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PARSHA INSIGHTS

GOING WITH THE FLOW

“...and G-d churned Egypt in the midst of the sea” (14:28)

Society has no truer mirror than its advertising. What motivates people to put their hands in their pockets and pull out their hard-earned cash must appeal to their innermost desires. And what someone wants, what he truly desires — is who he is.

Think for a moment of all those car ads filmed in the desert. There’s no one for fifty miles in any direction. Climb behind the wheel and you can go wherever you want, whenever you want. You can be whatever you want. Think of all those ads for get-away-from-it-all vacations (whatever the dreaded “it” might be). They all express the same ideal: the commitment to being uncommitted, the freedom to do what I want when I want, and to change what I want from one moment to the next.

Society pays lip service to the ideals of commitment, stability and fidelity. Advertising, however, gives the lie to that sanctimony, and reveals that society’s real aspiration is to be free to “go with the flow”.

Unfortunately, modern man finds his flow severely restricted. At every turn he is encumbered by commitments: a home, a wife, children, a mortgage, a second mortgage, a second wife. What he would really like to do is take off and travel the world with a credit card and unlimited credit — to follow any, or all, of a myriad of possibilities. The fact that he tolerates responsibility doesn’t mean that he has accepted a specific form and purpose to his life. He’d really like to be somewhere else, anywhere else, *everywhere* else. From where does this ideology of irresponsibility come? Is this desire for constant change a new phenomenon, or does it

have its roots in something much more ancient?

Everything in this world is a combination of matter and form. By definition, matter has no form. It is capable of assuming an infinite number of forms, of shapes. In a world that is all matter, everything is possible. Nothing is fixed. The epitome of matter is water. Water always takes the form of its container. Itself, it has no shape, no form. For that reason the Hebrew word for “water,” *mayim*, is a plural noun. There is nothing singular about the shape of water. Water, in the “shape” of the Nile, was both the idolatry of the Egyptians, and in this week’s Torah portion, its ultimate demise — for if ever there was a culture that was dedicated to “going with the flow,” it was Egypt. Egypt was an entire society dedicated to the pursuit of infinite variety and potential. By definition, such a society is incapable of, and scorns, marital fidelity.

At the Friday night meal, welcoming the Shabbat Queen, a Jewish husband sings to his wife, his ‘queen’, the closing verses of King Solomon’s *Proverbs*, *eishet chayil*... “a woman of valor...” In direct contrast, Egypt represented the “*eishet zenunim*” — the unfaithful wife, the antithesis of King Solomon’s *eishet chayil*. Egypt was the faithless spouse who seeks constantly a new partner, a new form. Inconstant as water, she wants to “go with the flow”.

The Jewish home aspires to the ultimate triumph of matter that is forever faithful. It aspires to be like the *eishet chayil*, the woman of valor, who is able to concretize incessant potential and give it unchanging stability.

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PARSHA OVERVIEW

Pharaoh finally sends *Bnei Yisrael* out of Egypt. With pillars of cloud and fire, G-d leads them toward *Eretz Yisrael* on a circuitous route, avoiding the *Pelishtim* (Philistines). Pharaoh regrets the loss of so many slaves and chases the Jews with his army. The Jews are very afraid as the Egyptians draw close, but G-d protects them. Moshe raises his staff and G-d splits the sea, enabling the Jews to cross safely. Pharaoh, his heart hardened by G-d, commands his army to pursue, whereupon the waters crash down upon the Egyptian army. Moshe and Miriam lead the men and women, respectively, in a song of thanks. After three days' travel only to find bitter waters at Marah, the people complain. Moshe

miraculously produces potable water. In Marah they receive certain *mitzvot*. The people complain that they ate better food in Egypt. G-d sends quail for meat and provides manna, a miraculous bread that falls from the sky every day except Shabbat. On Friday a double portion descends to supply the Shabbat needs. No one is able to obtain more than his daily portion, but manna collected on Friday suffices for two days so the Jews can rest on Shabbat. Some manna is set aside as a memorial for future generations. When the Jews again complain about a lack of water, Moshe miraculously produces water from a rock. Then Amalek attacks. Joshua leads the Jews in battle while Moshe prays for their welfare.

ISRAEL Forever

HOPE FROM MANNA

The financial crisis that has caused so many people to lose their source of a livelihood is a challenge faced by Jews in Israel as well as people throughout the world.

