

O H R N E T

SHABBAT PARSHAT VAERA · 1 SHVAT 5763 · JAN. 4, 2003 · VOL. 10 NO. 14

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PARSHA INSIGHTS

SCHMATTES

“...I have heard the groan of the Children of Israel...” (6:5)

If I asked you now to tell me what’s written on your wristwatch, could you tell me? Go ahead. Don’t peek! Think of everything that’s written on your watch. Now – have a look. I’ll bet you missed out at least something. How many times a day do you look at your watch? Twenty? Thirty? And you’ve probably owned that watch for a year or so. That makes a minimum of over 7,000 times. You’ve looked at your watch over 7,000 times, and you still don’t know what it is says!

We can look at things every day, but unless we make an effort to see them, they will never register in our minds.

Until a couple of years ago, living in Israel was about as dangerous as living in Brisbane.

True, there was the very occasional terrorist outrage, but no more than the average maniac-on-the-loose that modern society seems to spawn most anywhere in the world.

A couple of years ago, all that changed. Being a Jew in the land of the Bible meant living on the front line, and sometimes behind it. Tragedy followed tragedy on a daily basis. For those of us who were post-war babies, born into a world of relative tranquility for the Jewish People, it’s easy to think that the past couple of years have been an aberration, and what preceded it was the norm.

A cursory glance at Jewish History proves the reverse. Since the Babylonian Exile, some 2500 years ago, the majority of Jewish history has been full of suffering. The notoriety of the Holocaust needs no further publicity. The Chelminitzki massacres, the Crusades and the expulsion from Spain were near total devastation to the Jewish People. Let us also not forget the oppression of the medieval Moslem world, the so-called “Golden Age” of

Spain in which Jews had no legal enfranchisement and were at the mercy, or the lack of it, of their Moslem rulers.

Today’s situation isn’t the exception. It’s the historical norm.

Jewish law mandates that whenever we hear of a tragedy we should tear our clothes. However, this law was abrogated many years ago, for were we to tear our clothing at every tragedy, we would be walking around in shreds.

And it wouldn’t be just our clothes that would be in shreds.

So would be our emotional life.

Regrettably and inevitably, every new tragedy that occurs has less and less effect on us.

There’s a fine line here. If we made ourselves, as well as our clothes, into *schmattes* — rags — what good would we be to ourselves, to our families or to society at large. On the other hand, how do we combat the numbness of the heart that repeated death and injury seems to inflict?

It says in last week’s Torah portion, “And he (Moshe) went out to his brothers and he saw their burdens...” (2:11) Rashi comments “he gave over his eyes and his attention to experience their pain.” Moshe did not lack for servants to bring him news of the situation of his fellow Jews. Why was it that Moshe himself went out to his brothers?

You can’t compare hearing to looking. And you can’t compare looking to seeing.

Moshe wanted to see. He wanted to give over his eyes to the sight of the suffering of the Jewish people. He wanted to give his heart, to pay attention, to their pain.

Empathy requires effort.

“...the G-d of Israel, and under his feet was the likeness of a sapphire brick.” (Shemot 11:10) That brick was in front of G-d all the time that the Jewish People were captive in Egypt as a reminder of the pain of the Jewish People and their slave labor.

Let me ask you a question. Does G-d need to tie a knot

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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's being 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

THE FIFTH CUP

All of us are anxious about the future of Israel, especially at such a time of local and international terror. The believing Jew, however, takes comfort in the Divine promise given to Moshe at the time of the Exodus from Egyptian bondage. As we will hear read in synagogues this Shabbat four expressions of freedom from slavery were Divinely communicated to Moshe. Our four cups of wine at the Passover Seder correspond to those four promises.

But there was a fifth promise as well. After the assurance that his people would be liberated in four stages, Moshe was also told that "I shall bring them to the land which I vowed to give to Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov" (*Shmot* 6:8). This is a promise which was never fulfilled to the generation which heard it repeated to them by Moshe. They perished during the forty-year sojourn in the wilderness and only their children inherited the land.

