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PARSHA INSIGHTS

ON BEING GREAT

“These are the offspring of Aharon and Moshe... these are the names of the sons of Aharon...” (3:1)

The desire for greatness stirs the human spirit like none other. We can look at the world and see it as a series of obstacles to be overcome; money, loneliness, depression, or we can look at the world as a chance to expand beyond ourselves.

For some, what lies behind the desire to take drugs is the warm embrace of oblivion, for a merciless release from the pain of consciousness.

For others, including the recently deceased Timothy Leary and those other criminally misguided drug-prophets of the sixties, it was desire to transcend the body, to connect to beyond.

In Hebrew, the noun for ‘small’ is *katan*, which is connected to the word *katua*, meaning ‘cut’ (in pronunciation very similar to its English counterpart). Being small means being cut off. Similarly, the Hebrew word for great is *gadol*, which is linked to the Hebrew name Gad; “*Gad is a marching troop.*” (*Bereshet 49:19*)

The essence of a marching troop is that it goes forward; it connects this moment to the next. Greatness is a function of connection. Great people are those who connect every moment in their lives to one singular purpose, and that gives them the ability to influence and raise the sights of all who come within their sphere of influence.

“These are the offspring of Aharon and Moshe... these are the names of the sons of Aharon...” The Talmud (*Sanhedrin 19b*) questions why the Torah starts off by mentioning the offspring of Aharon and Moshe, and then lists only Aharon’s sons. It answers that because Moshe taught Torah to Aharon’s four sons, he was their spiritual father.

When you teach Torah to someone you are giving him or her life no less than a genetic parent.

A person’s example and his teaching are what make him truly great; that’s what allows him to transcend his mortal frame and to father the souls of others.

PARSHA OVERVIEW

The Book of Bamidbar — “In the desert” — begins with G-d commanding Moshe to take a census of all men over age twenty — old enough for service. The count reveals just over 600,000. The *levi'im* are counted separately later because their service will be unique. They will be responsible for transporting the *Mishkan* and its furnishings and assembling them when the nation encamps. The 12 Tribes of Israel, each with its banner, are arranged around the *Mishkan* in four sections: east, south, west and north. Since Levi is singled out, the tribe of Yosef is split into two tribes, Ephraim and Menashe, so there will be four groups of three. When the nation travels, they march in a formation similar to the way they camp. A formal transfer is made between the first-born and the *levi'im*, whereby

the *levi'im* take over the role the first-born would have had serving in the *Mishkan* if not for the sin of the golden calf. The transfer is made using all the 22,000 surveyed *levi'im* from one month old and up. Only *levi'im* between 30 and 50 will work in the *Mishkan*. The remaining first-born sons are redeemed with silver, similar to the way we redeem our first-born today. The sons of Levi are divided in three main families, Gershon, Kehat and Merari (besides the *kohanim* — the special division from Kehat’s family). The family of Kehat carried the *menorah*, the table, the altar and the holy ark. Because of their utmost sanctity, the ark and the altar are covered only by Aharon and his sons, before the *levi'im* prepare them for travel.

THE CONSOLATION PRIZE

Whenever Jews are faced with troubles it is important to remember the lesson of the “consolation prize” which is often awarded to those who suffer.

One outstanding example is found in the census of our ancestors in the wilderness that is recorded in this week’s Torah portion.

In his commentary, Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman (RaMbaN) takes note of the fact that the Tribe of Levi was far less in number than all of the other tribes. This seems strange in light of the special status that this tribe had as servants of Heaven.

One suggestion he makes is that all the other tribes were subject to oppressive bondage in Egypt that was

calculated to reduce the Jewish birth rate. It was then that a voice from Heaven declared “You are trying to prevent them from having children and I say they will have children.” The result was a miraculous birth explosion with Jewish mothers giving birth to sextuplets. Since the Tribe of Levi was not subject to Egyptian bondage their birth rate remained normal and therefore had a smaller population than those blessed with miraculous reproduction.

Just as there was a “consolation prize” for the suffering in Egyptian bondage, we can look forward to something similar that will increase the numbers and security of 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

GATE OF CHULDA – MONUMENTS TO A PROPHETESS

Two gates in the walls of the Old City of Jerusalem are named for the Prophetess Chulda.

One of the seven women whose prophecies are recorded in Scripture, Chulda was a descen-



dant of Yehoshua bin Nun and the convert Rachav whom he took for a wife.

Her prophecy regarding the hidden Sefer Torah discovered during the reign of King Yoshiyahu is recorded in *Melachim II* 22:14-20.

לעיני

מרת ביילא בת ר' דוד ע"ה
ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

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PARSHA Q&A ?

