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PARSHA INSIGHTS

PUBLIC MISPEAKING

“Distance yourself from a false word...” (23:7)

I will never forget one of the great lines of political double-think uttered by a famous Hollywood ‘B’-film actor and sometime United States President. When challenged over the truthfulness of a statement he had made, he replied without batting an eyelid, “I misspoke.” Lithe as a lounge-lizard, he had managed to finesse a bald lie into an innocent slip of the tongue. I was duly impressed.

Politics has always been truth’s slippery slope. Advertising fares no better. And even though standards of truthfulness are mandated for advertising, it’s amazing how much can be infiltrated between the lines to distort and misrepresent without falling foul of the law.

“Distance yourself from a false word...”

The Torah is uncompromising in its ban on lying. However, there are circumstances where this prohibition can conflict with other prohibitions. What does

one do in those situations?

The brother of the Vilna Gaon, Rabbi Zalmele, together with another rabbi, once went to visit a friend of Rabbi Zalmele. They found the friend seated at his

meal. He sprang to his feet and begged them to join him. Rabbi Zalmele knew that this man was extremely poor and the meal that he was eating was inadequate for one person, let alone three. Rabbi Zalmele thus excused himself from joining him, protesting that the doctor had prohibited him from the kind of food that his friend was eating.

After they left, the other rabbi turned to Rabbi Zalmele and said, “Is it true that you are ill?” Replied Rabbi Zalmele, “No.” Most surprised, the other said to him, “You, who are so careful not to let a false word escape your lips, how can you, of all people, tell a direct lie?” Rabbi Zalmele replied, “The Rambam (Maimonides) was a doctor. He writes that it is prohibited to share the food of someone who does not

have enough for himself.”

• Source: *Iturei Torah*

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The Jewish People receive a series of laws concerning social justice. Topics include: Proper treatment of Jewish servants; a husband's obligations to his wife; penalties for hitting people and for cursing parents, judges and leaders; financial responsibilities for damaging people or their property, either by oneself or by one's animate or inanimate property, or by pitfalls that one created; payments for theft; not returning an object that one accepted responsibility to guard; the right to self-defense of a person being robbed.

Other topics include: Prohibitions against seduction; witchcraft, bestiality and sacrifices to idols. The Torah warns us to treat the convert, widow and orphan with dignity, and to avoid lying. Usury is forbidden and the rights over collateral are limited. Payment of obligations to the

Temple should not be delayed, and the Jewish People must be Holy, even concerning food. The Torah teaches the proper conduct for judges in court proceedings. The commandments of Shabbat and the Sabbatical year are outlined. Three times a year — Pesach, Shavuot and Succot — we are to come to the Temple. The Torah concludes this listing of laws with a law of kashrut — not to mix milk and meat.

G-d promises that He will lead the Jewish People to the Land of Israel, helping them conquer its inhabitants, and tells them that by fulfilling His commandments they will bring blessings to their nation. The people promise to do and listen to everything that G-d says. Moshe writes the Book of the Covenant, and reads it to the people. Moshe ascends the mountain to remain there for 40 days in order to receive the two Tablets of the Covenant.

ISRAEL Forever

GIVE TILL IT HURTS

One of the oldest slogans used in fundraising campaigns for charitable causes is "Give till it hurts". In the Torah approach to giving, it can safely be stated that unless one actually endangers his financial security he will never be hurt from giving generously.

This assurance was symbolized by something described in the special "Parshat Shekalim" chapter we will be reading this Shabbat in addition to the regular weekly portion.

When Moshe expressed difficulty in determining what size coin each Jew was required to give as his *machatzit hashekel* contribution to the construction of the Mishkan Sanctuary, he was shown by the Creator a coin of fire that

he should use as a model.

The choice of fire rather than silver as the material for this model was intended as a lesson for those called upon to give. There is plenty of water in the ocean and sand on the shore. But if one drop of water or one grain of sand is removed, there is something missing, as indiscernible as it may be. Fire is the one exception. One can use fire to light, to heat and to cook without reducing the amount of fire. In similar fashion one who gives to a good cause need not be concerned that he will be hurt by his loss, because G-d will certainly reward his charitable act with replenishment and perhaps even more.

LOVE OF THE LAND - THE SAGES

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

"MAKE SOMEONE YOUR REBBIE AND ACQUIRE A FRIEND"

YEHOSHUA BEN PERACHIA (AVOT 1:1)

A man needs a good friend for three purposes:

1) To learn Torah. As one Sage said: "I have learned much from my teachers, but even more from my friends."

