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PARSHA INSIGHTS

THE GREATEST LIE

“You shall safeguard the matzot...” (12:17)

Still as a sentry, my refrigerator had been standing in the same spot for many months; Pesach was approaching now, however, and it would have to move.

Grudgingly, its small wheels struggled through months of sticky under-fridge-grunge, and then suddenly, a pristine white form came into view. Stiff as a board, but devoid of even a hint of mold, a flawless monolithic slice of white bread greeted its first light of day in many a month. (I could almost hear the timpani of *Also Sprach...* from “2001: A Space Odyssey” welling up to a crescendo)

I marveled at our chemical society that manages to immortalize the transient with no less skill than an Egyptian embalmer.

“You shall safeguard the matzot...” Rashi comments that the word *matzot* can be read as *mitzvot*, meaning that just as we should guard the *matzot* from tardiness, similarly we should not delay our performance of *mitzvot*; rather when a *mitzvah* comes to hand, we should do it immediately.

This Rashi is perplexing. Rashi is the *parshan* par excellence; he tells us the literal meaning of the Torah and it is not his style to deliver homilies.

Secondly, the comparison is difficult to comprehend; there’s an enormous gulf between not doing a *mitzvah* in a timely fashion and between *chametz*. For delaying a *mitzvah* one receives no punishment at all; the punishment for eating *chametz*, on the other hand, is *karet*, spiritual excision and premature death.

Quite a difference!

The basis of all atheism is the perception that the world has always been here and always will be here. It’s an easy mistake to make. Time seems immutable. We divide time into minutes and seconds, but that’s only for our convenience. To the untutored eye, time is a megalithic existence with no beginning or end. Time just is.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

The very first word in the Torah — *Bereshet* — comes to contradict that presumption. *Bereshet*, “In the beginning...” G-d created beginning. Time itself is a creation.

In Hebrew, the word for time is *zman*. The same root appears in the word *hazmana*, which the Talmud uses to mean “preparation.” Time’s greatest lie is that each moment seems to be prepared from the moment that precedes it; that each moment obliges the one that follows.

Look into a flame flickering and moving.

All we really see when we look at the flame is the combustion of that split-second, for as soon as it shines, that particular flame is burned and is now ash. The flame you see in the next second is a different flame, and the moment after that there is yet another flame... and another... and another...

We know that each nanosecond of a burning fire is a separate event; yet the flame gives every appearance of being continuous.

The Midrash describes how G-d made Himself known to Avraham Avinu. Avraham was like a traveler who comes upon a great building ablaze with light and remarks that such a building must have an owner. Avraham Avinu looked at the Creation and saw that this world must also have an owner.

In Hebrew, the expression “ablaze with light” could also mean “ablaze with fire.” In other words, Avraham saw that this world was like a burning flame, that every single second was a discrete existence. He saw that the seeming continuity and immutability of time was a lie.

It was this perception that showed G-d that Avraham was worthy to see the reality behind the lie, and as a result the Creator of time appeared to Avraham.

The truth of this world is that God re-makes the world every single second. Every moment is like a flame that blazes and is then replaced with another.

Matza has only two ingredients: flour and water. Bread has a third ingredient. Time.

Just as the addition of time to matza turns it into *chametz*, so doing a *mitzvah* in a tardy fashion injects into it the illusion of time.

And there can be no greater lie than that.

• Sources: *Maharal and others*

PARSHA OVERVIEW

G-d tells Moshe that He is hardening Pharaoh's heart so that through miraculous plagues the world will know for all time that He is the one true G-d. Pharaoh is warned about the plague of locusts and is told how severe it will be. Pharaoh agrees to release only the men, but Moshe insists that everyone must go. During the plague, Pharaoh calls for Moshe and Aharon to remove the locusts, and he admits he has sinned. G-d ends the plague but hardens Pharaoh's heart, and again Pharaoh fails to free the Jews. The country, except for the Jewish People, is then engulfed in a palpable darkness. Pharaoh calls for Moshe and tells him to take all the Jews out of Egypt, but to leave their flocks behind. Moshe tells him that not only will they take their own flocks, but Pharaoh must add his own too. Moshe tells Pharaoh that G-d is going to bring one more plague, the death of the first-born, and then the Jews will leave Egypt. G-d

