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PARSHA INSIGHTS

IT'S NOTHING REALLY!

"I am Yosef. Is my father still alive?" (45:3)

How many times when you apologize to someone do you hear, "It's nothing, really! Why are you making such a business out of it? What did you do, after all? Forget it! It's really nothing."

Now for some people, saying "It's nothing" is genuine forgiveness. It really is nothing to them. However, most of the time what people really mean is "It's nothing — really?!" *You must be joking! I don't even want to hear to your voice. I just want to see you squirm around in front of me. I'm not letting you off the hook for anything. Apologize away. It's nothing really!*"

A person who refuses to accept an honest apology can make himself guiltier than the "guilty party". Just as Judaism prescribes the appropriate behavior for one who needs to apologize, so too here is a correct way to behave towards someone seeking forgiveness. Indeed, someone who turns a plea for forgiveness into an opportunity for vengeance, however subtle it might be, will very probably end up committing a graver sin than the original offence.

Picture Yosef's brothers standing in front of him — the utter humiliation and guilt of facing their young brother whom they had wronged so terribly. Now they were facing a king who had the power of life and death over them. How did Yosef react in this situation? Human nature would suggest that Yosef would, at least, have laid out in some detail all the hardship and suffering they had caused him. However, what we read in the Torah sounds

more like an extended "thank-you" note than a reproach.

"And now, be not distressed, nor reproach yourselves... for it was to be a provider that G-d sent me ahead of you... Thus G-d has sent me ahead of you to ensure your survival in the land and to sustain you... It is not you who sent me here but G-d."

The Torah teaches us that, as important as it is to say "Sorry", it's equally important to know how to say "I forgive you" in a way that genuinely comforts the offender.

• Source: *Da'at Torah*

TEMPORARY AMNESIA

"I am Yosef. Is my father still alive?" (45:3)

Why, at this climactic moment when Yosef finally revealed his true identity to his brothers, did he ask whether his father was still alive? The brothers had already confirmed the fact several times. In fact, Yehuda had just finished an impassioned plea to free Binyamin on the grounds that Yaakov would not have survived the loss of Binyamin.

And here lies the understanding of Yosef's question: Yosef wasn't asking for information about his father's well-being; he was rebuking Yehuda. He was saying to him, "You're so concerned that our father will not survive the loss of his son Binyamin. Where was that concern when you sold another of his sons into slavery?! Don't forget to whom you are talking. I am Yosef. Is my father still alive?"

• Source: *Beit HaLevi*

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PARSHA OVERVIEW

With the discovery of the goblet in Binyamin's sack, the brothers are confused. Yehuda alone steps forward and eloquently but firmly petitions Yosef for Binyamin's release, offering himself instead. As a result of this act of total selflessness, Yosef finally has irrefutable proof that his brothers are different people from the ones who cast him into the pit, and so he now reveals to them that he is none other than their brother. The brothers shrink from him in shame, but Yosef consoles them, telling them that everything has been part of G-d's plan. He sends them back to their father Yaakov with a message to come and reside in the land of Goshen. At first, Yaakov cannot accept the news, but when he recognizes hidden signs in the message which positively identify the sender as his son Yosef, his spirit is revived. Yaakov together with all his family and possessions sets out for Goshen. G-d communicates with Yaakov in a vision at night. He tells him not to fear going down to Egypt and its negative spiritual conse-

quences, because it is there that G-d will establish the Children of Israel as a great nation even though they will be dwelling in a land steeped in immorality and corruption. The Torah lists Yaakov's offspring and hints to the birth of Yocheved, who will be the mother of Moshe Rabbeinu. Seventy souls in total descend into Egypt, where Yosef is reunited with his father after 22 years of separation. He embraces his father and weeps, overflowing with joy. Yosef secures the settlement of his family in Goshen. Yosef takes his father Yaakov and five of the least threatening of his brothers to be presented to Pharaoh, and Yaakov blesses Pharaoh. Yosef instructs that, in return for grain, all the people of Egypt must give everything to Pharaoh, including themselves as his slaves. Yosef then redistributes the population, except for the Egyptian priests who are directly supported by a stipend from Pharaoh. The Children of Israel become settled, and their numbers multiply greatly.

