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PARSHA INSIGHTS

EASY STREET

“Yissachar is a strong-boned donkey; he rests between the boundaries. He saw that tranquility was good... yet he bent his shoulder to bear...” (49:14-15)

Approximately 18.8 million American adults, or about 9.5 percent of the U.S. population age 18 and older, suffer from depression.

That’s an amazing statistic.

And that doesn’t include those who are just above the cutoff point of what’s called ‘clinically depressed’. And it also doesn’t take into account those who haven’t sought professional help. Whichever way you look at it, 9.5% is a frightening number.

Why do so many people experience feelings of depression?

America is a society predicated on making everything easy. Convenience shopping. TV dinners. Drive-thru banking. These short-term benefits breeds a certain attitude: “Nothing should cause me effort”.

One of the fundamental components of a happy person is a healthy self-esteem. Probably more cases of juvenile depression are linked to low self-esteem than any other cause. What give us a sense of self-esteem? When we do succeed in doing something that’s difficult? By making life into *easy street*, by giving the subliminal message that everything has to be easy, we have subconsciously taken away a major formula for achieving self-esteem: Rising to a challenge. Overcoming something that’s difficult.

What’s the difference between fun and happiness?

Mount Whitney in California is the highest peak in the lower 48 United States. It’s 14,494 feet tall. You could probably fly to the top of Mount Whitney in about 15 minutes. To walk the same distance might take you 15 days.

It could well be that flying to the top of Mount Whitney is

a lot more fun than climbing it, but climbing will give you a lot more happiness, because you’ll have achieved something quite hard. Fun is something external, and because it’s external it’s evanescent and fleeting. Happiness is inside. It becomes part of your essence.

Learning Torah is the ultimate in deferred gratification. The Torah is as hard as steel and as difficult to hold onto as water. It takes many years of application, of ‘breaking your teeth’ to be able to master its sublime intricacies, and yet there is no *simcha* in the world like learning Torah.

There is no physical pleasure in this world that can compare with the ecstasy of cracking a difficult *Tosefot*. It may not be much fun, but it’s the greatest happiness that there is.

“Yissachar is a strong-boned donkey; he rests between the boundaries. He saw that tranquility was good... yet he bent his shoulder to bear and became an indentured laborer.”

Yissachar is the tribe of the Torah scholars. A Torah scholar carries a heavy yoke, but he is a “strong-boned donkey”. G-d gives him the stamina to carry out his task. Even though he labors day and night, he ‘rests between the boundaries’. He rests between the boundaries of the day and night. How can anything exist between day and night? That’s all there is. Day or night. The *talmid chacham* experiences repose of the soul on a spiritual plane that is beyond the boundaries of day and night. On that plane he has a contentment that is out of this world. He saw “tranquility was good” “yet he bent his shoulder to bear.” He understands that the ultimate of achievement comes from hard work and dedication to G-d’s Holy Torah.

And he ends up much higher than Mount Whitney.

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 LONGEST SIEGE

This week, on the tenth day of the Month of Tevet, Jews throughout the world will be fasting as they recall the siege which the Babylonians imposed on Yerushalayim – a siege which eventually led to the destruction of the *Beit Hamikdash* and a 70-year long exile.

That siege took place thousands of years ago, but in a larger sense it continues into our own day as the longest siege in history. The Iranian nuclear threat and the spread of radical Islamism among Israel's Arab neighbors present a picture of a modern Jewish state under siege.

The purpose of fasting, writes Rambam, is to reflect on the grievous sins committed by our ancestors which brought upon them the Heavenly orchestrated tragedies of siege, destruction and exile. Such reflection will hopefully inspire us to be careful not to repeat those sins but to return to our religious roots.

At a time when the very survival of the Jewish state is threatened, it is our hope that the memory of that first siege will inspire us to mend our ways and bring an end to the longest siege for the sake of Israel forever.

LOVE OF THE LAND

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

ERETZ TOVA – A GOOD LAND

When G-d promised Moshe that He would free His people from Egyptian bondage He said that he would "take them up from that land to a good and spacious land" (*Shmot* 3:8).

This same adjective in describing *Eretz Yisrael*



was used by Yehoshua and Calev in countering the slanderous report given by their fellow spies. "The land which we passed through to spy upon," they declared, "is an exceedingly good land." (*Bamidbar* 14:7)

Succeeding generations up to our own day can testify to the truth of their description.

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.

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- Which animals do not have to be tithed
- The season for tithing
- Why tithing cannot be done on Yom Tov
- The preferred method for successful tithing
- If one of the tithed gets mixed with the untithed

- If tithing was done while animals were stationary
- When a mistake is made in the counting
- If it is an agent who makes the mistake
- An agent's mistake in tithing grain

A MISTAKE THAT COUNTS

If someone is tithing his animals and mistakenly calls the ninth one passing through the gate "Number Ten", that animal is not qualified to be sacrificed as *maisser behaima* but is considered a sanctified animal which can only be consumed if it develops a physical flaw.

