

OHRNET

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PARSHA INSIGHTS

BIRTH OF A NATION

"...and there he became a nation..." (Devarim 26:5)

I have a friend who became religious in New York City. He had been attending a synagogue on a fairly regular basis. One day he was leaving the shul after the morning service. He was returning the paper *yarmulke* to its place at the shul's entrance when he decided he wanted to "wear" his new-found religiosity more openly.

Leaving the shul, he turned, not toward his apartment, but in the other direction. Within a few minutes, he found himself at the door of a Jewish bookstore. At the end of the counter there was a carousel that carried the entire gamut of Orthodox Jewish headgear. Approaching the carousel, he began to turn it slowly.

He was amazed at the range of choices. There were white *kipot* and green *kipot*, black *kipot*, knitted *kipot*, leather *kipot*, velvet *kipot*, cloth *kipot* and *kipot* that looked like they had come off the head of an Afghan sheep herd.

"Which one am I going to chose?" he thought to himself.

Little did he realize he was about to enter a political minefield.

Without thinking too much about it, he picked a large black velvet *kipah* and plonked it on the top of his head. Making his way to the cashier, he paid for his new *yarmulke*, and walked outside, and stopped in his tracks.

Everything had changed.

He had changed. The world had changed.

He thought to himself, "I have become an ambassador.

I have become an ambassador for the Jewish People. Everything I do now will be judged through the lens of my Jewishness.

If I push in line, people won't say 'Who's this guy pushing in line?' They'll say 'Who's this Jew pushing in line?' And if I give up my seat to an old lady on the subway (If old ladies do still venture onto the subway) I will have sanctified the Name of Heaven."

Little do we realize that the good name of the Jewish People, and along with them the G-d of the Jewish People, rests on a small piece of cloth perched precariously on our heads.

This week's Torah portion marks the beginning of the birth of a nation.

"...and there he became a nation..."

The Haggada of Passover quotes this verse and explains that the Jewish People were "outstanding" there in Egypt. They didn't change their manner of dress, their names or their language. They were a very visible and very distinct minority.

As we were born, so we continue.

Every interaction a "uniformed" Jew has with the world-at-large has the potential to sanctify the Name of Heaven. And it can be done in the smallest of ways. I've seen this same friend go up to garbage collectors (even if he doesn't live in the area) and say "Thank you!"

The other day he was in an art shop. He was looking for a very, very, fine paintbrush. He found four no. 0000s. To save himself another trip to the art store, he took all of them. In line to pay, he noticed the cashier (a young lady with spiked hair the color of a depressed Barbie® doll) looking at him with an expression of mild distaste. Handing the brushes to her, he remarked, "I took the last of these brushes. You may want to reorder them so you'll have them in stock when the next person comes along."

The assistant looked up at him for a second, and smiled.

We are all ambassadors in the birth of our nation.

PARSHA OVERVIEW

With the death of Yosef, the Book of Bereishet (Genesis) comes to an end. The Book of Shmot (Exodus) chronicles the creation of the nation of Israel from the descendants of Yaakov. At the beginning of this week's Parsha, Pharaoh, fearing the population explosion of Jews, enslaves them. However, when their birthrate increases, he orders the Jewish midwives to kill all newborn males. Yocheved gives birth to Moshe and hides him in the reeds by the Nile. Pharaoh's daughter finds and adopts him, although she knows he is probably a Hebrew. Miriam, Moshe's sister, offers to find a nursemaid for Moshe and arranges for his mother Yocheved to be his nursemaid. Years later, Moshe witnesses an Egyptian beating a Hebrew and Moshe kills the Egyptian. Realizing his life is in danger, Moshe flees to Midian where he rescues Tziporah, whose father Yitro approves their subsequent marriage. On

Chorev (Mt. Sinai) Moshe witnesses the burning bush where G-d commands him to lead the Jewish People from Egypt to *Eretz Yisrael*, the land promised to their ancestors. Moshe protests that the Jewish People will doubt his being G-d's agent, so G-d enables Moshe to perform three miraculous transformations to validate himself in the people's eyes: Transforming his staff into a snake, his healthy hand into a leprous one, and water into blood. When Moshe declares that he is not a good public speaker G-d tells him that his brother Aharon will be his spokesman. Aharon greets Moshe on his return to Egypt and they petition Pharaoh to release the Jews. Pharaoh responds with even harsher decrees, declaring that the Jews must produce the same quota of bricks as before but without being given supplies. The people become dispirited, but G-d assures Moshe that He will force Pharaoh to let the Jews leave.