The explanation offered by the commentary "Ohr Hachayim" is that while the first four promises were

unconditional this fifth one had strings attached. In the passage preceding it there is a prerequisite that "you will be aware that I am your G-d Who has taken you out of Egyptian bondage". The faithlessness demonstrated by this generation in accepting the slanderous report of the spies sent to survey Eretz Yisrael and voicing a desire to turn back was proof that they were really not aware of Heaven directing their course and were guilty of defaulting on that crucial clause.

This Shabbat is Rosh Chodesh Shevat, the day 3275 years ago when Moshe reviewed the entire Torah for the new generation which learned from the mistakes of their forbears, and was on the threshold of entering the Promised Land. It should also be a time for every Jew to reflect on the indispensable condition for inheriting in peace and security the land we love. Once we fulfill the condition of recognizing the Divine author of history we shall be privileged to drink that fifth cup – today reserved for the Prophet Eliyahu – and enjoy Israel forever.

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Published by **Ohr Somayach** Tanenbaum College

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FEMME FATALE

“The wise one of the women builds her home and the foolish one destroys it with her own hands.”
(Mishlei 14:1)

This contrast which King Shlomo drew between two sorts of women is sharply illustrated in the roles played by two different women in the rebellion which Korach led against Moshe while the Israelites were traveling through the desert on their way to *Eretz Yisrael*.

The wise woman, says the Sage Rav, is the wife of Ohn ben Peles, who prevented her husband from continuing on with the conspirators whom he had initially joined, and thus saved him from being swallowed up by the earth like the others. The foolish one is the wife of Korach, who incited her husband to lead the rebellion.

In order to initiate the Levites, the tribe of Korach, into their sacred role as servants of G-d in the Sanctuary, Moshe had been commanded by G-d to shave off all their hair and to lift them up. When Korach came home and related to his wife what had been done to him and his fellow Levites, she exploited this as an opportunity to incite him against Moshe. She suggested that Moshe had received no Divine command, but removed their hair because he was envious of the physical beauty which it bestowed them. She also interpreted his picking them up and moving them around as an expression of relating to them as nothing more than refuse. These and similar incitements encouraged Korach to embark on his fatal endeavor.

The commentaries draw an important lesson from the tragedy caused by Korach's wife. It is not advisable for a man to share with his wife the indignity he has suffered at the hands of others. Although he may be seeking compassion for his hurt, his effort may prove counterproductive by moving his wife to challenge him to get even, or to cause her to think that the others may be right and thus reduce her respect for him.

• *Sanhedrin 110a*

A SWORD IN THEIR HAND

Once entered the Egyptian city of Alexandria, recalled Rabbi Eliezer ben Yossi, and encountered an old man who said to me, “Come and I will show you what my ancestors did to yours. Some of them they drowned in the river, some they killed with the sword and some they entombed in the walls of buildings.”

It was in regard to this suffering of his people, adds the *gemara*, that Moshe was punished. “Ever since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your Name,” he had complained to G-d,

“their situation has become worse and You have not saved them.” He was thereupon rebuked for failing to show the same trust as did the Patriarchs, and was informed that he would witness the triumph over Pharaoh but would not be entitled to witness the triumph over the 31 kings in the conquest of *Eretz Yisrael*. (*Shmot* 5:22-6:1)

What the old Egyptian showed Rabbi Eliezer, points out Maharsha, were the national archives, rather than the actual bodies of the victims which hardly could have been available. The author also suggests that this *gemara* refers to Moshe's complaint about the deterioration of the situation of his people as a result of the decree which Pharaoh issued after their first encounter to withhold straw from his Israelite slaves but yet require them to fill the same daily quota of bricks. Failure to fill this quota led to the children of the slaves being entombed in the walls to take the place of the missing bricks.

Moshe, he adds, was also reflecting the complaint he had just heard from the Israelite officers about causing Pharaoh and the Egyptians to be upset with their slaves and this “put a sword in their hand to slay us” (*ibid.* 5:21). Until Moshe came to Pharaoh the Egyptians hesitated to slay the Israelites with the sword, for they feared G-d would punish them through the sword. They restricted themselves to casting male Israelite babies into the river because they mistakenly relied on the Divine promise after the Great Deluge not to bring flood waters again to destroy the world. “Why did you send me?” complained Moshe, who was aware of the notoriety he had gained years earlier in Egypt for slaying the Egyptian taskmaster who was beating an Israelite to death. Moshe had been portrayed by the Egyptians as a killer in order to provide them with justification for taking up the sword against Moshe's people in so-called “self-defense”. Here we have a preview of how throughout history Jewish self-defense would be distorted into a blood libel excuse for persecution.