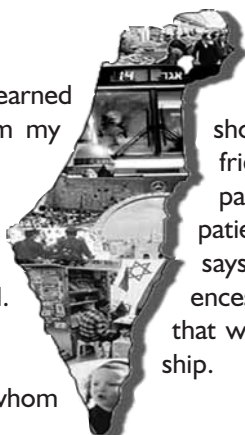
2) To be more careful in observing the *mitzvot*. Even if one of them will be tempted to transgress he will not allow the other to fall as well. This offers hope for both of them to improve.

3) To enjoy his counsel and have someone in whom

he can confide.

The term "acquire" employed here is to indicate that if he can find no other route he should be prepared to pay anything to gain a good friend. It also suggests that one should be prepared to "buy" a good friend with soft-spoken patience and to show him tolerance, even when he says something offensive. Otherwise the differences in human personalities will create situations that will lead to strains that can endanger the friendship.

• Rabbeinu Yonah



PARSHA Q&A ?

1. In what context is a *mezuzah* mentioned in this week's parsha?
2. What special mitzvah does the Torah give to the master of a Hebrew maidservant?
3. What is the penalty for wounding one's father or mother?
4. "A" intentionally hits "B." As a result, B is close to death. Besides any monetary payments, what happens to A?
5. What is the penalty for someone who tries to murder a particular person, but accidentally kills another person instead? Give two opinions.
6. A slave goes free if his master knocks out one of the slave's teeth. What teeth do not qualify for this rule and why?
7. An ox gores another ox. What is the maximum the owner of the damaging ox must pay, provided his animal had gored no more than twice previously?
8. From where in this week's parsha can the importance of work be demonstrated?
9. What is meant by the words "If the sun shone on him"?
10. A person is given an object for safe-keeping. Later, he swears it was stolen. Witnesses come and say that in fact he is the one who stole it. How much must he pay?
11. A person borrows his employee's car. The car is struck by lightning. How much must he pay?
12. Why is lending money at interest called "biting"?
13. Non-kosher meat, "*treifa*," is preferentially fed to dogs. Why?
14. Which verse forbids listening to slander?
15. What constitutes a majority-ruling in a capital case?
16. How is Shavuot referred to in this week's parsha?
17. How many prohibitions are transgressed when cooking meat and milk together?
18. What was written in the *Sefer Habrit* which Moshe wrote prior to the giving of the Torah?
19. What was the *livnat hasapir* a reminder of?
20. Who was Efrat? Who was her husband? Who was her son?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

1. 21:6 - If a Hebrew slave desires to remain enslaved, his owner brings him "to the doorpost *mezuzah*" to pierce his ear.
2. 21:8,9 - To marry her
3. 21:15 - Death by strangulation.
4. 21:19 - He is put in jail until "B" recovers or dies.
5. 21:23 - 1)The murderer deserves the death penalty. 2)The murderer is exempt from death but must compensate the heirs of his victim.
6. 21:26 - Baby teeth, which grow back.
7. 21:35 - The full value of his own animal.
8. 21:37 - From the "five-times" penalty for stealing an ox and slaughtering it. This fine is seen as punishment for preventing the owner from plowing with his ox.
9. 22:2 - If it's as clear as the sun that the thief has no intent to kill.
10. 22:8 - Double value of the object.
11. 22:14 - Nothing.
12. 22:24 - Interest is like a snake bite. Just as the poison is not noticed at first but soon overwhelms the person, so too interest is barely noticeable until it accumulates to an overwhelming sum.
13. 22:30 - As "reward" for their silence during the plague of the first-born.
14. 23:1 - Targum Onkelos translates "Don't bear a false report" as "Don't receive a false report".
15. 23:2 - A simple majority is needed for an acquittal. A majority of two is needed for a ruling of guilty.
16. 23:16 - *Chag Hakatzir* — Festival of Reaping.
17. 23:19 - One.
18. 24:4,7 - The Torah, starting from Bereishet until the giving of the Torah, and the *mitzvot* given at Mara.
19. 24:10 - That the Jews in Egypt were forced to toil by making bricks.
20. 24:14 - Miriam, wife of Calev, mother of Chur.