When one reflects, however, on the lesson to be learned from this week's Torah portion, he is saved from despair despite his seemingly desperate situation. For forty years in the wilderness on their way to *Eretz Yisrael* our ancestors subsisted on manna from Heaven. This constituted a nation-

al experience of totally relying on G-d, which serves as a reassurance in the toughest times that we will survive.

Manna did not come down in wholesale amounts, only one day's supply at a time, so that Jews would always maintain their sense of dependence on Heaven. Perhaps the sudden loss of savings and jobs is intended as a reminder to abandon our sense of self-confidence and turn our eyes towards Heaven as the only guarantee 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*

TSEFAT – TOMB OF BINYAMIN HATZADIK

Binyamin Hatzadik, whose grave is in Tsefat according to Rabbi Chaim Vital in the name of the Ari Zal, is mentioned only one time in our sources.

The *gemara* tells of the time that a woman came to him, as manager of a charity fund, for help during a drought. When he informed her that there was no charity funds left she cried, "Rabbi, if you don't help me a woman and her seven sons will die!"



This *tzadik* was so moved by her plight that he gave her his own funds. Soon after he became deathly ill. In his behalf interceded angels who said to G-d: "Master of the Universe, You said that whoever sustains one life in Israel is considered as if he saved the entire world. Binyamin Hatzadik supported a woman and her seven sons. Must he die at a young age?"

The decree of death was rescinded and twenty-two years were added to his life.

לע"נ

מת לאה בת ר' יצחק אייזיק ז"ל

ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

PARSHA Q&A ?

1. What percentage of the Jewish People died during the plague of darkness?
2. Why did the oath that Yosef administered to his brothers apply to Moshe's generation?
3. Why did the Egyptians want to pursue the Jewish People?
4. Where did the Egyptians get animals to pull their chariots?
5. What does it mean that the Jewish People "took hold of their fathers' craft" (*tafsu umnut avotam*)?
6. How did G-d cause the wheels of the Egyptian chariots to fall off?
7. Why were the dead Egyptians cast out of the sea?
8. To what future time is the verse hinting when it uses the future tense of "Then Moshe and *Bnei Yisrael* will sing"?
9. Why are the Egyptians compared to stone, lead and straw?
10. The princes of Edom and Moav had nothing to fear from the Jewish People. Why, then, were they "confused and gripped with trembling?"
11. Moshe foretold that he would not enter the Land of Israel. Which word in the parsha indicates this?
12. Why is Miriam referred to as "Aharon's sister" and not as "Moshe's sister"?
13. The Jewish women trusted that G-d would grant the Jewish People a miraculous victory over the Egyptians. How do we see this?
14. Which sections of the Torah did the Jewish People receive at Marah?
15. When did *Bnei Yisrael* run out of food?
16. What lesson in *derech erez* concerning the eating of meat is taught in this week's Parsha?
17. How did non-Jews experience the taste of the manna?
18. The Prophet Yirmiyahu showed the Jewish People a jar of manna prepared in the time of Moshe. Why?
19. Which verse in this week's parsha alludes to the plague of blood?
20. Why did Moshe's hands become heavy during the war against Amalek?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this week's Questions!

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

1. 13:18 - Eighty percent (four-fifths).
2. 13:19 - Yosef made his brothers swear that they would make their children swear.
3. 14:5 - To regain their wealth.
4. 14:7 - From those Egyptians who feared the word of G-d and kept their animals inside during the plagues.
5. 14:10 - They cried out to G-d.
6. 14:25 - He melted them with fire.
7. 14:30 - So that the Jewish People would see the destruction of the Egyptians and be assured of no further pursuit.
8. 15:1 - Resurrection of the dead during the time of *mashiach*.
9. 15:5 - The wickedest ones floated like straw, dying slowly. The average ones suffered less, sinking like stone. Those still more righteous sunk like lead, dying immediately.
10. 15:14 - They felt horrible seeing Israel in a state of glory.
11. 15:17 - "*T'vi-aimo...*" — "Bring them" (and not "bring us").
12. 15:20 - Aharon put himself at risk for her when she was struck with *tzara'at*. (See *Bamidbar 12:12*)
13. 15:20 - They brought musical instruments with them in preparation for the miraculous victory celebration.
14. 15:25 - Shabbat, Red Heifer, Judicial Laws.
15. 16:1 - 15th of Iyar.
16. 16:8 - One should not eat meat to the point of satiation.
17. 16:21 - The sun melted whatever manna remained in the fields. This flowed into streams from which animals drank. Whoever ate these animals tasted manna.
18. 16:32 - The people claimed they couldn't study Torah because they were too busy earning a livelihood. Yirmiyahu showed them the manna saying: "If you study Torah, G-d will provide for you just as he provided for your ancestors in the desert."
19. 17:5 - "And your staff with which you smote the river...."
20. 17:12 - Because he was remiss in his duty, since he, not Yehoshua, should have led the battle.