ISRAEL Forever

A LONG HISTORY OF SHORT MEMORIES

The world has a short memory – especially when it comes to Jews and what is owed to them! A half-century ago the world understood that a nation which had lost six million of its members in a holocaust perpetrated by a tyrant and his “willing executioners” in Germany and other European nations deserved a state of its own. Yet that same world has chosen to conveniently forget the United Nations resolution establishing the Jewish state and to abandon it to the mercy of Arab terrorists committed to another holocaust.

Then, too, there is the short memory of a world which forgets what Jews have done for it and shrugs its shoulders when the head of a Moslem country publicly rails against Jews “running the world by proxy” and a poll of Europeans names Israel as “the greatest danger to world peace”.

Take a look at the list of scores of Jews who have been awarded Nobel Prizes for peace, the sciences and literature and compare it to what our detractors have contributed to the world in any of these fields.

But this is hardly news for anyone who reads this week's Torah portion about the decisive role that Yosef played in saving Egypt from being wiped out by a famine. Nevertheless, less than half a century after Yosef's passing, a new king ascends the throne, conveniently forgets what this Hebrew ex-slave did for his country, and turns all of his Hebrew citizens into slaves.

The nations of the world may have short memories but the Jewish People have a long memory of how little they can rely on those nations and must put their faith in Heaven to remember Israel forever.

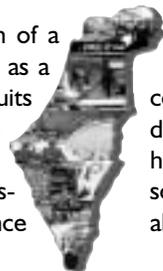
LOVE OF THE LAND - THE NAMES

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

ERETZ ZVI – THE EXPANDING LAND

The comparison of Eretz Yisrael to the skin of a deer which one Talmudic Sage interpreted as a tribute to the land's ability to produce fruits quickly and plentifully was applied by Rabbi Chanina to the expanding nature of its territory.

Challenged by a heathen skeptic how it was possible, as the Sages claimed, that millions of Jews once



lived in a part of Eretz Yisrael called Har Hamelech, he referred him to the Prophet Yirmiyahu's description of the country as “the land of the deer”. Just as when the skin of a deer is removed from its carcass it is impossible to once again have it envelop the animal's flesh because of its contraction, so too when Jews live in Eretz Yisrael the land expands to absorb them after contracting when they are not there.

PARSHA Q&A ?

1. What threatening words did Yehuda say to Yosef?
2. Why did Yehuda say his missing brother died?
3. Why was Yehuda the one to plead for Binyamin?
4. What do we learn from Yosef telling his brothers "Go up to my father"?
5. What two things did the brothers see that helped prove that he was really Yosef?
6. Why did Binyamin weep on Yosef's neck?
7. Why did Yosef send old wine to Yaakov?
8. What did Yosef mean when he said "Don't dispute on the way?"
9. What happened to Yaakov when he realized Yosef was alive?
10. Why did G-d tell Yaakov, "Don't fear going down to Egypt?"
11. "I will bring you up" from Egypt. To what did this allude?
12. What happened to the property that Yaakov acquired in Padan Aram?
13. Who was the mother of Shaul ben HaCanaanit?
14. When listing Yaakov's children, the verse refers to Rachel as "Rachel, wife of Yaakov." Leah, Bilhah and Zilpah are not referred to as Yaakov's wives. Why?
15. Yosef harnessed his own chariot instead of letting a servant do it. Why?
16. Why were shepherds abhorrent to the Egyptians?
17. Why did Yosef pick the weakest brothers to stand before Pharaoh?
18. What blessing did Yaakov give Pharaoh when he left his presence?
19. Yosef resettled the land of Egypt, moving the people from city to city. What were his two motives for this?
20. Whose fields were not bought by Yosef?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

1. 44:18 - He threatened that Yosef would be stricken with leprosy, like Pharaoh when he took Sarah from Avraham; alternatively, Yehuda threatened to kill Yosef and Pharaoh.
2. 44:20 - Yehuda feared that if he said his missing brother was alive, Yosef would demand to see him.
3. 44:32 - He was the one who took "soul" responsibility for him.
4. 45:9 - We learn that *Eretz Yisrael* is higher than all other lands.
5. 45:12 - He was circumcised like they were, and he spoke *Lashon Hakodesh*.
6. 45:14 - Binyamin wept for the destruction of *Mishkan Shilo* built in Yosef's territory.
7. 45:23 - Elderly people appreciate old wine.
8. 45:24 - He warned that if they engage in halachic disputes, they might not be alert to possible travel dangers.
9. 45:27 - His *ruach hakodesh* (prophetic spirit) returned.
10. 46:3 - Because Yaakov was grieved to leave Eretz Canaan.
11. 46:4 - That Yaakov would be buried in Eretz Canaan.
12. 46:6 - He traded it for Esav's portion in the Cave of Machpelah.
13. 46:10 - *Dina bat Yaakov*.
14. 46:19 - Rachel was regarded as the mainstay of the family.
15. 46:29 - Yosef wanted to hasten to honor his father.
16. 46:34 - Because the Egyptians worshipped sheep.
17. 47:2 - So Pharaoh wouldn't see their strength and draft them.
18. 47:10 - That the waters of the Nile should rise to greet Pharaoh.
19. 47:21 - In order to remind them that they no longer owned the land, and to help his family by removing the stigma of being strangers.
20. 47:22 - The Egyptian priests.