again hardens Pharaoh's heart, and Pharaoh warns Moshe that if he sees him again, Moshe will be put to death. G-d tells Moshe that the month of Nissan will be the chief month. The Jewish people are commanded to take a sheep on the 10th of the month and guard it until the 14th. The sheep is then to be slaughtered as a Pesach offering, its blood put on their door-posts, and its roasted meat eaten. The blood on the door-post will be a sign that their homes will be passed-over when G-d strikes the first-born of Egypt. The Jewish People are told to memorialize this day as the Exodus from Egypt by never eating *chametz* on Pesach. Moshe relays G-d's commands, and the Jewish People fulfill them flawlessly. G-d sends the final plague, killing the first-born, and Pharaoh sends the Jews out of Egypt. G-d tells Moshe and Aharon the laws concerning the Pesach sacrifice, *pidyon haben* (redemption of the first-born son) and *tefillin*.

ISRAEL Forever

THANKS FOR EVERY SON

How does one relate to those Jews who have yet to commit themselves to a religious lifestyle? An interesting perspective on this issue is provided in the Torah portion of this week.

When our ancestors in Egypt were informed that when they would be freed from bondage and would offer the Paschal sacrifice in Eretz Yisrael, they might be faced with a question from their children as to the meaning of that ritual. The Torah informs us that they bowed three times in gratitude for the three promises of liberation, inheriting the land

promised to their ancestors and that that they would be blessed with children.

What is striking about this is that in the Haggadah we recite at the Pesach Seder the question mentioned above is identified as coming from the wicked son who is more cynical than curious. Nevertheless there is a bowing of gratitude for even such a son because he has the potential for change.

This is the optimistic attitude of all those precious Jews reaching out to their alienated brothers and it is the success of such efforts that will secure Israel forever.

LOVE OF THE LAND - THE WISDOM

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

TOMBS OF THE SANHEDRIN

It was recently announced that the Jerusalem Municipality is undertaking a major project of renovating the Tombs of the Sanhedrin.

The tombs which tradition claims are the burial sites of the members of the high court of Eretz Yisrael are located near the Sanhedria



neighborhood in Jerusalem.

The seat of the Sanhedrin was originally within the *Beit Hamikdash*, but with the approach of the destruction of the Temple by the Romans it moved to a number of other locations. It finally ended up in Tiberiah where it will eventually be restored.

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PARSHA Q&A ?

1. What was Pharaoh's excuse for not releasing the Jewish children?
2. How did the locusts in the time of Moshe differ from those in the days of Yoel?
3. How did the first three days of darkness differ from the last three?
4. When the Jews asked the Egyptians for gold and silver vessels, the Egyptians were unable to deny ownership of such vessels. Why?
5. *Makat bechorot* took place at exactly midnight. Why did Moshe say it would take place at approximately midnight?
6. Why did the first-born of the animals die?
7. How did Moshe show respect to Pharaoh when he warned him about the aftermath of the plague of the first-born?
8. G-d told Moshe, "...so that My wonders will be multiplied" (11:9). What three wonders was G-d referring to?
9. Why did G-d command the mitzvah of Rosh Chodesh to Aharon, and not only to Moshe?
10. Up to what age is an animal fit to be a Pesach offering?
11. Prior to the Exodus from Egypt, what two *mitzvot* involving blood did G-d give to the Jewish People?
12. Rashi gives two explanations of the word "*Pasachti*." What are they?
13. Why were the Jews told to stay indoors during *makat bechorot*?
14. What was Pharaoh screaming as he ran from door to door the night of *makat bechorot*?
15. Why did Pharaoh ask Moshe to bless him?
16. Why did the Jewish People carry their matzah on their shoulders rather than have their animals carry it?
17. Who comprised the *erev rav* (mixed multitude)?
18. What three historical events occurred on the 15th of Nissan, prior to the event of the Exodus from Egypt?
19. What is the source of the "milk and honey" found in *Eretz Yisrael*?
20. The only non-kosher animal whose first-born is redeemed is the donkey. What did the donkeys do to "earn" this distinction?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