1. Why were the Jewish People counted so frequently?
2. What documents did the people bring when they were counted?
3. What determined the color of the tribal flags?
4. What is the difference between an “ot” and a “degel”?
5. How do we see that the Jews in the time of Moshe observed “*techum Shabbat*” - the prohibition against traveling more than 2,000 *amot* on *Shabbat*?
6. What was the signal for the camp to travel?
7. What was the sum total of the counting of the 12 tribes?
8. Why are Aharon’s sons called “sons of Aharon and Moshe”?
9. Who was Nadav’s oldest son?
10. Which two people from the Book of Esther does Rashi mention in this week’s Parsha?
11. Why did the *levi'im* receive *ma'aser rishon*?
12. Which groups of people were counted from the age of one month?
13. Name the first descendant of Levi in history to be counted as an infant.
14. Who assisted Moshe in counting the *levi'im*?
15. Why did so many people from the tribe of Reuven support Korach in his campaign against Moshe?
16. Why did so many people from the tribes of Yehuda, Yissachar and Zevulun become great Torah scholars?
17. In verse 3:39 the Torah states that the total number of *levi'im* was 22,000. The actual number was 22,300. Why does the Torah seem to ignore 300 *levi'im*?
18. The first-born males of the Jewish People were redeemed for five *shekalim*. Why five *shekalim*?
19. During what age-span is a man considered at his full strength?
20. As the camp was readying itself for travel, who was in charge of covering the vessels of the *Mishkan* in preparation for transport?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week’s Questions!

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

1. 1:1 - They are very dear to G-d.
2. 1:18 - They brought birth records proving their tribal lineage.
3. 2:2 - Each tribe’s flag was the color of that tribe’s stone in the breastplate of the *kohen gadol*.
4. 2:2 - An “ot” is a flag, i.e., a colored cloth that hangs from a flagpole. A *degel* is a flagpole.
5. 2:2 - G-d commanded them to camp no more than 2,000 *amot* from the *Ohel Mo'ed*. Had they camped farther, it would have been forbidden for them to go to the *Ohel Mo'ed* on *Shabbat*.
6. 2:9 - The cloud over the *Ohel Mo'ed* departed and the *kohanim* sounded the trumpets.
7. 2:32 - 603,550.
8. 3:1 - Since Moshe taught them Torah, it’s as if he gave birth to them.
9. 3:4 - Nadav had no children.
10. 3:7 - Bigtan and Teresh.
11. 3:8 - Since the *levi'im* served in the *Mishkan* in place of everyone else, they received tithes as “payment.”
12. 3:15, 40 - The *levi'im*, and the first-born of *B'nei Yisrael*.
13. 3:15 - Levi’s daughter Yocheved was born while the Jewish People were entering Egypt. She is counted as one of the 70 people who entered Egypt.
14. 3:16 – G-d.
15. 3:29 - The tribe of Reuven was encamped near Korach, and were therefore influenced for the worse. This teaches that one should avoid living near the wicked.
16. 3:38 - The tribes of Yehuda, Yissachar and Zevulun were encamped near Moshe, and were therefore influenced for the good. This teaches that one should seek to live near the righteous
17. 3:39 - Each *levi* served to redeem a first-born of the Jewish People. Since 300 *levi'im* were themselves first-born, they themselves needed to be redeemed, and could therefore not redeem others.
18. 3:46 - To atone for the sale of Yosef, Rachel’s first-born, who was sold by his brothers for five *shekalim* (20 pieces of silver.)
19. 4:2 - Between the ages of 30 and 50.
20. 4:5 - The *kohanim*.

- Poetic justice for the guilty *sotah*
- The timing of Heavenly retribution
- The primeval serpent and other victims of their own envy
- All about Shimshon
- The *eishel* of the Patriarch Avraham
- The courageous confession of Yehuda
- David and his son Avshalom
- The decrees of Pharaoh and the birth of Moshe
- The discovery of Moshe's crib and the aftermath
- The funeral of the Patriarch Yaakov
- Moshe and the casket of Yosef
- Moshe's last day in this world and his burial
- The importance of doing acts of lovingkindness
- The mincha flour offering of the *sotah*, its ingredients, its ritual and its consumption
- Preparation of the bitter water for the *sotah* to drink

THE IMPACT OF MOTHER'S MILK

When the infant Moshe was discovered among the river's reeds by the daughter of Pharaoh, an attempt was made to find an Egyptian woman to nurse him. Our Sages explain the refusal of Moshe to be nursed by them as Heavenly intervention "for how could the mouth which was destined to speak with G-d be fed with something impure!" (The Egyptian women ate foods that were spiritually impure and the child they nursed would be nourished by those foods. — Rashi)

The question arises as to why this reason was specifically given in regard to Moshe when all Jews are advised to refrain from having a non-Jew nurse their child if a Jewish nurse is available (Rama in *Shulchan Aruch Yoreh*

De'ah 81:7).

The answer offered by Rabbi Zvi Hirsh Chayos is that the rule of all Jews only applied after the Torah was received and many of the foods consumed by other nations became forbidden to Jews. Since this reason did not apply to the infant Moshe it was necessary to provide a different explanation for his refusal to be nursed by an Egyptian woman.