BONUS QUESTION ?

Last week we read that Yehuda said: "**Behold, we are slaves to my lord; we, as well as the person in whose hand the goblet was found.**" Yosef replied: "**G-d forbid I should do such a thing! Only the person in whose hand the goblet was found shall be my slave.**" This week we read: "**And Yehuda approached.**" (44:16-18) Yehuda first offers all the brothers including Binyamin as slaves. But when Yosef declares his intention to free all of them except Binyamin, Yehuda protests, even speaking harshly. What accounts for this change in Yehuda's attitude?

BONUS ANSWER !

At first, Yehuda thought Hashem was punishing the brothers for their part in selling Yosef 22 years earlier. He reasoned that although Binyamin took no part in that sin, yet he was nonetheless included in the punishment being part of the group. Seeing Yosef's actions as part of a Heavenly decree, Yehuda felt intervention was useless.

But when Yosef declared his intention to free everyone except for the innocent Binyamin, Yehuda realized Yosef's actions could not possibly be the result of a Heavenly decree, but rather were a direct result of Yosef's free will. Therefore, Yehuda took action.

• *Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh*

A TWO-HANDED COMPLEMENT

When an individual offered a sacrifice in the Beit Hamikdash in most cases he was required to complement the sacrificial service with *semicha* by placing his two hands on the head of the animal to be sacrificed. The challenge in finding a source for this requirement of using two hands arises from the fact that in regard to all the sacrifices where the Torah mentions *semicha*, the singular form is used for “hand,” which would indicate that only one hand is needed for this ritual.

The Sage Reish Lakish solved this mystery by pointing to the passage in the Torah chapter dealing with the service performed by the *Kohen Gadol* on Yom Kippur in the Beit Hamikdash. “Aharon shall place his two *yado*” (*Vayikra 16:21*) is how it is written in the Torah. The word *yado*, however, means his one hand, which is a contradiction to the word “two” preceding it. Our tradition is to indeed pronounce the word as *yadav*, which is the plural form of hand, and makes it consistent with the word two preceding it. But if the Torah made a point of having the word written in the singular it taught us that just as here the singular form really meant both hands, so too wherever we find the singular form of hand it really means two.

Rabbi Elazar heard this brilliant solution from Reish Lakish and repeated it in the Beit Medrish study hall without quoting it in his name. This upset Reish Lakish and he decided to challenge Rabbi Elazar’s understanding of the point he had made. If even the singular form for hand always means two, he asked him, why did the Torah write it in plural form in 24 different places? It was only after he felt that he had put Rabbi Elazar in his place did Reish Lakish provide the answer to this question. The rule that he had established regarding the singular form of hand meaning two was limited to where the Torah spoke of placing a hand on an animal. Everywhere else this would not apply, so that where the Torah wished to speak of two hands it had to use the plural form.

• *Menachot 93b*

LIFESAVING SHOWBREADS

A dialogue between King David and the *Kohen Gadol* Achimelech is the subject of much discussion in our *gemara* because of its possible ramifications for the laws concerning the preparations of the showbreads on the table of the Sanctuary.