• *Sanhedrin 111a*

The Weekly Daf

by RABBI MENDEL WEINBACH

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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 (*pitern*) 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.

LOVE OF THE LAND - THE PEOPLE

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

THE TENTH MAN – A MYSTERIOUS GUEST

There were very few Jews in Hebron several centuries ago, and the only way they were able to have a minyan for Shabbat and Holiday services was through the arrival of some Jews from the surrounding villages. One year those Jews decided to go to Yerushalayim for Yom Kippur, and the Hebron community was left with only nine men, with no tenth man in sight to complete the minyan for services.

As they wept over the likelihood of Yom Kippur without a minyan, an aged stranger appeared. He refused their



offer of a pre-fast meal saying that he had already eaten one during his travel. After a very special day of prayer, one of the community leaders invited the mysterious stranger to his home to break the fast. When they reached the house, however, the guest suddenly disappeared. After a futile search the disappointed host had a somewhat restless sleep during which the stranger appeared to him in a dream. He identified himself as the Patriarch Avraham, who saw how pained they were and joined them for one day as the tenth man in the city where he lived and was buried.

BOYCOTTS

From: M. in Long Island, NY

Dear Rabbi,

There is a movement in certain cities of the U.S. to convince people to cancel their subscriptions to major newspapers that are well-known for their anti-Israel reporting policies. The problem I have with this movement: Hurting someone else's livelihood, namely the innocent employees whose income is dependent upon the number of subscribers. Last I heard, working for a newspaper (even if they're reporting tactics are a bit questionable) is not considered to be a dishonorable profession. What are your views on this issue (and boycotting in general)?

Dear M.,

In general, these newspapers are at present actively working against the State of Israel. Whether it is being done deliberately or not does not detract from the damage that is being done internationally to Israel's standing. Are all the thousands of people who work in the offices of these media centers guilty of Israel bashing? No, of course not. Does that mean that people cannot try to redress the problem? No, of course not. Enough people have drawn the newspapers' attention to the fact that their reporting is biased,

untrue and sometimes downright dangerous. They do not seem to be too concerned, so other methods are being tried.

Is a boycott a "kosher" method of getting one's point across? Well, sometimes. Of course, as Jews we must be super-sensitive to boycotts. In the last century the Jewish People were subject to boycott after boycott and we paid a heavy price. That means that anyone thinking of boycotting something must be very careful. I think that it is important to point out that the boycott that the Jewish groups are trying to organize are more symbolic than anything else.

Since the circumstances, reasons and ramifications for a boycott can differ so greatly from one case to another, it is essential not to embark on a private or public action without the direction of the proper halachic authorities.

Recently there was much talk here in Israel of boycotting certain shopping centers that were open on Shabbat. Interestingly enough, aside from the obvious concern for Shabbat desecration, a major reason for the boycott was concern for the livelihood of workers who would lose their jobs since they could not work on Shabbat. The matter was resolved when the main shopping center involved agreed to close on Shabbat.

It's important to note that sometimes a "non-boycott" can be as effective, or even more so, than an actual boy-

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WHAT'S THE RIGHT THING TO DO?

REAL-LIFE QUESTIONS OF SOCIAL AND BUSINESS ETHICS

THE SILENT (MIS)TREATMENT

Question: I have a next door neighbor who causes me great discomfort. The smoke coming in to my yard when he burns his leaves and the volume of the music he plays when I am trying to take an afternoon nap are examples of his inconsiderate behavior. Rather than get into a quarrel with him I have just stopped talking to him. Is this the proper approach?

Answer: Definitely not! While your desire to avoid quarreling with your neighbor is highly commendable, your giving him the "silent treatment" is not a commendable or effective way of dealing with someone who you feel has hurt you.