1. 10:11 - Since children don't bring sacrifices there was no need for them to go.
2. 10:14 - The plague brought by Moshe was composed of one species of locust, whereas the plague in the days of Yoel was composed of many species.
3. 10:22 - During the first three days the Egyptians couldn't see. During the last three days they couldn't move.
4. 10:22 - During the plague of darkness the Jews could see and they searched for and found the Egyptians' vessels.
5. 11:4 - If Moshe said the plague would begin exactly at midnight, the Egyptians might miscalculate and accuse Moshe of being a fake.
6. 11:5 - Because the Egyptians worshiped them as gods, and when G-d punishes a nation He also punishes its gods.
7. 11:8 - Moshe warned that "All these servants of yours will come down to me" when, in fact, it was Pharaoh himself who actually came running to Moshe.
8. 11:9 - The plague of the first-born, the splitting of the sea, the drowning of the Egyptian soldiers.
9. 12:1 - As reward for his efforts in bringing about the plagues.
10. 12:5 - One year.
11. 12:6 - Circumcision and *Korban Pesach*.
12. 12:13 - "I had mercy" and "I skipped."
13. 12:22 - Since it was a night of destruction, it was not safe for anyone to leave the protected premises of his home.
14. 12:31 - "Where does Moshe live? Where does Aharon live?"
15. 12:32 - So he wouldn't die, for he himself was a first-born.
16. 12:34 - Because the commandment of matzah was dear to them.
17. 12:38 - People from other nations who became converts.
18. 12:41 - The angels came to promise that Sarah would have a son, Yitzchak was born, and the exile of the "covenant between the parts" was decreed.
19. 13:5 - Goat milk, date and fig honey.
20. 13:13 - They helped the Jews by carrying silver and gold out of Egypt.

- When troubling the rabbis serves as an opening for vow nullification
- The conflict over whom the daughter of the Sage Abaye should marry
- The source for “Kol Nidrei” on Yom Kippur
- Vows taken to ensure the granting of a favor or the receiving of one
- Vows and oaths based on absurd statements
- Ensuring that an oath is taken without deviousness
- Vows taken in error
- Partial nullification of a vow affecting many
- Vows taking effect as a result of unavoidable circumstances
- Vows taken to avoid financial loss
- Consecration on condition and need for redemption
- Different levels of consecration

SUN AND SHADE

An interesting observation regarding *Beit Midrash* architecture emerges from an incident recorded in our *gemara*.

When Rabbi Shimon came before the Rabbinical Court in the *Beit Midrash* to have his vow annulled, the rabbis made a long and strenuous effort to find an opening. But each time that they asked him if he would have made his vow had he been aware of some problem it would cause him he would respond that he would have made the vow in any case. The day dragged on and the rabbis moved their session from the sunny part of the building to the shady part and later back to the sunny part. This inspired one of the Sages present to come up with a solution.

“Had you realized that your vow would cause the rabbis so much trouble of moving around would you have made

that vow?” he asked.

When the answer came that he would certainly not have made his vow with such awareness, this constituted the regret required for annulment of the vow.

Maharsha notes that in some countries it is customary to build homes that are only partially covered by a roof. This allows for enjoying the sun in the morning and late afternoon while seeking shelter from the heat at noontime in the covered area. This, he points out, was the way the *Beit Midrash* in this story was built and explains the movement of the rabbis.

It may be added that this same sort of *Beit Midrash* was the one in which the Sages Rabbi Ami and Rabbi Asi studied, for they too are described (*Ketubot* 112b) as moving from sun to shade and later back to the sun so that they should never have any complaint about the climate of Eretz Yisrael.

• *Nedarim* 23a

What the SAGES Say

“Whoever wishes that his vows throughout the year should not take effect should declare at the beginning of the year that all vows which he will make should be null and void (the source for ‘Kol Nidrei’).”