What happens if the owner of the animals appoints an agent to do the tithing and the agent makes this above-mentioned mistake?

One opinion in our *gemara* is that in this case the effect on the animal will be the same as in the case of the owner himself making the mistake. The reason for this is that the agent has not caused any real loss for the owner since he still can consume that animal once it develops a flaw.

Rabbi Papa, however, contends that the designation made by the agent has no effect at all since the owner can claim that he appointed him to do something positive for him and

not to cause him a loss. Rashi explains that the loss suffered is that he is not able to consume that animal until a flaw develops and is also restrained from using it for work or for its wool because of its sacred status.

This idea that the action of an agent is ineffective if it is counterproductive is challenged on the basis of a *mishna* which deals with an agent appointed to tithe grain but is unaware how much *terumah* the owner wishes to give to the *kohen*. If he tithes a fortieth of the crop, his tithing is effective even though the owner only wished to give a fiftieth and we do not render his action ineffective because it was detrimental to the owner.

The difference between the two cases is that in the latter one the agent can rightfully claim that since there are people who generously give the *kohen* a fortieth of their crop, he assumed that the owner who appointed him without specific instructions belonged to that category.

• *Bechorot* 51a

WHAT THE Sages SAY

"A Jew is pleased to have his resources utilized for fulfillment of a mitzvah."

• *Rabbi Tanchum son of Rabbi Chiya - Bechorot* 58a

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SWAYING OUT OF HARM'S WAY

From: Ira

Dear Rabbi,

I recently read an article that made the following point: Many Orthodox men wear spectacles. It was once assumed that it was strain brought on by the long hours of study in the yeshiva, or Torah schools, that affected the eyesight of so many religious men. However, a study in Israel suggested that much of the blame lay with shockkelling - the fervent rocking backward and forward motion that students make as they read the texts, and which causes an incessant change of focus in the eyes leading to myopia. My question is, if this is so, is it worth losing sight over? Is there a religious need for the davening shaking or is it just to stay alert?

Dear Ira,

With due respect to the study you cite, I have trouble seeing its argument. Many people world-wide wear glasses or need corrective vision despite the fact that they never "shukled" in their life. In fact, I imagine the need for glasses is much more prevalent in societies where reading is central to the culture.

Conversely, many religious men do not "shukle" at all when praying, or pray with their eyes closed, or hold their book in their hands as they sway such that it stays at a constant distance from their eyes, and still they need glasses.

So I must say, I am not swayed by the study's conclusion but rather lean toward the more Orthodox explanation mentioned in the article. But perhaps I can focus on the second part of your question instead: Is there a need to sway, and if so, why?

There is Scriptural basis for the practice of swaying during Torah learning and prayer, and the practice is discussed in the Jewish legal texts. One general view is that this "shukling" is encouraged (for reasons I'll discuss below) during both study and prayer. The other general view is that while this is true regarding Torah study and for parts of the prayer service, regarding the silent, standing prayer most closely associated with communing before G-d, one should be still. The later commentators posit that in all cases, it's a personal decision and one may do what's most conducive to attaining and maintaining intention in prayer.

There are several reasons given for the practice of "shuk-

ling":

1. King David wrote, "All of my limbs shall proclaim: Who is like You..." (Psalms 35:10). When we praise G-d, we do so with all of our being: the mind, heart, and mouth express the prayer through speech, and the rest of the body does so by moving. Every facet of our self is involved in connecting to our Creator.

2. Solomon taught, "The soul of man is a candle of G-d" (Proverbs 20:27). The candle's flame constantly sways and flickers as it attempts to ascend on high. Our soul also constantly seeks to rise above the physical world and cleave to its Source. This is especially true during the experience of prayer as we concentrate and focus on our relationship with G-d. Our body, swaying back and forth like a flame, reflects this flickering of the soul.

3. Many verses discuss the need to serve G-d with reverence, fear, trembling and awe. Accordingly, this "shukling" is an external expression of what should be our inner feeling of humility and awe before G-d in general, and in particular, while serving him in worship and prayer. Perhaps paradoxically, it is this idea which is the basis for the opinion that during the silent, standing prayer mentioned above, one should be perfectly still, as one would appear before a king for whom he has reverence and awe.

4. Our experience in prayer is likened to the way in which the angels minister before G-d. It is for this reason that during the pinnacle of prayer, we stand with our feet together, resembling the way the angels are described as serving G-d with singular purpose. Similarly, the angles are described as "rushing forth" and "turning back" (*ratzo v'shov*), as they surge with desire to cleave to G-d, then recoil with the realization of their limitation. So too our "shukling" forward and back conveys this dichotomy of reaching for the ideal but returning to the real.

Interestingly, converts to Judaism who prayed in the context of other religions before converting, and to a lesser extent newly-religious Jews, relate an inexplicable inclination to sway during prayer, which they never felt before becoming practicing Jews. While one might attribute this to spiritual acculturation, many of them assert that this motion naturally flows from a soul interacting with its Creator as a tuning fork resonating in response to a pure tone, or a harp string vibrating at the touch of the musician, or a reed swaying in a caressing breeze.

