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PARSHA INSIGHTS

HEAVEN'S GATE

"This is none other than the abode of G-d, and this is the gate of the Heavens." (28:17)

As far as architecture is concerned, the Western Wall cannot compete with the Taj Mahal, or the Sistine Chapel, or any number of Far Eastern places of worship.

Yet that row of enigmatic stone blocks and what is beyond them has an unparalleled draw on the hearts and minds of man.

The Muslims may look to Mecca and Medina, but they would like nothing better than to bury their leaders on that hill. The Catholic Church may have its seat of power in the Vatican, but their eye is constantly on Jerusalem.

Why?

On that small hill called Har HaMoriah, the central events of world history have been played out. On that hill lies the stone that was the first physical existence that G-d created. It is called the "foundation stone." From that stone, G-d extruded the entire creation. That stone is the bridge between this reality and the reality beyond.

On that same hill, Avraham brought up Yitzchak as an offering in the ultimate test of his faithfulness to G-d.

And, in this week's Torah portion, Yaakov saw a vision of the ladder with its feet planted on the ground and its head reaching to the Heavens. That place has always been, and is to this day, the gate of Heaven.

On that hill stood the two Holy Temples and very soon the third one will stand there again. Subconsciously, the

world understands this, but it cannot verbalize that knowledge. That intuitive feeling manifests itself as a stream of resolutions in the United Nations about the necessity to preserve the international nature of the city of Jerusalem.

In this week's Torah portion Yaakov prayed at Har HaMoriah. After completing his prayer Yaakov suddenly heard the voices of angels saying, "Yaakov has arrived, the great Yaakov who casts light on the world like the sun!" Yaakov understood that he was overhearing a conversation in Heaven. From Yaakov's words, "the Shechina (Divine Presence) rests in this place," we learn that the Shechina rests on Har HaMoria forever. Not only did it rest there when the two Holy Temples were standing, but it is there to this day.

When you stand at that Wall, you are standing at the gateway of Heaven. If Yaakov could hear what they were saying in Heaven, surely in Heaven they can hear what we are saying in this world. When you pray at the Wall, it is as if you are praying in front of the Kisei HaKavod, "the Heavenly Throne." This is Heaven's gate — the gate that is open to all prayers.

No wonder then that the eyes of the world are constantly on the Wall.

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PARSHA OVERVIEW

Fleeing from Esav, Yaakov leaves Be'er Sheva and sets out for Charan, the home of his mother's family. After a 14-year stint in the Torah Academy of Shem and Ever, he resumes his journey and comes to Mount Moriah, the place where his father Yitzchak was brought as an offering, and the future site of the *Beit Hamikdash*. He sleeps there and dreams of angels going up and down a ladder between Heaven and earth. G-d promises him the Land of Israel, that he will found a great nation, and that he will enjoy Divine protection. Yaakov wakes and vows to build an altar there and tithe all that he will receive. Then he travels to Charan and meets his cousin Rachel at the well. He arranges with her father, Lavan, to work seven years for her hand in marriage, but Lavan fools Yaakov, substituting Rachel's older sister, Leah. Yaakov commits himself to work another seven years in order to also marry Rachel. Leah bears four sons:

Reuven, Shimon, Levi and Yehuda, the first Tribes of Israel. Rachel is barren, and, in an attempt to give Yaakov children, she gives her handmaiden Bilhah to Yaakov as a wife. Bilhah bears Dan and Naftali. Leah also gives Yaakov her handmaiden Zilpah, who bears Gad and Asher. Leah then bears Yissachar, Zevulun, and a daughter, Dina. G-d finally blesses Rachel with a son, Yosef. Yaakov decides to leave Lavan, but Lavan, aware of the wealth Yaakov has made for him, is reluctant to let him go, and concludes a contract of employment with him. Lavan tries to swindle Yaakov, but Yaakov becomes extremely wealthy. Six years later, Yaakov, aware that Lavan has become dangerously resentful of his wealth, flees with his family. Lavan pursues them but is warned by G-d not to harm them. Yaakov and Lavan agree to a covenant and Lavan returns home. Yaakov continues on his way to face his brother Esav.

LOVE OF THE LAND

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

A HEAVENLY SIGN

The German forces under General Rommel were advancing towards Eretz Yisrael and Jews there feared that they might face the same fate as their brothers in Europe. In the summer of 1941 many of them gathered at the grave of the Ohr Hachayim on the Mount of Olives. They chose to do so on the day of his Yahrzeit in order to give greater power to their prayers for Heavenly deliverance from the threatening Nazis.

Among the worshippers was the Chassidic leader Rabbi Yisrael of Hasaytin who had set up his court in Tel Aviv a few

years earlier. The crowd was stunned as he suddenly cried out, "The wicked will not come. They will not enter Eretz Yisrael!"

