

OHRNET

SHABBAT PARSHAT VAYECHI · 12 TEVET 5775 - JAN. 3, 2015 · VOL. 22 NO. 12

PARSHA INSIGHTS

THE UNDERSTANDING HEART

“And Yaakov lived in the land of Egypt...” (13:17)

Rashi comments: “Why is this passage ‘closed’? Because once our forefather Yaakov passed away, the eyes and heart of Yisrael were closed.” The “understanding of the heart” (*binat halev*) is one of the forty-eight ways to acquire Torah. The Torah enjoins us to love G-d “... with all our heart...” and not to “stray after our hearts.” King Solomon says, “My heart saw much wisdom” (Kohelet 1:15), and “The wise of heart will accept *mitzvot* (Mishlei 10:8).” The list of examples where the Torah and our Sages refer to the heart as a seat of cognition is extensive.

It’s easy to think of the Torah’s use of the heart as an organ of understanding as merely poetic. However, David Robson in an article for the BBC writes, “We often talk about ‘following the heart’, but it is only recently that scientists have begun to show that there is literal truth in the cliché; the heaving lump of muscle contributes to our emotions and the mysterious feelings of ‘intuition’ in a very real way.”

Robson reports that neuroscientist Agustin Ibanez met a patient — let’s call him Carlos — who had a small mechanical pump inserted in his chest to relieve the burden on his failing cardiac muscles. Apart from Carlos’ complaints that the beat of the machine seemed to replace his pulse, a sensation that warped his body image, Ibanez however suspected even odder effects were to come. By changing the man’s heart, Ibanez thought, the doctors might have also changed their patient’s mind. Perhaps Carlos would now think, feel and act differently as a result of the implant.

And the man who feels two hearts offered Ibanez, who is based at Favaloro University in Buenos Aires, a unique opportunity to test those ideas.

Ibanez’s work echoes Judaism’s view of the heart’s role in cognition — that the heart is a vital organ of perception which sometimes supersedes the brain’s ability.

It’s all too easy when reading something in the Torah or the words of our Sages that is contradicted by conventional wisdom to reach for the apologist’s lexicon and explain it away as not to be taken literally.

Another example was the ‘Big Bang’.

When Bell Labs built a giant antenna in Holmdel, New Jersey, in 1960, it was part of a very early satellite transmission system called Echo.

However, two employees of Bell Labs, Arno Penzias and Robert Wilson, had their eye on the Holmdel antenna for quite a different purpose. They realized that it would make a superb radio-telescope.

At first they were disappointed. When they started their research they couldn’t get rid of a background ‘noise’. It was like trying to tune into your favorite radio program and it being obscured with static. This annoyance was a uniform signal in the microwave range which seemed to come from all directions. Everyone assumed it came from the telescope itself.

They checked out everything, trying to find the source of this excess radiation. They even pointed the antenna right at New York City — there’s no bigger urban radio ‘noise’ than the Big Apple. It wasn’t urban interference. It wasn’t radiation from our galaxy or extraterrestrial radio sources. It wasn’t even the pigeons. Penzias and Wilson kicked them out of the big horn-shaped antenna and swept out all their droppings.

The source remained constant throughout the four seasons, so it couldn’t have come from the solar system. Nor could it be the product of a 1962 above-ground nuclear test, because within a year that fallout would have shown a decrease. They had to conclude it was not the machine and it was not random noise causing the radiation.

What was it then that they were hearing?

Eventually they came to the staggering conclusion that what they were hearing was the very first moments of the creation of the universe.

In the 1950s there were two theories about the origin of the universe. The first was called the Steady State Theory. It had been put forward by Hermann Bondi, Thomas Gold and Fred Hoyle and held that the universe was homogeneous in space and time and had remained like that forever — in “a steady state”. This was essentially what Greek culture had posited: the universe was *kadmon* and it had always existed.

