two sons of Yaakov did not carry his coffin? Why not?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

1. 47:29 - Because the giver expects no reward from the recipient.
2. 47:29 - a) Egypt's ground was to be plagued with lice; b) At the time of the resurrection, those buried outside Israel will suffer; c) So the Egyptians wouldn't make him into an idol.
3. 47:31 - Bow to him.
4. 48:7 - Yaakov thought Yosef harbored resentment since Yaakov had not buried Yosef's mother, Rachel, in the *Ma'arat HaMachpela*.
5. 48:8 - The *Shechina* departed from him.
6. 48:11 - “I thought.”
7. 48:22 - a) The actual city of Shechem; b) A portion.
8. 48:22 - Esav. a) He acted like an Emorite; b) He trapped his father with words (*imrei pi*).
9. 49:1 - When *mashiach* will come.
10. 49:3 - Priesthood and Kingship.
11. 49:6 - Korach and his congregation.
12. 49:8 - He drew back. He was afraid that Yaakov would rebuke him for the incident with Tamar.
13. 49:12 - It makes them white.
14. 49:14 - Just as a donkey bears a heavy burden, so the tribe of Yissachar bears the yoke of Torah.
15. 49:20 - Oil-rich land.
16. 49:23 - Yosef's brothers, Potifar and his wife.
17. 49:27 - Mordechai and Esther.
18. 50:5 - From Esav.
19. 50:6 - Yosef swore not to reveal Pharaoh's ignorance of Hebrew.
20. 50:13 - Levi, because he would carry the *aron* (holy ark). Yosef, because he was a king.

לע"נ

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

- The order of the first *mishna* in comparison with other *mishnayot*
- Definition of a *kinuy* and a *yad* and their source
- Violation or delay of fulfilling a *neder* commitment
- The *nazir* who makes only a partial commitment
- The language required for making someone's property forbidden to the *neder* maker and vice versa
- A subtle *yad* in regard to *neder*, marriage and divorce, *korban*, *pe'ah*, *tzedakah* and *hefker*
- The difference of opinion regarding the term *menudah* used in making a *neder*
- The seriousness of mentioning the name of G-d in vain
- Poverty equivalent to death
- Torah scholar releasing himself for self-imposed excommunication
- Taking an oath to fulfill a mitzvah
- What to do if one dreams of being excommunicated

POVERTY AND DEATH

“Poverty is equivalent to death.” As the source for this equation the Sage Rav cites the Torah passage (*Shmot* 4:19) in which G-d assures Moshe that he need not fear returning to Egypt because of his enemies who were responsible for his forced flight from there.

“For all the men are dead who sought your life,” he was told, a reference to Datan and Aviram, two Jews who had informed Pharaoh that Moshe had slain an Egyptian who was mercilessly beating a Jew, causing Moshe to flee for his life.

But did these two wicked men really die?

In the much later rebellion of Korach against Moshe they are mentioned as accomplices (*Bamidbar* 16:1), so the description of them as “dead” cannot be taken literally. There are, however, several possibilities for applying this term. A blind person, a *metzora* and a childless one are also considered dead in a certain sense. Rabbeinu Nissim (RaN),

in his commentary, rules out the option that Moshe's enemies were powerless to harm him because of their blindness since Datan and Aviram expressed their defiance of Moshe in the above-mentioned rebellion by declaring that (*ibid.* 16:14) “even if you blind us we shall not come to meet with you.”

The other option that they were *metzoraim* is also eliminated because a *metzora* is isolated from the community and the Torah reports (*Devarim* 11:16) that they were swallowed up by the earth as punishment for their rebellion “in the midst of all of Israel.”

Childlessness could also not be considered as the equivalent of death in this case because their lack of offspring would not affect their evil influence with the king. The only remaining possibility is that Datan and Aviram had become impoverished and thus lost their clout.

This is the proof that poverty is equated with death.

• *Nedarim 7b*

WHAT THE Sages SAY

“Just as it is impossible to have wheat without chaff, so to it is impossible for a dream to not contain some meaningless elements.”

• *Rabbi Acha - Nedarim 8a*

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NEW HOUSE ON THE PRAIRIE

From: Susan in Akron, OH

Dear Rabbi,

I will be moving into a new house in the near future. Is there any special dedication service for such an occasion?

Dear Susan,

Congratulations on your upcoming move. May you have a “*yishuv tov*” – meaning may your dwelling be good.

There is definitely an idea and practice of inaugurating a new dwelling.

First and foremost, several places in the Torah and Scriptures describe and emphasize the great significance and joy accompanying the dedication of the House of G-d. For example:

Regarding the Tabernacle in the desert, “And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, Take Aaron and his sons with him and the garments, and the anointing oil, and the sin offering bull, and the two rams, and the basket of unleavened bread...And assemble the entire community at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting... And Moses and Aaron went into the Tent of Meeting. Then they came out and blessed the people, and the glory of the Lord appeared to all the people. And fire went forth from before the Lord and consumed the burnt offering and the fats upon the altar, and all the people saw, sang praises, and fell upon their faces” (Lev. Ch. 8,9).