ISRAEL Forever

WHO SHALL LEAD THE PEOPLE?

With the national elections in Israel only a few weeks away voters are being asked to cast their ballots for the political party which they feel will do the best job of leading the people. The candidates for seats in the Knesset, Israel's parliament, spare no words in trying to convince the voting public that they are the ones best suited for leadership and that their competitors are not.

What a far cry from the election of the first leader of the Jewish People. In this week's Torah portion we read about the election of Moshe without primaries, campaigns and ballot boxes. It is not the undemocratic manner in which Moshe was chosen that sets his election apart from the current one. Moshe, after all, was Divinely appointed. It is the manner in which this, the most humble man on earth despite his extraordinary stature, responded to his appointment which separates the big men from the little boys in the political arena.

Moshe's reaction to being offered perhaps the most important leadership role in world history is that he is not worthy of the appointment. He raises the handicap he has in properly communicating to the Egyptian despot the Divine command to let His people go. He even suggests that his older brother, Aaron, would be a more suitable candidate.

This leader, who gained the title of "Rebbeinu", our teacher, also taught us an important lesson in leadership. Not the aggressive campaigning of the office seeker is the hallmark of true leadership. Despite his hesitations and protestations, Moshe accepted the awesome responsibility of confronting a very stubborn king and leading out of bondage a very difficult people because this was the will of Heaven. His leadership was selfless and therefore enduring. If we could see only a fragment of his character in today's candidates for leadership we would feel a great deal more secure about Israel forever.



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SECRETS OF SUCCESS

In what merit, asked Rabbi Yochanan, did Omri become king of Israel? Because he added another city to *Eretz Yisrael!*

The source quoted for this settlement effort raises somewhat of a problem. The passage (*Melachim I 16:24*) which relates that Omri purchased the mountain of Shomron and built the city of Shemer there appears after the account of his rise to the throne. How could this then be the merit which made him a king?

The answer given by the commentaries, based on a *midrash*, is that Rabbi Yochanan is calling attention to the fact that Omri, alone among all the sinful kings of the Kingdom of Israel, was succeeded by both his son and later his grandson. He merited this because he dedicated himself to the needs of his subjects as expressed in adding a city and caring for it.

In what merit, continued Rabbi Yochanan, did a wicked king like Achav merit to reign as king for 22 years? Because he showed great respect for the Torah which is made up of 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet!

The great respect for the Torah shown by Achav came at a very critical moment in his reign as described in *Melachim I*, chapter 20. The King of Aram, Ben-Hadad, came with a mighty army and laid siege to Achav's capital, Shomron. He then sent messengers demanding that Achav deliver to them whatever he asks in gold and silver, women and children. Anxious to avoid an invasion at virtually any price, Achav agreed to his demand. The messengers who relayed his consent returned with a new demand that they be enabled to take in their hands the most desirable possession he had – the Sefer Torah. Despite his awareness that refusal to do so would mean certain war against overwhelming odds, Achav responded that this last request was something he could not accommodate.

Not only did his courage gain for him a miraculous military victory, but the respect for Torah it expressed, despite his being a confirmed idol worshipper, gained for him a long reign of 22 years.

• *Sanhedrin 102b*

ONE-WAY STREET OF CREDIT

In the listing of kings, in the *mishneh* at the beginning of our *perek*, whose sinful ways caused them to lose a share in the World to Come, there appears the name of Menashe the son of Chizkiyahu. Menashe's son and successor, Omon, is not listed among them even though we read (*Melachim II*

21:20) "he did what was evil in the eyes of G-d, like his father Menashe."

The reason for omitting Omon, says our *gemara*, is out of deference to his son, the righteous King Yoshiyahu. If so, the question is raised, why is Menashe not omitted from this list of shame out of deference to his righteous father, King Chizkiyahu?

A son, comes the answer, is capable of endowing his father with merit but a father cannot do so for a son. When G-d states in the Torah (*Devarim 32:39*) that "no one can save from My hand," He is declaring that "Avraham cannot save Yishmael, nor can Yitzchak save Eisav."

Two explanations are offered by the commentaries for this one-way impact.