The rival, and, at the time, more controversial theory

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PARSHA OVERVIEW

After 17 years in Egypt, Yaakov senses his days drawing to a close and summons Yosef. He has Yosef swear to bury him in the Machpela Cave, the burial place of Adam and Chava, Avraham and Sarah, Yitzchak and Rivka. Yaakov falls ill and Yosef brings to him his two sons, Ephraim and Menashe. Yaakov elevates Ephraim and Menashe to the status of his own sons, thus giving Yosef a double portion that removes the status of firstborn from Reuven. As Yaakov is blind from old age, Yosef leads his sons close to their grandfather. Yaakov kisses and hugs them. He had not thought to see his son Yosef again, let alone Yosef's children. Yaakov begins to bless them, giving precedence to Ephraim, the younger, but Yosef interrupts him and indicates that Menashe is the elder. Yaakov explains that he intends to bless Ephraim with his strong hand because Yehoshua will descend from him, and Yehoshua will be both the conqueror of *Eretz Yisrael* and the teacher of Torah to the

Jewish People. Yaakov summons the rest of his sons in order to bless them as well. Yaakov's blessing reflects the unique character and ability of each tribe, directing each one in its unique mission in serving G-d. Yaakov passes from this world at age 147. A tremendous procession accompanies his funeral cortege up from Egypt to his resting place in the Cave of Machpela in Chevron. After Yaakov's passing, the brothers are concerned that Yosef will now take revenge on them. Yosef reassures them, even promising to support them and their families. Yosef lives out the rest of his years in Egypt, seeing Ephraim's great-grandchildren. Before his death, Yosef foretells to his brothers that G-d will redeem them from Egypt. He makes them swear to bring his bones out of Egypt with them at that time. Yosef passes away at the age of 110 and is embalmed. Thus ends Sefer Bereishet, the first of the five Books of the Torah. *Chazak!*

TALMUD Tips

ADVICE FOR LIFE

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

YEVAMOT 93 - 99

Rabbi Yossi ben Kisma said, "I will be amazed if this synagogue does not become a place of idol worship!"

What a strange thing to say! And the *gemara* concludes that Rabbi Yossi's tragic prediction came true: "And so it was". The context of this statement is that Rabbi Yossi ben Kisma was present in a synagogue in Tiberius and saw Rabbi Elazar and Rabbi Yossi disputing a halachic matter in a heated manner that also involved an element of anger. These two Sages argued with such fervor that they tragically unintentionally tore a Sefer Torah during the process.

The Maharsha points out that the eventual fate of the synagogue becoming a place of idolatry is based on what our Sages teach that one who is angry 'pushes away from him' the Divine Presence (*Nedarim* 22b). I have also heard from a great rabbi in Jerusalem that the Sefer Torah was torn also due to a degree of anger in the debate. Although the tearing was not intentional, it occurred as a result of their negligence and they shared a responsibility for this calamity. In fact, the initial wording in the *sugya* is that "they tore" a Sefer Torah", which implies "with intent" (Rashi). The *gemara* of course rejects the absurd possibility that they tore it intentionally, and explains that it was in fact torn without intent. However, we can understand from the initial wording ("they tore") that it was "as if" they negligently tore it. As our Sages also teach, one who is angry will make a mistake.

• *Yevamot 96b*

Rabbi Yochanan said in the name of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, "Whenever someone in this world repeats a teaching in the name of a Torah scholar who has 'passed', the lips of that Torah scholar move in the grave."

This teaching is derived from a verse in *Shir Hashirim* as is explained in the *gemara* by Rabbi Yitzchak ben Zeira — and others say it was Shimon Nazira (very important to mention their names!). The reason this teaching is cited in our *sugya* is to help understand why Rabbi Yochanan originally felt distraught when he heard that his student, Rabbi Elazar taught a halacha that he had learned from Rabbi Yochanan without mentioning Rabbi Yochanan's name. Another source is cited from King David in Psalms (61) that "I will dwell in your place in the worlds". Tosefot explains that when a person's soul is in the Heavenly Yeshiva but his lips are moving in the grave in this world because someone is teaching Torah in his name, it is as if he is dwelling in both worlds simultaneously.