- Thick *matzot*, thick dough and decoratively shaped *matzot*
- Status of pan-baked bread or *matzah*
- The status of *ma'aser sheini* (second tithe) in regard to *mitzvot* of *challah*, *matzah* and *etrog*
- Can *challah* of *ma'aser sheini* qualify as *matzah* for the *mitzvah* of the *kohen*?
- The problem of *challah* of the *korban todah* (thanksgiving sacrifice) qualifying for the *mitzvah* of *matzah*
- Which bitter herbs qualify for the *mitzvah* of *maror*
- An analysis of what sort of bitterness the Torah meant with the word *maror*
- The condition of the *maror* which can disqualify it for the *mitzvah*
- Soaking or boiling grain and which grain products cannot become *chametz*
- At which stage must guarding against *chametz* begin
- The grain of the sunken ship
- Flour into vinegary sauce or mustard
- Broiling and boiling the flesh of the *korban pesach*
- Is a general prohibition or an implied one punishable by lashes?
- The proper water, conditions and precautions for baking *matzah*
- *Chametz* mixtures and inedible *chametz*
- Obligation of women in regard to eating *matzah* and avoiding *chametz*

THE MAROR MYSTERY

When our ancestors in Egypt were commanded (*Shmot* 12:8) to eat the meat of the *korban pesach* together with *matzah* and *maror* (bitterness), no

details were given about the nature of the bitterness. Rabbi Rachumi therefore asked the Sage Abaye how we know that the intention was bitter herbs. He even suggested the following things which are bitter, only to have Abaye explain why they did not qualify:

1) **The bile of a fish** – Since the Torah mentioned *matzah* and *maror* in the same passage, there is a suggested equation. Just as *matzah* is made from something that grows from the earth, so must *maror* be something that grows from the earth.

2) **Hirduf - the bitter wood of a tree (which Moshe used {*Shmot* 15:25} in miraculous fashion to make the bitter waters of Marah drinkable for his people.)**

Just as *matzah* is made from grain that must be repeatedly planted, so must *maror* be from vegetables, not trees.

3) **Harzifa - a vegetable which is poisonous for animals.**

Just as *matzah* is edible food that can be purchased in Yerushalayim with the funds that redeemed *ma'aser sheini* (second tithe), so must *maror* be something that can be purchased from these funds and *harzifa* is not something which people eat.

Tosefot points out that in regard to the above species which is poisonous to animals, the *gemara* could also have disqualified it for use as fulfillment of the *mitzvah* for the same reason the *gemara* (*Mesechta Succah* 32b) disqualifies it for use as one of the four species we are commanded to take on Succot – that “the ways of Torah are pleasant” and would not require us to use something of a poisonous nature.

• *Pesachim* 39a

WHAT THE Sages SAY

“Although the *mishna* lists a number of bitter herbs which qualify for the *mitzvah* of eating *maror* on Pesach eve, the preferred species is *chazeret* (Romaine lettuce).”

• Rabbi Oshia

“*Chazeret* is what we call *chassa*, and it is thus called because it recalls that G-d was *chass* (had mercy) on us and took us out of Egyptian bondage.”

• The Sage Rava - *Pesachim* 39a

FROM GERMANY TO JERUSALEM

From: Alli Allen in Atlanta, Georgia

Dear Rabbi,

I very much enjoy your weekly emails and would appreciate getting your opinion on an idea that my family is considering. For some background information: My mother was born in Germany and escaped when she was 9 years old with her parents one week before Kristallnacht. Unfortunately, her grandparents, aunt and other family members perished in the Holocaust. The synagogue where my mother went to school as a young girl in Stuttgart was bombed in WWII but has since been rebuilt. Now, sixty years later, my son will have his bar mitzvah in 2 years. We are entertaining the idea, if it is possible, of returning to Germany to the very same synagogue and conducting his bar mitzvah there. Of course, G-d willing, my parents would be there with us making the experience all the more meaningful. What are your thoughts? To us, this would be a way of expressing the fact that despite all the attempts to wipe out the Jews of Germany, we have survived and thrived and are returning as Jews with the freedom to do as we please. I don't know whether it would be objectionable for us to have his bar mitzvah in Germany, and I would appreciate getting your thoughts on this. Thank you very much.

Dear Alli,

I completely empathize with your feelings. While I always knew part of my father's family came from Germany, recently, after much research, I found out from exactly which town (also in Southern Germany, near Stuttgart). In order to reconstruct, and thereby reconnect to my German-Jewish roots, I obtained many primary resources including maps and pictures, which culminated in documentation regarding the house in which my family lived, the (Kristallnacht-rebuilt) synagogue in which they prayed and the (desecrated) cemetery in which many were buried.

Eventually I had an opportunity to be in Europe, and I made my way to Hechingen. Traveling in a rail car seven hours through Germany while appearing so conspicuously Jewish and being stared at by many of the Germans (and Arabs) was a very eerie and uncomfortable feeling. On the other hand, being received so graciously by my helpful German host, and visiting places so meaningful to me, was very heart-warming and moving.