In his *Mishneh Torah (Hilchot Dayot 6:6)* Rambam has the following to say on this subject: "When one man sins against another, the victim should not hate him and maintain silence. This is the way of the wicked, as it is written about Avshalom that "he did not speak with Amnon neither good nor bad, for Avshalom hated Amnon" (*Shmuel II 13:22*). On the contrary,

he is obligated to confront him and to say to him 'Why did you do this to me and why did you sin against me in this way?'. This is what the Torah instructs us to do in the command of 'You shall not hate your brother in your heart; you must surely rebuke your neighbor'." (*Vayikra 19:17*).

The purpose of such confrontation is to give the other fellow an opportunity to explain himself. He may be completely unaware that his smoke or his noise is actually reaching and disturbing you. In the worst case scenario that he was truly inconsiderate your rebuke may well elicit from him an apology for his behavior.

This is not merely good advice for neighbors. Many of the strained relations between husband and wife, parents and children and business associates could be averted if the injured party summoned up the courage to confront rather than let silence prolong the hatred.

• Based on the response of Rabbi Yitzchok Zilberstein, Rabbi of the Ramat Elchanan Community in Bnei Brak

A PARK FOR THE BLIND

The great sensitivity of the Jewish People for the blind amongst them is as old as the national oath-taking upon entering Eretz Yisrael and as new as a special park for the blind in the land to which they returned.

As they stood on Mount Gerezim and Mount Eival soon after enter Eretz Yisrael the assembled Tribes of Israel accepted an oath by answering "Amen" to the blessing for the person who would refrain from causing a blind person to blunder along his path. A modern application of

this was the recent inauguration of the first park in Israel completely equipped for the blind.

Located in the Ben Shemen Forest near Jerusalem this park has attractions for blind people to enjoy with their sense of smell and sense of touch. Explanations in Braille and a raised map of the 800 meter round pathway, situated at the entrance to the park, will aid visitors to find their way through the forest. Fruit and herb gardens combine with wooden structures to enhance the nature experience of the blind through smelling and touching.

DID YOU KNOW THAT...

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cott. I remember hearing the story of Rabbi Aryeh Levin, a renowned and revered *tzaddik* (righteous person) who resided in Jerusalem in the middle of last century. A certain Jerusalem store owner kept his store open on Shabbat, much to the chagrin of a large sector of the populace. There were demonstrations and general fuss in the community as to what course of action to take, but week after week the store remained open. One Friday afternoon Rabbi Levin arrived at the store dressed in his Shabbat finery and sat down unobtrusively in the store. The store owner saw him but decided to ignore him. As the afternoon passed Rabbi Levin continued to sit and watch the constant flow of customers. Even as the sun began to set,

and Shabbat was about to begin, he didn't move until finally the store owner came over and asked him what he was doing. Rabbi Levin answered that he had heard that the shop was open on Shabbat and he wanted to see with his own eyes how difficult it must be for the store owner to close up since there were so many customers. Rabbi Levin gave a sad, longing look and sighed "But Shabbat is Shabbat." As he departed for the synagogue he wished the man a "Shabbat Shalom."

The man was moved to tears and told Rabbi Levin that he was the first person to speak to him in such a warm and "understanding" manner. A few weeks later the store was closed on Shabbat.

PARSHA INSIGHTS

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in His handkerchief to remind Himself not to forget? The Omniscient needs no reminders. There is no forgetfulness before His throne. He sees everything. He knows everything.

G-d was teaching us a lesson.

To empathize we must concretize.

We must make the effort, set aside a little time each day, and think. Think for a few moments. Think about what it means to be on the phone to my wife and I suddenly hear gunshots, shouting in Arabic, and I recognize the screams of my wife and my children and realize that there is *nothing I*

can do.

By nature we are all selfish. Why should I concern myself with the problems of others? I have my own share of problems.

The only way we can love other people is to love ourselves less. We must conquer our most cherished unexamined belief: That I am the most important thing in the world.

Every drop of self-love poisons the love of others.

We must make the effort to know the suffering of others, better than the writing on our own wristwatches.