"I have just seen the Divine Name of G-d shining brightly," he explained. "This is a Heavenly sign that the enemy will never enter the land."

Within a year Rommel was stopped at El Alamein only 60 miles west of Alexandria on the Israel-Egypt border, and by the beginning of 1943 the German forces were driven so far back that the threat to Eretz Yisrael was gone.



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PARSHA Q&A ?

1. When Yaakov traveled to Charan, the Torah stresses that he departed from Be'er Sheva. Why?
2. On the night of his dream, Yaakov did something he hadn't done in 14 years. What?
3. G-d compressed the entire Land of Israel underneath the sleeping Yaakov. What did this symbolize?
4. Yaakov said "I will return with *shalom*." What did he mean by "*shalom*"?
5. Why did Yaakov rebuke the shepherds?
6. Why did Rachel, and not her brothers, tend her father's sheep?
7. Why did Yaakov cry when he met Rachel?
8. Why did Lavan run to greet Yaakov?
9. Why were Leah's eyes tender?
10. How old was Yaakov when he married?
11. What did Rachel find enviable about Leah?
12. Who was Yaakov's fifth son?
13. Who was Leah's handmaiden? Was she older or younger than Rachel's handmaiden?
14. How do you say *dudaim* in Arabic?
15. "G-d remembered Rachel" (30:22). What did He remember?
16. What does "Yosef" mean? Why was he named that?
17. G-d forbade Lavan to speak to Yaakov "either of good or of bad." Why didn't G-d want Lavan to speak of good?
18. Where are there two Aramaic words in this week's parsha?
19. Who was Billah's father? Who was Zilpah's father?
20. Who escorted Yaakov into *Eretz Yisrael*?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

1. 28:10 - The departure of a righteous person leaves a noticeable void in that place.
2. 28:11 - Sleep at night lying down.
3. 28:13 - That the Land would be easy for his descendants to conquer.
4. 28:21 - Completely without sin.
5. 29:7 - He thought they were loafing, stopping work early in the day.
6. 30:27 - Her brothers weren't born yet.
7. 29:11 - He saw prophetically that they would not be buried together; or because he was penniless.
8. 29:13 - He thought Yaakov was carrying money.
9. 29:17 - She cried continually because she thought she was destined to marry Esav.
10. 29:21 - Eighty-four.
11. 30:1 - Her good deeds, thinking they were the reason Leah merited children.
12. 30:5 - Dan.
13. 30:10 - Zilpah. She was younger.
14. 30:14 - Jasmine (*Yasmin*).
15. 30:22 - That Rachel gave Leah the "signs of recognition" that Yaakov had taught her, so that Leah wouldn't be embarrassed.
16. 30:24 - "Yosef" means "He will add." Rachel asked G-d for another son in addition to Yosef.
17. 31:24 - Because the "good" that comes from wicked people is bad for the righteous.
18. 31:41 - *Yagar Sahaduta*, meaning "wall of testimony."
19. 31:50 - Lavan.
20. 32:1 - The angels of *Eretz Yisrael*.

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Based on the Talmudic Sages found in the seven pages of the Talmud studied each week in the Daf Yomi cycle

SHABBAT 51 - 57

“How unworthy is the man for whom G-d changes the order of His original creation.”

This was the observation of the Sage Abaye regarding the man whose wife died and left him with a baby that needed nursing and he could not afford to hire a woman to nurse the infant. He miraculously sprouted breasts like a woman and was able to nurse the child.

Although Rabbi Yosef saw this miracle as evidence that this man was someone special, his disciple, the Sage Abaye, saw this as a sign that he was unworthy, since the order of nature had to be altered for him rather than provide him with the funds to hire a nurse.

• Shabbat 53b

“One who is capable of reproofing a sinner in his household and fails to do so shares in his guilt.”

This warning of Rabbi Yonatan is not limited to one's household. If he is capable of reproofing the sinners in his city or those anywhere else, he also shares in their guilt.

• Shabbat 54b

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REVOLVING DOOR

From: Menashe

Dear Rabbi,

The ba'al teshuva movement seems to be successful in connecting non-observant people, particularly student-aged, to Judaism. On the other hand, unfortunately, there are young people raised in the system that are disconnecting. Are there methods that the established religious community could learn from the ba'al teshuva movement to keep kids from religious families involved? Or are they two separate phenomena each with its own particular dynamic?

Dear Menashe,

This is a very interesting question.

I am not familiar enough with the unfortunate phenomenon that you mention and its reasons, so I can't say for sure whether what works to inspire ba'alei teshuva would work for uninspired young people from observant homes.