After initially being upset, Rabbi Yochanan was appeased by a novel approach by Rabbi Yaakov bar Idi. Based on a precedent in the Tanach regarding Moshe and Yehoshua, it is clear that it although Rabbi Elazar did not state Rabbi Yochanan's name, everyone knew that the teaching was from Rabbi Yochanan since he was Rabbi Elazar's teacher, and even without mentioning Rabbi Yochanan's name he was in fact mentioning it.

• *Yevamot 96b, 97a*

PARSHA Q&A ?

1. Why is kindness towards the dead called “*chesed shel emet*” — kindness of truth?
2. Give three reasons Yaakov didn’t want to be buried in Egypt.
3. How do you treat a “fox in his time” (i.e., a commoner who rules)?
4. “When I was coming from Padan, Rachel died on me... I buried her there on the way to Efrat...” Why did Yaakov say all this to Yosef?
5. Initially, why was Yaakov unable to bless Efraim and Menashe?
6. What does *pillalti* mean?
7. What does “*Shechem*” mean as used in this week’s parsha? (two answers)
8. Which individual is called “the *Emori*”? Why? Give two reasons.
9. What did Yaakov want to tell his sons but was unable to?
10. What privileges did Reuven lose due to his rash actions?
11. What congregation from Yaakov’s offspring did Yaakov not want to be associated with?
12. What did Yehuda do after he heard Yaakov rebuke Reuven, Shimon and Levi? Why?
13. What does milk do to teeth?
14. Why is Yissachar like a “strong-boned donkey”?
15. With what resource did both Yaakov and Moshe bless Asher?
16. In Yosef’s blessing Yaakov said, “They embittered him...” Who are “they”?
17. Which descendants of Binyamin “will divide the spoils in the evening”?
18. From whom did Yaakov buy his burial place?
19. What oath did Yosef make to Pharaoh?
20. Which two sons of Yaakov did not carry his coffin? Why not?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to This Week’s Questions!

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

1. 47:29 - Because the giver expects no reward from the recipient.
2. 47:29 - a) Egypt’s ground was to be plagued with lice; b) At the time of the resurrection, those buried outside Israel will suffer; c) So the Egyptians wouldn’t make him into an idol.
3. 47:31 - Bow to him.
4. 48:7 - Yaakov thought Yosef harbored resentment since Yaakov had not buried Yosef’s mother, Rachel, in the *Ma’arat HaMachpela*.
5. 48:8 - The *Shechina* departed from him.
6. 48:11 - “I thought.”
7. 48:22 - a) The actual city of Shechem; b) A portion.
8. 48:22 - Esav. a) He acted like an Emorite; b) He trapped his father with words (*imrei pi*).
9. 49:1 - When *mashiach* will come.
10. 49:3 - Priesthood and Kingship.
11. 49:6 - Korach and his congregation.
12. 49:8 - He drew back. He was afraid that Yaakov would rebuke him for the incident with Tamar.
13. 49:12 - It makes them white.
14. 49:14 - Just as a donkey bears a heavy burden, so the tribe of Yissachar bears the yoke of Torah.
15. 49:20 - Oil-rich land.
16. 49:23 - Yosef’s brothers, Potifar and his wife.
17. 49:27 - Mordechai and Esther.
18. 50:5 - From Esav.
19. 50:6 - Yosef swore not to reveal Pharaoh’s ignorance of Hebrew.
20. 50:13 - Levi, because he would carry the *aron* (holy ark). Yosef, because he was a king.

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Abarbanel

ON PARSHAT VAYECHI

By Rabbi Pinchas Kasnett

At the beginning of this Parsha, Yaakov, on his deathbed, summons his son Yosef to his bedside. He tells Yosef that G-d had appeared to him years before in the land of Canaan and had said to him, “I will make you fruitful and numerous; I will make you a congregation of nations, and I will give this land to your offspring after you as an eternal possession. And now, your two sons who were born to you in the land of Egypt before my coming to you in Egypt shall be Mine; Ephraim and Menashe shall be Mine like Reuven and Shimon...Rachel died on Me in the land of Canaan, on the road...and I buried her there on the road to Efrat...” (Ber. 48:3-7)

Abarbanel cites a number of difficulties with these verses. Why does Yaakov mention at this point the blessing that he received years earlier, and what is the connection between this blessing and Yosef’s sons? What does Yaakov mean that Ephraim and Menashe will be his like Reuven and Shimon? Why would Yaakov consider these two as equal to his sons and not his other grandchildren from the rest of his sons? If they would represent Yosef’s portion of the eventual division of the land of Canaan amongst the tribes, there would be thirteen divisions instead of twelve. Finally, why does Yaakov mention Rachel’s death and place of burial at this point in time?