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after a year of growth, but the yeshiva didn't leave him. All the connections he made — in learning and in life — stayed with him, and today, his entire family enjoys the Shabbatons, *shiurim*, and simchas of all his friends at Ohr Somayach.

This past June, Mr. Hochheiser decided to return to the source and learn at Ohr Somayach for Elul session. With his wife's loving support, he made the flight once again. He greeted Rosh Hashana 5772 with a *sugya* in hand, in Jerusalem, amongst old friends and new.

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

THE ANONYMOUS HERO

The Israeli soldier heard the sound of shots coming from a lonely spot in Hebron and rushed to investigate what had happened. There he saw another soldier lying in a pool of blood, the victim of a terrorist attack. He quickly administered first aid, summoned help and accompanied the ambulance to the emergency room of the hospital. The doctors told him that the patient would live only because of the initial medical attention he had provided.

When the parents of the wounded man arrived at the hospital and heard the story of his rescue they wanted to thank his rescuer. But he was nowhere to be found and no one knew his identity. After a fruitless search for this anonymous savior they returned to their grocery store in Kiryat Malachi where they hung a big sign relating the story of their son's miraculous rescue and asking for help in locating the

hero.

One day a year later a woman from Beersheba entered their shop, read the sign and cried out "That's my son!" A quick telephone call to her son was followed by a heartwarming meeting of the two families. At one point the hero's mother called aside the mother of the soldier he had saved and said to her:

"You don't remember me but we met twenty years ago when I entered your shop and I struck up a nice conversation with you and your husband. In the course of our talk I mentioned that I was suffering from a difficult pregnancy and was planning an abortion. Both of you persuaded me to drop this idea, pointing out what a blessing children are. You succeeded in convincing me, and the child to whom I gave birth was the one who saved your son!"

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Why Do They Hate Religious Jews?

Insights into the current anti-religious campaign

BY RABBI MENDEL WEINBACH

The current campaign in Israel to demonize the religious community as discriminators against women must be understood by analyzing the motives of leftist politicians and media. Anyone familiar with the lifestyle of Jews whose lives are governed by Torah law is aware that this campaign is based on lies and an old anti-Semitic tactic of blaming an entire community for the excesses of a few.

The motive of the politicians has already been exposed in a Knesset debate following a motion of “no-confidence” in the government put forth by the Kadima party on the issue of the alleged religious discrimination against women. Minister of Culture Limor Livnat of the Likud blasted Kadima-head Tzippi Livni, accusing her of exploiting this issue for political advantage in anticipation of primaries which may soon take place in her party. Livnat came under fire from the Opposition when she voiced her opinion that religious Jews should be allowed to conduct their lives according to their religious principles.

Another criticism of the motive of the leftist parties was voiced by the Chairman of the Knesset Finance Committee, Rabbi Moshe Gafni of the Torah Jewry party. He saw the anti-religious campaign as an attempt by the Opposition to bring down the government which is a coalition of right wing and religious parties. “If we would only

agree to join the Left in a coalition government,” he said, “the anti-religious campaign would immediately come to an end.”

What about the media? Why do radio, television and the secular press project the issue of discrimination as the most important topic of the news?

In addition to the media’s familiar leftist leaning there is the motive of blowing up an issue in order to gain higher ratings of listeners, viewers and readers. No wonder then that television crews invaded the religious community of Beit Shemesh in order to provoke protests which could be portrayed as violent.

It is truly remarkable that the real issues of a nuclear Iran and the upheavals in the Arab world have given way to this outpouring of hatred of some Jews of those who are faithful to Torah law. Can it be the fear that the religious community will someday become the majority? The Central Bureau of Statistics recently reported that in the year 2059 religious Jews will represent forty percent of the nation’s population with the secular element behind them.

Jews who have remained loyal to their faith despite persecution from non-Jews will not be fazed by the propaganda of fellow Jews and look with hope that the number of Jews returning to their religious roots will continue to grow and bring an end to self-destructive hatred.

WHAT’S THE RIGHT THING TO DO?

REAL-LIFE QUESTIONS OF SOCIAL AND BUSINESS ETHICS

TO TAKE OR NOT TO TAKE?

Question: When I stay in a hotel during a business or vacation trip I am always tempted to take the unused soap and shampoo packets left in my room. I am aware that it is a common practice for people to take such items to either bring home as souvenirs or to contribute to charitable organizations, but I would like to know if it is proper to do so.

Answer: There is no uniform policy of hotels in regard to this issue. While some expect guests to leave behind what they don’t use, others are either resigned to their being

taken or even welcome such behavior as a promotion of the hotel. If you are really interested in taking some of these things with you, it would be best to inquire at the checkout desk if you have the hotel’s permission to do so.

The failure to even consider that there may be something dishonest about taking soap without permission has led to the practice of taking towels and other portable items that the hotel certainly is not prepared to part with. Even if the intention of the taker is to help a charitable cause there is no justification for fulfilling a mitzvah through sin.