• *Gemara’s explanation of the missing words in the mishna (Nedarim 23b)*

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TORAH BLUEPRINT

From: Nick in Toronto

Dear Rabbi,

I heard that according to Jewish teachings, the Torah preceded Creation and was actually used as a blueprint through which G-d created everything. Is this true and how can it be that the Torah which seems to say very little about Creation could actually be the blueprint for all that came into being? Thanks.

Dear Nick,

It is true that the Zohar writes, “G-d looked into the Torah and created the World”.

Of course, the Torah, in its written form, only briefly describes the process and sequence of Creation. However, we should not think that because of its deceptively brief and general description that the Torah does not contain within the text the plan for the entire multitude of Creation.

The Torah is not punctuated and contains a continuum of letters that according to tradition can be divided in many ways, resulting in a myriad of meanings. In fact,

the Zohar also states that the Torah is accordingly comprised of many names of G-d, or even one long name of G-d. Therefore the seemingly simple text is believed to contain within it many levels of subliminal meaning interwoven with names of G-d. This multi-faceted writing beneath the surface of the Torah text may also contain the blueprint for what became the multiplicity of Creation.

Still, there is another explanation as well.

When we refer to G-d looking into the Torah in order to create, we are referring to the plane of Torah that existed before Creation, and before it was given at Sinai. In this pure, primal form, Torah is understood as meaning and referring to Divine Will or Intelligence before it was crystallized, formulated and expressed in what became the Written Torah given to the Jews and mankind.

This is the meaning of the teaching “G-d, the Torah and Israel are all one”. G-d, His Will/Intelligence and his concept of Israel – a term referring to G-d’s desire that mankind grapple with seeking and finding Him – are all inseparably bound in One. This pre-Creation form of the Torah, then, is what G-d “looked” into as a blueprint of Creation. Meaning, Creation is a manifestation or projection of Divine Intelligence that came into being as a result of, and according to, His Will.

WHAT’S THE RIGHT THING TO DO?

REAL-LIFE QUESTIONS OF SOCIAL AND BUSINESS ETHICS

GET ME TO THE CHUPA ON TIME

Question: In making up the text for the invitation to my daughter’s wedding I face a problem of a conflict between honesty and practicality. If I write the real time I expect the *chupa* to take place hardly anyone will be there because they assume it will really happen at least an hour later. What is the right thing to do?

Answer: Someone once suggested that the word “*bediyuk*” (exactly), which many people add to the time designated for the *chupa*, is not really a warning of “exactly” but rather an acronym for “*biz di yidden vellen*

kummen” (till the Jews will arrive).

You needn’t worry about not being truthful in writing a time for the *chupa* since everyone understands that this is no more than a “ballpark figure”. But perhaps you should consider pioneering a trend towards eliminating that misleading *bediyuk* term and stating instead that an effort will be made to have the *chupa* take place as soon as possible after the scheduled hour.

In this way, truthfulness and practicality can combine to make your invitation and your wedding more joyful for yourself and your guests.

SNOW AND FIRE

The movie house in Jerusalem was a source of great disturbance to the leaders of the city's religious Jews, especially Rabbi Yosef Chaim Zonnenfeld. When the city was hit by a severe snowstorm in 1919 the venerable rabbi saw it as a sign from Heaven that his troubles would soon be over.

Arriving at a synagogue in Meah Shearim to perform a circumcision he noticed the Jew who had in partnership with an Arab built that offensive theater. Turning to him he quoted the passage, "Though your sins be like scarlet they shall be washed white as snow," as a warning that the

snowstorm would wipe out his abomination. Turning to the crowd he asked if the movie house was still standing. When informed that it was, he announced that the day was still young.

It wasn't long afterwards that the roof of the movie house collapsed under the weight of the snow. The Arab partner, however, failed to appreciate this as a Heavenly sign and proceeded to rebuild the theater and even show movies on Shabbat. A few weeks after the reopening a fire broke out on Friday night and completely destroyed the offensive building.

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