- Unintentional slaughter perpetrated by an ox
- Which murderous ox is liable for execution
- Sanctifying or slaughtering a murderous ox before or after it is condemned to die
- Role of the *shomer* (guardian) in regard to the ox placed in his safekeeping
- The degree of guarding required in regard to an ox
- Mystery of which animal was gorer and victim
- On whom is the burden of proof
- The damage done by an ox to vessels or animal brought into its owner's area without permission
- When the animal sustains damage by eating something which does not belong to its owner
- Responsibility of man or animal in involuntarily causing a miscarriage
- How value of the children lost is calculated
- Digging a pit in a private or public domain
- The miraculous rescue of Nechemia's daughter
- Degrees of responsibility for damage caused by someone or something falling into a pit

SAFETY IN STREET AND HOME

What is considered sufficient guarding of an ox to absolve its owner from responsibility for the damage it causes? While Rabbi Meir and Rabbi Yehuda have different positions as to how far the owner must go in guarding an ox which is a habitual gorer, an extreme view is taken by Rabbi Eliezer who rules that the only way to prevent such an ox from causing damage is to slaughter it.

The Sage Abaye suggests that Rabbi Eliezer's position is based on a ruling of Rabbi Natan that it is forbidden for one to keep a wild dog or a rickety ladder in his home. This is

based on the Torah command "to not allow blood to be shed in your home" (*Devarim* 22:8); a safety warning that extends as well to a dangerous ox.

It would seem from the simple reading of the text that Rabbi Eliezer would hold the owner of a habitual gorer responsible for damage it causes even if he provided maximum guarding. But Tosefot takes a different look at things. Rabbi Eliezer, according to the Sage Abaye, is merely stating that it is forbidden to maintain such a dangerous animal and that it should therefore be slaughtered. If one did not get around to slaughtering it but provided maximum guarding he will not be responsible for the damage it causes.

• *Bava Kama* 46a

What the SAGES Say

"Whoever says that G-d overlooks his sins will have his own life overlooked (because he encourages people to sin. – Rashi)"

• *Rabbi Chanina - Bava Kama* 50a

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THE FIRST JEW

From: Holly in Scotland

Dear Rabbi,

Who were the first Jews? If Adam and Eve, then all mankind is Jewish. If Abraham (or the other patriarchs and matriarchs), since they came from non-Jewish families, where do we find they converted? And if they did, then were Ishmael and Esau (and their descendents) Jewish? If the patriarchs and matriarchs were not Jewish, then how and when did the Jews become Jewish?

Dear Holly,

This is a very insightful and interesting question.

Adam and Eve were not Jewish. They were mankind in its inception and they were given the right and responsibility to use all their spiritual powers to effect their own perfection by cleaving to G-d and following His ways. G-d instructed them to uphold six basic commandments alluded to in the Torah verses, which, if they had done correctly, they would have acquired for themselves and their progeny the desired, elevated and universal perfection of humanity.

After Adam and Eve rebelled against G-d, humanity gradually plummeted to a very low spiritual state where theft, immorality, murder and idolatry became commonplace. These events are described in the Torah, culminating in the Flood. Noah preserved the potential for perfection in man and received a seventh commandment that completed G-d's code for mankind, and thereby came to be known as the Noahide Laws. Unfortunately, Noah's descendents also fell short of the mark and continued the antediluvian decadence after the Flood.

Nevertheless, the Torah delineates righteous individuals throughout the generations after the Flood. While they were not Jewish per se, they did pursue G-d's mission for man by cleaving to G-d and following His ways as mandated to Adam and Noah. One such couple was Abraham and Sarah, who despite coming from non-Jewish, idolatrous families, nevertheless made great efforts to break through the prevailing climate of impurity to regain the pre-sin purity of Adam and Eve.