The background of this dialogue was the flight of David from King Saul, who viewed him as a threat to his throne and sought to slay him. In a desperate state of hunger he arrived at the city of Nov where the Mishkan sanctuary stood and asked Achimelech for five loaves of bread or whatever else he had on hand. Achimelech informed him that he had only sacred bread “and the *kohen* gave him sacred bread for there was no bread there but showbread that had been removed from before G-d.” (*Shmuel I 21:7*)

Nov was populated only by *kohanim*, whose food consisted of *terumah*, which is forbidden to a non-*kohen*. There was therefore no permissible food available to alleviate the life-threatening hunger that had seized David. In such circumstances one may eat forbidden food to save his life but must try to survive on the variety with the least degree of sin. Eating *terumah* as a non-*kohen* is punishable by premature death, while eating the showbreads is punishable only by lashes. David therefore asked Achimelech for the five showbread loaves which are his portion as *Kohen Gadol*. He was pleased to hear from Achimelech that the loaves he offered him had already been removed from the table and were available for consumption by the *kohanim*, for this meant that the additional ban of *meilah* – stealing something belonging to the Sanctuary – no longer applied. But David did point out to Achimelech that even if he had been compelled to take the showbreads off the table and be guilty of *meilah* as well, he would have been justified in doing so in order to save his life.

• *Menachot 95b*

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THE MEANING OF KABBALA

From: David Z.

Dear Rabbi,
What is Kabbala and its history in Judaism? May we learn Kabbala today?

Dear David Z.,

Kabbala literally means “received” because true understanding of it is only possible through tradition handed down from master to disciple. Also known as *Sod* (meaning secret), or *Sitrei Torah* (the hidden aspects of Torah), Kabbala addresses issues that are not observable in the physical world and are difficult to express in words. For this reason Kabbala was always discussed in cryptic language and clothed in secrecy.

Because of its subtlety, complexity and depth, stringent laws surround the study of Kabbala. Only someone well versed in the revealed aspects of Torah and steeped in the knowledge of Jewish law can learn or truly understand Kabbala. Extreme ethical and spiritual purity is another prerequisite for learning and understanding Kabbala, as in the verse “the beginning of wisdom is fear of G-d” (Psalms 111:10). Furthermore, mistakes in the study of Kabbala have more far-reaching and serious consequences than in the study of law and ethics, since they affect our perception of G-d and our beliefs.

Kabbala can be divided into five main areas. *Ma’asei Bereishet* (Acts of Creation) explores seemingly contradictory ideas such as an infinite Creator of a finite world, an omnipresent God in a world of seemingly separate existence, and creation ex-nihilo, from nothing. *Ma’asei Merkava* (Deeds of the Chariot) deals with Divine providence, G-d’s continuous interaction with the world. *Ta’amei Hamitzvot* (Reasons for the Commandments) explains how the physical body and spiritual soul interact and how the *mitzvot* establish harmony between the physical and spiritual worlds. *Remez and Sod* (Intimated and Secret Torah) offer mystical explanations of verses, stories and incidents in Tanach (the Scriptures). *Kabbala Ma’asit* (Practical Kabbala) entails using Divine Names and knowledge of the innermost levels of reality to produce effects in the physical world.

Kabbala was part of the Oral Torah that G-d gave to Moses at Sinai, and parts of it were recorded in the Mishna with the rest of the Oral Torah. The Gemara also recounts that Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and his son hid in a cave, penetrating the depths of Torah and revealing its hidden secrets in the Zohar. Jews continued to learn Kabbala throughout

the ages, led by rabbis like the Ramban and Rabbeinu Bachaye, as well as rabbis in Europe. In the late 1500’s, Tzefat became the home of great Kabbalists such as Rabbi Yitzchak Luria (the Arizal) who compiled the system of Kabbala used until today. Later rabbis such as the Ba’al Shem Tov, father of the Chassidic movement, and the Vilna Gaon taught to incorporate certain peripheral kabbalistic concepts into our daily observance.

Nowadays, many Jews and non-Jews are attracted to the mystical and esoteric aura surrounding the Kabbala. It has been degradingly drawn into pop culture where it has become commercialized by pseudo-spiritual “experts” who write of it profusely and “teach” it in various vicarious Kabbala centers. Needless to say, these people are not teaching nor learning real Kabbala, which by definition can only be understood through proper transmission. What’s more, they lack even a basic knowledge of Torah and Jewish law, and, simultaneously steeped in modern pop-culture, are not expected to have the ethical and spiritual purity needed to properly grasp the Kabbala.

This does not mean, however, that a beginner to traditional Judaism cannot have some exposure to the esoteric. As mentioned earlier, the disciples of the Ba’al Shem Tov and the Vilna Gaon offered ways to infuse mysticism into our daily observance. But this must be in the context of proper Torah study and mitzvah observance, under the responsible guide of authentic rabbis.