One is that a son is a physical extension of his father without whom he would never have come to the world. The *mitzvot* and good deeds of the son can therefore serve as a source of credit for the father. This is one of the concepts behind the saying of *Kaddish* and leading the services during the year following the passing of a parent, as is evident from the famous *midrash* concerning Rabbi Akiva and the wicked tax collector. The same is obviously not true in regard to crediting the son with his father's *mitzvot*. (The concept of *zechut avot* – ancestral merits – is another issue not relevant to the matter of reward and punishment.)

Another explanation is that there are sinful people who want their children to be better than them and therefore provide them with guidance in the proper direction which enables them to develop into righteous Jews. They therefore deserve some credit for the outcome. But reproof and guidance goes from father to son and not the other way around, so that a son can hardly be credited with impacting his father's righteousness.

• *Sanhedrin 104a*

The Weekly Daf

by RABBI MENDEL WEINBACH

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PARSHA Q&A ?

1. Why does the verse say "And Yosef was in Egypt?"
2. "...And they will go up out of the land." Who said this and what did he mean?
3. Why did Pharaoh specifically choose water as the means of killing the Jewish boys? (Two reasons.)
4. "She saw that he was good." What did she see "good" about Moshe that was unique?
5. Which Hebrew men were fighting each other?
6. Moshe was afraid that the Jewish People were not fit to be redeemed, because some among them committed a certain sin. What sin?
7. Why did the Midianites drive Yitro's daughters away from the well?
8. How did Yitro know that Moshe was Yaakov's descendant?
9. What lesson was Moshe to learn from the fact that the burning bush was not consumed?
10. What merit did the Jewish People have that warranted G-d's promise to redeem them?
11. Which expression of redemption would assure the people that Moshe was the true redeemer?
12. What did the staff turning into a snake symbolize?
13. Why didn't Moshe want to be the leader?
14. "And Hashem was angry with Moshe..." What did Moshe lose as a result of this anger?
15. What was special about Moshe's donkey?
16. About which plague was Pharaoh warned first?
17. Why didn't the elders accompany Moshe and Aharon to Pharaoh? How were they punished?
18. Which tribe did not work as slaves?
19. Who were the: a) *nogsim* b) *shotrim*?
20. How were the *shotrim* rewarded for accepting the beatings on behalf of their fellow Jews?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

1. 1:5 - This verse adds that despite being in Egypt as a ruler, Yosef maintained his righteousness.
2. 1:10 - Pharaoh said it, meaning that the Egyptians would be forced to leave Egypt.
3. 1:10,22 - He hoped to escape Divine retribution, as G-d promised never to flood the entire world. Also, his astrologers saw that the Jewish redeemer's downfall would be through water.
4. 2:2 - When he was born, the house was filled with light.
5. 2:13 - Datan and Aviram.
6. 2:14 - *Lashon hara* (evil speech).
7. 2:17 - Because a ban had been placed on Yitro for abandoning idol worship.
8. 2:20 - The well water rose towards Moshe.
9. 3:12 - Just as the bush was not consumed, so too Moshe would be protected by G-d.
10. 3:12 - That they were destined to receive the Torah.
11. 3:16,18 - "I surely remembered (*pakod pakadeti*)."
12. 4:3 - It symbolized that Moshe spoke ill of the Jews by saying that they wouldn't listen to him, just as the original snake sinned through speech.
13. 4:10 - He didn't want to take a position above that of his older brother, Aharon.
14. 4:14 - Moshe lost the privilege of being a *kohen*.
15. 4:20 - It was used by Avraham for *akeidat Yitzchak* and will be used in the future by *mashiach*.
16. 4:23 - Death of the firstborn.
17. 5:1 - The elders were accompanying Moshe and Aharon, but they were afraid and one by one they slipped away. Hence, at the giving of the Torah, the elders weren't allowed to ascend with Moshe.
18. 5:5 - The tribe of Levi.
19. 5:6 - a) Egyptian taskmasters; b) Jewish officers.
20. 5:14 - They were chosen to be on the Sanhedrin.

LOVE OF THE LAND - THE PEOPLE

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

SULTAN SALIM – UNCOVERING THE WESTERN WALL

A fascinating story is told of how the Kotel (Western Wall) was rescued from obscurity almost five centuries ago. Soon after the Turkish Sultan Salim had conquered Yerushalayim he looked out from the window of his residence near the area where the *Beit Hamikdash* once stood and observed a woman dumping garbage. She explained that this was the custom of the Christian community every since the Romans



destroyed the Holy Temple of the Jews but were unable to destroy the West Wall of the Temple Mount. By dumping garbage at this site for centuries they hoped to eliminate any memory of the sacred wall.