Regarding the Temple in Jerusalem, “And when Solomon finished praying, and the fire descended from heaven and consumed the burnt offerings and the sacrifices, and the glory of the Lord filled the House...And all the Children of Israel saw the descent of the fire, and the glory of the Lord on the House, and they kneeled on their faces to the ground on the floor, and they prostrated themselves and said: Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good, for His loving-kindness is eternal.... Now Solomon observed the Feast at that time seven days, and all Israel with him, a very great assemblage...rejoicing and delighted of heart for all the goodness that the Lord had wrought for David, for Solomon, and for Israel His people (II Chronicles 7)”.

Yet, the significance of dedicating a new dwelling is not limited to the House of G-d. The Torah includes one who has built a new house among those who are exempt from military service (such as newlyweds): “When you go out to war against your enemies...the officers shall speak to the people, saying, What man is there who has built a new house and has not yet inaugurated it? Let him go and return to his house, lest he die in the war, and another man inaugurate it” (Deut. 20). Such an inauguration is even more relevant when one views his home as a mini-sanctuary for G-d.

Even a house which is not newly built but which one has newly moved into also needs “inaugurating”. Regarding the Israelites’ pending entrance into the Land of Israel, G-d commanded that any house whose walls became plagued with a condition called “*tzara’at*” must be dissembled and rebuilt. Eventually the Canaanite-built houses that they occupied became plagued and the walls had to be dismantled.

The question is, after blessing the Jews with the Land, its planted fields and built houses, why did G-d cause the houses to become plagued and torn down? Rashi (Lev. 14:34) explains that the Canaanites, fearing the Israelite’s invasion, hid their wealth in the walls. The plague and consequent deconstruction revealed an extra goldmine of wealth in addition to the Land, fields and houses.

However, it would seem that this is not the only reason for the plague, since G-d’s favor toward that generation would not have been expressed as such a blessing in disguise. Rather, there was literally more going on beneath the surface. The Zohar (3:50a) notes that when the idolaters built their houses, each stone was placed in the name and in honor of their gods. Desiring to eradicate idolatry from the Land, G-d plagued the houses so that their deconstruction would purge the idolatrous impurity. When the Jews then rebuilt their houses, they instead dedicated them in the service of, and as an abode for, G-d.

This is the spirit behind our dedication of a house, whether one has built it, bought it or is even just renting it. Regardless of who the previous inhabitants were, we inaugurate our use of the house by purging it of spiritual impurities through expressing our thanks to G-d for giving us the resources to obtain a place to live, while simultaneously affirming our dedication to use our home as an instrument for doing His will. In this way, our dwelling truly becomes an abode for G-d.

The most conspicuous and well-known “service” associated with the dedication of a house is the affixing of a *mezuzah* in all of the appropriate doorways in the house. This a Torah commandment whose relevant verses are actually written on the parchments rolled in the elongated boxes attached to the doorway. [Some mistakenly call the box the “*mezuzah*” thinking it is the mitzvah, but the *mezuzah* is really the parchment inside, which, if not prepared and written according to strict specifications, disqualifies the mitzvah].

Another less known service, practiced mainly (but not exclusively) by Sefardi Jews is called “*Chanukat HaBayit*” – dedication/inauguration of a house. It was compiled by Rabbi Chaim Yosef David Azulay (the *Chida*) and is comprised of excerpts from the Mishna, Gemara, Zohar and Rambam’s Mishna Torah. It is recited in a minyan concluded by *Kaddish* and followed by a meal peppered with words of Torah and songs of thanks and praise to G-d.

Notes:

The detailed texts and order of the Chida’s “*Chanukat Habayit*” are as follows: the complete *mishnayot* of Berachot, Yom Tov (Beitza) and Tamid (whose first letters beit, yud, tav spell “bayit” or house, and whose total number of chapters equals 21 which is the numerical equivalent of one of G-d’s names - alef,heh,yud,hey); Zohar 3:50a; Gemara Baba Matzia 107a; Rambam’s Hilchot De’ot 5:11-13 and Hilchot Beit HaBachira 1:1-20. These sections are often divided among the participants and read simultaneously by each so as to shorten the service while still having the whole session learned in the presence of a minyan.

LOST AND FOUND

Question: I often see signs in public places or newspaper ads concerning a lost object in which it is stated that the finder will be rewarded. Since we are commanded by the Torah to return to its owner a lost object, is the right thing to do to accept such a reward?

Answer: This question was posed to Rabbi Yitzchak Zilberstein, the rav of the Ramat Elchanan community in

Bnei Brak. His response was that it is wrong to accept payment for returning a lost object even if the owner offers such a reward. A Jew returns what he has found because he is so commanded by the Torah and it is improper to demand or accept payment for doing a mitzvah.

When placing that “lost and found” ad, he suggested writing that the finder returning the lost object will receive his reward from Heaven.

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY _____

CLOTHES FOR THE MAID

The home of Rabbi Chaim Ozer Grodzenski in Vilna was the haven of hundreds of Roshei Yeshiva and their students when the Nazi menace threatened them at the outbreak of World War Two. This Torah giant offered compassion, counsel and financial assistance to those fleeing from the terror of war.

His selfless dedication, day and night, to everyone who

came to him so impressed the director of the local office of the Joint Distribution Committee that he offered to grant him any request in appreciation of his public service.

The rabbi's reply was that his poor maid's clothes were worn out and she could not afford to buy new ones. “If you really want to do something for me,” he said, “see to it that some new clothes are provided for her.”

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