Sources:

- *Ramban, Bereishet I*
- *Chagiga, Mishna 11b, and Gemara until 16a*
- *Shabbat 33b*
- *The Zohar was hidden for over a thousand years until R. Moshe de Leon purportedly found it. Although originally there was some doubt as to its authenticity, once the master Kabbalist R. Yitzchak Luria (the Arizal) unequivocally attributed the Zohar to Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, this became the accepted opinion.*
- *Great Kabbalists of Europe include Rabbi Yehuda HaChassid, author of Sefer Chassidim, and Rabbi Elazar of Germiza, author of Rokeach.*
- *Other well-known Kabbalists of Tzefat were R. Moshe Kordova, author of Tomer Devora, and R. Shlomo Alkabetz, author of “Lecha Dodi” sung before Shabbat.*
- *The Vilna Gaon wrote extensively on the Kabbala including a commentary on an early Kabbalistic work called Sefer Yetzira which is attributed to Abraham and can be used to “create” animals and human-like beings such as a golem, see Sanhedrin 67b.*

A REWARD FROM HEAVEN

“**D**id you hear where Shimon is making his daughter’s wedding? It’s going to be in the most expensive hall in town!” This was the outraged reaction of a neighbor of Shimon upon reading the invitation he received. He shared his shock with another neighbor who had been his partner in collecting money from their fellow congregants in a Bnei Brak synagogue to provide Shimon, an indigent Torah scholar, with the minimum funds required to make a simple wedding. Realizing that more and more people would be surprised at his choice of a hall, Shimon rushed to the rabbi of the congregation to explain what had happened.

Shimon had already contacted the cheapest hall in town and made an appointment to discuss arrangements. Before he left the meeting there was a knock on his door. There stood a stranger who asked to speak to him for a few minutes. He told Shimon that he just got up from the *shiva* mourning period for his father, the owner of a large wedding hall in town. Just before passing away he told his son that during the holocaust there was a Jew who had saved his life

at the risk of his own. Upon arriving in Israel he was anxious to locate this Jew and somehow show his gratitude. All he knew of him, however, was his first name and the town he came from, and his search proved unsuccessful. Now that he was leaving this world he charged his son with the responsibility of locating that Jew or any heir of his and to repay him the favor he owed him.

During the *shiva* period one of the comforters mentioned the heroism of the mourner’s father and another Jew in surviving the holocaust. In the ensuing conversation, it suddenly became clear that the mysterious benefactor was the father of Shimon. As soon as the *shiva* period was over he rushed to Shimon’s home and when he verified that he was indeed the son of the man who saved his father’s life, he burst into tears. Upon hearing that Shimon was about to make a wedding he insisted that it be done in the hall he inherited from his father at no expense and would not take no for an answer.

Thus was the mystery solved and Shimon’s reputation reestablished in his community.

WHAT’S THE RIGHT THING TO DO?

REAL-LIFE QUESTIONS OF SOCIAL AND BUSINESS ETHICS

RELIEVING THE MOURNER’S GRIEF

Question: I recently paid a condolence visit to the mourners of an old friend and was somewhat taken aback by the nature of the conversation which was being conducted between the consolers and the mourners. What is the right thing to do – and to say – when making such a visit?

Answer: Since the principal objective of *nichum aveilim*, as we call the mitzvah of comforting mourners, is to relieve the grief suffered by those who lost a close relative, the very act of coming to their home during their *shiva* mourning period, regardless of what you say, expresses your empathy with their sorrow and relieves some of the agony of feeling alone in a time of tragedy.

Ideally, however, such a visit should provide both consoler and mourner with an opportunity to recall the virtues of the deceased in the same manner as the funeral provides the ones delivering the eulogies that opportunity. The concept behind this is that the judgment being conducted in Heaven for the soul of the deceased takes into

account what the survivors on earth have to say about him.

Even more praiseworthy is conversation about the theological aspects of life and death with a stress on the mercy of Heaven expressed even in what appears to be a tragedy, on afterlife and resurrection. Such talk reinforces the mourners’ sense that death is not an end but rather a beginning. One should be careful, however, to avoid saying “What can we do?” which our Talmudic sages viewed as a blasphemous suggestion that if it were in our power we would act against the Divine decision.

When you comfort the mourner, writes Rambam, you are also comforting the soul of the deceased. This may be the reason why the traditional blessing made by the comforter in the Ashkenazic community is said in the plural form — “May the Omnipresent comfort you (you is in the plural in Hebrew) together with all the other mourners of Zion and Jerusalem and may you be spared further grief” — even when there is a single mourner.