It seems to me that they are, in fact, two different movements – one in and the other out – resulting from very different experiences and mind-sets. Since each group has different needs and aspirations, ideally there should be different, specialized approaches and methods used to inspire each group separately.

That having been said, from my limited experience with such disconnected young men, I have encountered three basic claims for their disillusionment. While I'm sure the vast majority of parents and teachers in the system are inspiring role-models, and the young people themselves may just be looking to justify their disassociation, nevertheless, a proper approach to these issues in general is important in inspiring both ba'alei teshuva and straying religious kids alike.

One complaint of these disaffected kids is that they perceive a lack of enthusiasm among their role models like parents and teachers, and sensing a lack of love for what their leaders do and teach, the kids lack motivation to pursue their models' path. Of course, we all have our spiritual ups and

downs, but clearly parents and teachers who are passionate about what they teach and also perform with joy and vigor what they preach will be much more likely to inspire others to follow suit. That's one of the major factors in the teshuva movement – the rabbis and students, by and large, are “living inspired”.

Another claim of these kids is that not only do they sense a lack of passion in their role-models, they often perceive a lack of sincerity which they sometimes describe as hypocritical. Parents and teachers, they say, demand certain behavior and morals of the young people, but they're perceived as not living up to that ideal themselves. Clearly, to the extent that this is true, it's not particularly inspiring. We must be true to our teachings and be of pure enough intent that we are living examples of what we teach. The nature of the teshuva movement is that the young people, lacking a religious framework of their own, do see their role-models living the teachings – in school, as guests in their homes, with their children, around the neighborhood and more.

A third complaint I hear is that these young people feel a lack of love and affection from their parents and teachers. They express the idea that role models only want to tell them what to do, to instruct them in the ways of the Torah, but that they don't actually listen to what the kids have to say. Difficult questions are sometimes not properly addressed, or problems and frustrations are not duly deliberated upon. So these kids feel there's no room for their questions and predicaments in the Torah. Consequently, they lose their respect for and commitment to Judaism. The ba'al teshuva movement, however, is predicated upon encouraging questions and offering answers – not only academically, but in all realms of life. Usually, this is accompanied by close personal relationships with teachers who are also like family to their students. This is very heart-warming for both.

As I wrote above, these are only impressions I have received from a relatively small number of disaffected young men I have met over the years. But if there are ways in which we could all improve in inspiring our youth – both those who start out of the system and those who start in – it would be in these three areas: living inspired, sincerity and consistency in our own observance, and being loving listeners.

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KISSING IN THE SYNAGOGUE

Question:

My son is soon going to have his Bar Mitzvah in our synagogue and will be reading the *haftara* on Shabbat. I have noticed that some fathers are so overcome with emotion on such occasions that they kiss their sons when they complete the reading. I have heard from others that this is improper behavior in a synagogue. What is the right thing to do?

Answer:

Mazal Tov on the upcoming Bar Mitzvah! Enjoy your well-deserved *nachat* but save the kiss for when you get home.

The *Shulchan Aruch* (*Orach Chaim* 98:1 in the Rama) rules

that it is forbidden for a man to kiss his young children in the synagogue. The reason given is that a Jew must internalize that no love for a human can compete with his love for G-d.

There are, however, occasions when such a kiss is in order. It is well known that when a child falls and cries one of the most effective ways of soothing him is to give him a parental kiss. Since the purpose of such a kiss is therapeutic rather than an expression of love, it does not constitute a competition for love of G-d and is therefore very much in order.

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

THE IMPORTANCE OF SEEKING ADVICE

The 24-year old boy studying in a yeshiva in Israel was anxious to get started on shidduchim since almost every one of his peers was already married. His only obstacle was an older brother back in the States who was still unmarried.

His high hopes for a breakthrough in the situation through a shidduch in which his brother was involved were dashed when a call came from home that once again nothing had come of this attempt to find a marriage partner. He then began to seriously consider passing up his brother despite the pain this might cause him. When he finally decided to do so he phoned his parents to inform them. His father's reaction was to inquire whether he had asked a rosh yeshiva's advice on the matter. Although he was absolutely confident that he would receive confirmation of his decision, he con-

sent to immediately seek his advice.

Since his own rosh yeshiva was officiating at a wedding out of town and he was anxious to fulfill his promise to his father, he decided to consult the head of a yeshiva not far away from his own. After hearing his situation the rosh yeshiva said it was permissible for him to pass up his brother but also asked him for some details about that brother's personality and what type of girl he was looking for. Upon hearing his description the rosh yeshiva told him that he knew a family in the States whose daughter would be an ideal match and gave him their telephone number.

The happy ending was that the older brother became engaged to that girl and our hero's problem was solved by heeding his father's advice to seek advice.

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