Just as mother's milk can have a negative effect it can also have a positive one as in the case of the Roman Emperor Antoninus who had such a special relationship with Rabbi Yehuda Hanassi (Rebbie) as a result of momentarily being nursed by his mother.

• *Sotah* 12b

What the SAGES Say

"Whoever covets what belongs to another will not only fail to get it but will even suffer the loss of whatever he has."

• *Beraita, Sotah* 9a

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ADAM'S APPLE

From: Lisa

*Dear Rabbi,
What is the identity of the Fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil?*

Dear Lisa,

Soon I'll discuss what, according to Jewish sources, it might have been. But first allow me to set the record straight about what it wasn't: an apple. This is a common misconception based on non-Jewish sources and illustrations but is not found anywhere in authentic Jewish texts. The Adam's apple, then, so called because of the purported lodging of the forbidden fruit in Adam's throat, is a misnomer.

So, what was this forbidden fruit?

There are at least three opinions in the rabbinical literature: The grape, the fig, wheat.

The grape. This is based on the wording of the verse that states that Eve "took *from* its fruits" (Gen. 3:6) and not that "she took its fruits". The implication is that she did not take the fruit of the tree itself, but rather derived a product from it, namely wine which is the fruit of the vine. Thus, this opinion in our Sages posits that "Eve pressed grapes and gave Adam wine". This, of course, is in keeping with the Torah's many warnings against the vices of alcohol and the way that wine in particular can cause folly and offense.

The fig. This is based on the narrative that relates how after the sin Adam and Eve covered their newly realized nakedness with fig leaves (3:7). The explanation is that when the first couple became aware of the magnitude of

their misdeed they sought to hide themselves from G-d. As they grasped for straw to cover their iniquity all trees in the Garden recoiled from abetting their escape. Only the fig tree, their accomplice in sin, offered cover in its leaves. However, conversely, it was this cooperation to conceal that initiated the rectification of their wrong.

Wheat. This most interesting assertion is based on the idea that an infant only starts to call his father "abba" when he is able to eat and digest wheat. This ability reveals a certain degree of intelligence and discernment. While a child's first drooling "daddy" is most endearing, it paradoxically plants the first seeds of rebellion. How so? Initially, an infant is in speechless awe of his father. However, when he starts to call him "abba", he begins to quantify and thereby limit him such that eventually he second-guesses him until he finally attempts to outdo him. Accordingly, it is wheat which caused Adam and Eve to second-guess G-d's intention and to ultimately rebel against His Will.

Interestingly, this opinion maintains that wheat originally grew on trees in baked form. When Adam sinned, this marvelous tree, which grew ready-made baked goods, was reduced to a lowly kernel-sprouting plant. Yet, in the future, when all mankind returns to G-d and rectifies the sin of Adam and Eve, the Tree of Knowledge will be restored to its former glory. Then, all humanity will use its G-d given intelligence and power of discernment not to outdo G-d, but to wholeheartedly do His Will.

Sources:

- *Sanhedrin 72*
- *Bereshet Rabba 19*
- *Rashi, Gen. 3:7*
- *Ketubot 111b*

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THE “PIRATE PYRES” OF LAG B’OMER

Question: Regarding Lag B’Omer that we recently celebrated there were, as usual, many youngsters making bonfires in celebration of this special day. Since there is virtually no adult supervision of these fires there is a serious danger to the safety of children who are irresistibly drawn to throwing something into the conflagration. I am aware that it is futile to try to stop these once-a-year pyromaniacs, so what is the right thing to do?

Answer: Your concern is well-founded even though it is limited to the “pirate pyres” lit by kids and does not real-

ly relate to the official communal ones overseen by responsible adults.

The only suggestion we can make is to approach one or two of the youngsters and ask them their names and addresses. Their parents should then be apprised of the danger facing their children and urged to either summon them home or undertake the responsibility of adult supervision. Should the children or the parents who have thus been approached prove to be defiantly uncooperative, it would be in place to issue a gentle warning that you may have to call the fire department to put out the fire.

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY _____

A TALE ABOUT A BONFIRE

The traditional bonfires of Lag B’omer that recently generated their mystical light throughout Eretz Yisrael were the cause of an interesting incident that took place in Petach Tikvah shortly before Pesach.

Even though it was more than a month before Pesach youngsters were already gathering wood for their bonfires. One group of five very young girls engaged in such a search came across an old wooden chest that had been dumped on a vacant lot. As they began pulling out drawers they discovered a large batch of dollars and proceeded to divide up this treasure of \$33,000 among themselves.

When the mother of one of the girls discovered dollars in

her daughter’s possession she immediately called the police who quickly searched the abandoned chest and found documents identifying its owner. The woman to whom the money was returned told the police that the chest had belonged to her mother who was now in an retirement home and that she herself had no knowledge that there was anything of value in this old piece of furniture which was always in the way until she decided to get rid of it in her pre-Pesach cleaning.

A happy ending to a story told about — not around — a bonfire.

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