The Sultan dumped a fortune of coins on the rubbish pile and invited all the residents of the city to dig for them. For thirty days the money-hungry people dug for these coins until the Wall was revealed.

ANIMAL SUFFERING

From: A. C. in Mexico

Dear Rabbi,

I am studying Torah in Mexico City. I saw an animal program, where lions or wolves attack an animal for food. I saw that animals before they die, they suffer so much that it makes me wonder, why? In our eyes, this is so unfair for someone who does not have free will, did animals make sins so they are punished in this way? Can you please answer me this question? Best regards.

Rabbi Yehudah HaLevi, in the Kuzari, discusses the harshness of life in the animal kingdom in the context of describing the wonder of its design:

"See how wonderfully conceived is the nature of the creatures, how many marvelous gifts they possess which show forth the intention of an all-wise Creator, and the will of an omniscient all-powerful Being. He has endowed the small and the great with all necessary internal and external senses and limbs. He gave them organs corresponding to their instincts. He gave the hare and the stag the means of flight required by their timid nature; endowed the lion with ferocity and with the instruments for robbing and tearing. He who considers the formation, use, and relation of the limbs to the animal instinct, sees wisdom in them and so perfect an arrangement that no doubt or uncertainty can remain in his soul concerning the justice of the Creator. When an evil thought suggests that there is injustice in the circumstance that the hare falls prey to the lion or the wolf, and the fly to the spider, reason warns him as follows:

How can I charge the All-Wise with injustice when I am convinced of His justice, and that injustice is quite out of the question? If the lion's pursuit of the hare and the spider of the fly were mere accidents, I should have to assert the necessity of accident. I see, however, that the wise and just Manager of the world equipped the lion with the means for hunting, with ferocity, strength, teeth and claws; that He furnished the spider with cunning and taught it to weave a net which it constructs without having learned to do so; how He equipped it with the instruments required and appointed the fly as its food, just as many fish serve other fish for food. Can I say anything but that this is the fruit of a wisdom which I am unable to grasp, and that I must submit to Him Who is called "The Rock Whose doing is perfect" (*Deuteronomy 32:4*)?" (The Kuzari, part III)

Rather than give an explanation, he states that since there is an a priori awareness that G-d created the universe and is just, and that animals are clearly designed to eat one another, then predation must therefore be planned, and it must be the product of a justice that is beyond our comprehension. Like the mystery of human suffering, the suffering of the animal kingdom is one of the ultimate, unknowable mysteries of creation.

Rabbi Avraham Yeshayah Karelitz, the "Chazon Ish" (1878-1953), gives more of an explanation, although one that is nevertheless still somewhat cryptic:

"Animals are similar to man in the structure of the body, with its aspects and capabilities; the material of their bodies is flesh and blood, sinews, bones and skin, and they possess a life-force. They possess senses like man, they sustain themselves like man, they are of two genders, male and female, and the difference of man from animals is in intelligence and language. Animals are of utility to man, such as an ox for a yoke and a donkey for a bur-

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WHAT'S THE RIGHT THING TO DO?

REAL-LIFE QUESTIONS OF SOCIAL AND BUSINESS ETHICS

THE PARAMETERS OF PRIVACY

Question: Whenever an ambulance appears in a neighborhood there is a tendency for people to rush to see who is being taken to the hospital and to stare at the figure on the stretcher. Is this considered an invasion of another person's privacy?

Answer: In the Talmud (first perek of *Mesechta Bava Batra*) we learn of restrictions imposed by halacha on home builders and expanders in order to avoid "hezek riyah" – the invasion of another person's privacy. While the main basis for these restrictions is to protect the neighbor's ability to have free use of his own premises without fear of being observed by others, these laws also show consideration for the embarrassment suffered by one who is watched by others in situations where he does not wish to be seen.

Based on this consideration it follows that staring at an ill person being taken to a hospital by ambulance is improper

because it is a source of embarrassment for him to have people see him in such a helpless state. The halacha attaches great importance to a sick person's peace of mind even in regard to Shabbat violation when there is a serious danger to life. Since the shame caused to the patient by staring at him while he is being placed in the ambulance can disturb his peace of mind, such behavior harbors on aggravating his condition and must be avoided. It therefore follows that a responsible adult at the scene should take the initiative of urging all the spectators, especially the naturally curious children, to leave the area and allow the ambulance crew to work in privacy.