Still, I don't think one has to go there in order to demonstrate one's Jewish pride and freedom, and specifically on an occasion of Jewish significance. The Nazi/European persecution of that period extended beyond the Jews of Germany; and by the same token, Judaism never had any religious attachment to Germany or any other nation of exile. Jewish resilience in exile is not expressed by returning to one geographical location or another once the storm of persecution has passed, but rather by returning to Judaism wherever one ends up. For this reason, Judaism in America is flourishing.

Therefore, considering that in Germany you have no family, no friends and no rabbi, where you will have logistical problems with kashrut and Shabbat, and all this in a synagogue which may be more of a museum than a shul, and may not have a minyan or kosher Torah scroll - I think it's better to stay home. There, you'll share this very important occasion joyously with your family, friends and congregation, and your son will enter Jewish manhood with self-confidence and self-respect among loved ones, in a setting where he can perform his first *mitzvot* meticulously rather than having to compromise or cut corners. Celebrating the bar mitzvah where you are, in an established Jewish community with all that entails, is not only better from a Jewish perspective, ultimately it's a greater expression of Jewish pride and freedom as well.

This does not mean that you shouldn't take your son and parents to visit Germany another time. From an historical and Jewish point of view, this may be very educational, meaningful and moving. After all, I feel fortunate that I had the opportunity to do it, and I'm glad that I did. But having been there and knowing what it's like, I would never want to celebrate a joyous occasion in such Jewish eerie-isolation.

That being said, there is another possibility. While I wrote above that Jewish resilience is not about returning to a particular place, there is an exception – the Land of Israel. Even though we were so viciously persecuted and exiled from that Land, Israel is eternally central to Judaism and a Jew must hope, pray and strive to return to our nation's Home. In my opinion, observing your son's bar mitzvah in Jerusalem, near the location of the Holy Temple, would better realize what you expressed: "despite all the attempts to wipe out the Jews of Germany [and may I add, despite the attempts against all Jews in all times and places], we have survived and thrived and are returning as Jews with the freedom to do as we please [may I add, Jewishly, in our own Land]". If this is at all possible, you might consider visiting Germany on your way to the bar mitzvah in Jerusalem – this would certainly enhance your feelings of liberty from persecution and exile to Jewish pride and freedom.

CAN'T THROW THEM AWAY

Question: I have a batch of clothes and toys that my children have outgrown, but I have a sentimental attachment to them and cannot just throw them away. However I sorely need the space they are occupying. What is the right thing to do?

Answer: Almost every family faces the problem of what to do with used clothes, toys, utensils and other household items. You and others in your situation have a wonderful opportunity to help families who cannot afford to purchase these items new. Sometimes you may be aware of a needy recipient, but there is a much more efficient and sensitive way of disposing of your used things for the benefit of others.

In many religious communities in Eretz Yisrael and other countries *Gemach* centers have been established. These

centers receive the items you wish to be rid of and sell them to needy customers for a token sum. Collections made in communities where there are no clients for used things invariably send them to Eretz Yisrael where the need is great.

This system achieves three goals:

- 1) It allows the needy customers to receive these items in a dignified fashion without feeling they are charity cases.
- 2) The funds received from the sale of these items are applied to helping needy families with cash.
- 3) It helps people like you avoid the emotional trauma of throwing away used items you feel attached to.

So go ahead and find out where such a *Gemach* exists, or create one yourself.

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

COMFORTING A WIDOWER

The great Rosh Hayeshiva of the Ponovez Yeshiva, Harav Eliezer Shach, *zatzal*, was once informed that a particular Jew who had lost his wife was plunged into a deep depression. In his grief he ceased to eat, speak or function.

Rav Shach immediately went to visit him but there was no response when he knocked on the door. Seeing that the door was not locked he went inside and took a seat next to the couch upon which lay the poor fellow. Placing his hand on the fellow's shoulder he said to him:

"I understand you so well. I too am a widower and I also felt as if my world had come to an end. We share the same grief, for whoever is without a wife, say our Sages, is without *simcha*. You need *simcha* and I need *simcha*."

A spark of life was suddenly visible in the eyes of the listener and Rav Shach continued:

"I have an idea of how we can help each other. I know how to prepare a good *cholent* for the Shabbat meal. I will prepare such a *cholent* on Erev Shabbat and send it to you here. On Shabbat I will come to your home. We will eat together, sing *zemirot* together and give strength to each other."

For the first time a smile came to the lips of his listener who gently protested that there was no way for him to thus impose on the Rosh Hayeshiva.

"If so," concluded Rav Shach as he departed, "please think of some other plan. In any case I will visit you again tomorrow because I gain strength from being together with you."

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