Although ancient Jewish sources posit that through their great spiritual effort and intuition Abraham and Sarah each gained foreknowledge of the Torah before it was given, they did not formally convert and were therefore not formally Jewish. However, they did re-acquire for themselves and their progeny a unique potential to attain G-d's initial inten-

tion for humanity.

While Ishmael benefited by being fathered by Abraham, born of the marginal maidservant Hagar, he and his descendents became marginal to these developments. In addition, as described in the Torah, both Ishmael and Esau excluded themselves from the process by rejecting the righteous ways of the patriarchs and matriarchs, their parents and grandparents. Therefore only Isaac and Rebecca, Jacob (Israel) and his wives and then the sons of Jacob and their wives continued the dynamic of Adam and Eve, Abraham and Sarah.

But still no Jews. So how and when did the Jews become Jewish?

According to Torah law, a person becomes Jewish by: 1] declaring willingness to keep all the commandments, 2] by immersing oneself in a specifically defined body of water (mikveh), and 3] for men, this is preceded by circumcision. When the Children of Israel left Egypt and received the Torah at Mount Sinai these criteria were met. All males who left Egypt were circumcised, their having kept this command given by G-d to Abraham for his descendents. The Torah verses then describe the Israelites' commitment to keep the Torah and subsequent immersion (Exodus 19):

"In the third month of the children of Israel's departure from Egypt, on this day they arrived in the desert of Sinai...Moses ascended to G-d, and the Lord called to him from the mountain, saying, 'So shall you say to the house of Jacob and tell the sons of Israel...'And now, if you obey Me and keep My covenant, you shall be to Me a treasure out of all peoples, for Mine is the entire earth. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of princes and a holy nation.' Moses came and summoned the elders of Israel and placed before them all these words that the Lord had commanded him. And all the people replied in unison and said, 'All that the Lord has spoken we shall do!'...So Moses descended from the mountain to the people, and he sanctified the people [by having them immerse in the mikveh and temporarily refrain from marital contact]." The verses then go on to describe the awesome experience of the revelation of Torah at Sinai.

This event marked the mass, formal conversion of the descendents of the patriarchs and matriarchs to Judaism. Ancient sources associate it with the termination of the impurity of the original sin from off the Jewish people, which elevated them to the level of Adam and Eve before the sin. By choosing G-d, they became the Chosen People, whose mission was to be a light unto the nations, leading all of humanity back to G-d's initial, universal plan: that all mankind should be as one nation under G-d, indivisible, with spirituality and righteousness for all.

WHICH SON TO SAVE

Question: Parents of a “dropout” son are faced with a difficult choice of whether to spend a substantial amount of time and money on trying to bring him back to the fold or to devote their energy and resources in ensuring that his brother, who is meanwhile doing well, does not follow in the path of the wayward son. What is the right thing to do?

Answer: In ruling that the efforts of the parents should be concentrated on the second son, Rabbi Yitzchak Zilberstein, the rav of the Ramat Elchanan community in Bnei Brak, cited

both a halachic source and a parable from the Magid of Dubnow.

The Magid told of a fire that broke out in a neighborhood, which brought firemen to the scene. Onlookers noticed that the firemen were hosing water on the houses adjoining the one on fire and not on the blaze itself. When they expressed wonder at what was going on, the head of the firemen explained that there was little chance of saving the burning house and their efforts were directed towards ensuring that the blaze does not spread to the nearby houses.

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY _____

GRATITUDE TO A BUSH

The rosh hayeshiva who survived the Holocaust and eventually settled in Jerusalem had an interest activity that aroused the curiosity of his students. Each day he was seen carefully watering a bush growing in his yard.

Pressed for an explanation he recalled how he managed to escape death when the Nazis rounded up all the Jews in his Lithuanian town for deportation to a death camp. Standing near the back door when the Nazis arrived he managed to run out and hide behind a huge bush. His flight was

noticed and a frantic search was initiated which ended in failure because of the unusual thickness of the bush. After the Nazis left, taking with them all the members of his family, he fled into the forest and joined the Partisans until the end of the war.

After the war he returned to his hometown and snipped a part of the bush that had saved his life, planted it in his yard and, as an act of gratitude, dedicated himself to daily giving it life by watering it as it had given him life by concealing him.

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