As a footnote we might add a couple more examples of invasion of privacy that go beyond building restrictions.

Looking at someone's passport or any other identification in order to find out how old he is; taking out of the Kotel a "kvittel" on which someone has written a personal prayer.

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

MAN'S BEST FRIEND LIVES UP TO HIS NAME

The reputation of the dog as “man’s best friend” is being put to the test by “Pups for Peace”. This organization, founded by U.S. Jews and the Israeli-based Golan Fund to help Israel defend itself against terrorist attacks, plans to provide a thousand trained dogs capable of detecting explosives.

The first 60 dogs underwent a two-month bomb detection course given by 20 Israeli trainers at a facility in Los Angeles before being shipped to Israel for an additional month-long course in the Golan Heights. The thousand mark will be reached by 2004 if the Israeli police and IDF still need them.

The idea is to deploy these trained pups in supermarkets,

sports events and other public places throughout the country. They are capable of smelling an explosives source and indicating its location to their handlers. Although they are not trained to actually attack a suspected bomber, the information they provide in this way can save lives by alerting the military or police to the danger and thus preventing an explosion.

At a fundraising luncheon recently held in New York for this project, Governor George Pataki, who chaired the affair, was thrilled when a four-year old Labrador was named George. (It will actually be called by the Hebracized version of Gershon.) “I am delighted that this pup that will help ensure peace in Israel,” said the Governor, “has been named after me.”

DID YOU KNOW THAT...

...Ohr Somayach is named for one of the Torah greats of the last century, Rabbi Meir Simcha Hakohen (1843-1926), Rabbi of the Latvian city of Dvinsk, who is best known for his classic commentary on the Mishneh Torah of the Rambam, “Ohr Somayach”.

PUBLIC DOMAIN

Return to Sender

Dear Editor,

Regarding your Ethics article “Revenge for Simcha” (Ohrnet Vayeshev) I’d like to share the following story. I recently made a wedding for one of my children. Two nights before the wedding I was working on the seating arrangements, and noticed I hadn’t received a response from a certain couple. I called and asked if they were planning to attend and was greeted with puzzlement and delight. Possibly their invitation hadn’t included a response card. Alternately the invitation might be lost in the mail (especially since it had two return addresses for the families of the bride and groom). A third possibility is that the friend might have called and left a message that was never delivered.

May we all share in happy simchas!

• An Ohrnet reader

The Color of Humor on Ohr.edu

Hi, I’m thrilled to find kosher humor. Thanks a bunch—and it’s intelligent, too. One suggestion: it’s hard to read the top ten. Would you change the background from dark blue to a lighter color (to better contrast with the black print?)

Thanks again,

• R. W., Canada

Editor replies: Thanks for the words of appreciation. Your feedback is helpful and your suggestion is in queue of things to do on our virtual “workbench”.

Ask! YOUR JEWISH INFORMATION RESOURCE - WWW.OHR.EDU

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den, and they prepare food for man, milk and eggs, and from some of them we obtain wool to wear, and some of them are themselves food for people. They were created as different kinds and as many species, and the food of each is different. People do not benefit from some of them, such as predatory animals, and snakes, and vermin, and insects; however they possess sublime necessity and benefit. Sometimes man is punished by way of them, and sometimes man learns wisdom and ethics from them. We are already used to their existence, and we feel that without them the world would be lacking, and the world is not beautiful and perfect except when there are predatory animals in it. The abundance of habit numbs the sense of wonder of the soul which befits every living creature by virtue of its being alive. As opposed to this, the soul does feel wonder

from special species which are not so frequently found...” (Emunah U’bitachon 1:7)

Rabbi Karelitz seems to be saying that the harshness of nature, demonstrated by predatory animals, is part and parcel of the overall grand tapestry of creation. “We feel that without them the world would be lacking, and the world is not beautiful and perfect except when there are predatory animals in it.” Mankind somehow intuitively understands that it is part of a greater good.

In summary, then, the essential answer is that such things are part of the larger picture, part of the greater good, part of G-d’s ultimate and unknowable plan:

“For My thoughts are not as your thoughts, nor are your ways as My ways, says G-d.” (Isaiah 55:8)