Abarbanel explains that Yaakov intended to transfer the rights of the firstborn from Reuven to Yosef, as Reuven had forfeited the right to that honor and position. Since this could be interpreted as a perversion of justice, he emphasized that this was implied in the prophecy which he had received earlier in Canaan. He understood that the first three assurances in the blessing — “fruitful, numerous, and a congregation of nations” — were directed to him specifically, and referred to three additional sons who had not yet

been born. Since he had only one additional son, Binyamin, he realized that the other two had to be Ephraim and Menashe. He knew this from the fact that the word ‘fruitful’ in the first assurance has the same root in Hebrew as the name ‘Ephraim’. The second assurance, ‘numerous’, is a reference to Menashe. Even though the name ‘Menashe’ is not rooted in the word for ‘numerous’ in Hebrew, this connection was not necessary, since as Yosef’s first-born it was already fitting that he should be the head of one of the tribes. Ephraim, however, as the younger son, required the support of the prophecy to enable him to be the head of a separate tribe. The third assurance, ‘a congregation of nations’, referred to Binyamin.

The Torah compares Ephraim and Menashe to Reuven and Shimon to tell us that they would have equal status as two of the tribes in the division of the land. Furthermore, they would have the same population as Reuven and Shimon. Even though dividing Yosef into two tribes results in thirteen tribes instead of twelve, only twelve tribes take part in the division of the land, as the tribe of Levi is scattered throughout the land and receives no specific portion.

Finally, Yaakov mentions the burial of Rachel on the road to Efrat as another indication that Ephraim deserved to head a separate tribe who represented Yosef, in addition to Menashe who was the firstborn of Rachel. The memory of Rachel would be preserved through the name of the son of her son. The root of the place-name ‘Efrat’ is the same as the root of the name ‘Ephraim’, just as we saw with the word ‘numerous’ in the prophecy. This gave Yaakov a second reason to counter any complaints about making Ephraim a tribal leader.

Please daven for a refuah shleimah for

Chaim Yechiel ben Malka (Ohr Somayach alumnus Chaim Howard Rothman)

Chaim Eitan ben Sarah - Yitzchak ben Chaya

Shmuel Yerucham ben Baila (Rebbetzin Heller’s son-in-law)

May we all hear Besoros Tovos.

ASTONISHING BLESSING

From: Michael

Dear Rabbi,
I recently got a blessing from a Chassidic Rabbi. This blessing was quite astonishing (in a good way). What is the significance of a blessing from a Chassidic Rabbi?

Dear Michael,

I am inspired that you had such a moving experience!

The blessings of the holy and pious are very powerful, both from Chasidic Rabbis and from other righteous, learned individuals as well.

In our prayers we recite “G-d does the will of those who fear Him”. And our Sages taught, “A *tzaddik* (righteous person) decrees, and G-d fulfills”. This includes the idea that the blessings conferred by a *tzaddik* are heard and fulfilled by G-d. They also taught, “Anyone who has a sick person in his household should go to a *chacham* (Torah scholar) to pray for him”.

The Grand Rabbi Levi Yitzchak Horowitz (the “Bostoner

Rebbe”) — his memory for a blessing — said that a Chassidic Rabbi is in many respects like a spiritual plumber. G-d wants only to bestow goodness upon us, and all a person needs to do is make himself into a vessel to receive the good. But our bad deeds “clog up” the channels through which Divine goodness flows. A Chassidic Rabbi “unclogs” these channels for the person, allowing the Divine blessing to flow upon him.

A righteous person has a power of prayer more than most of us. Chasidic Masters and great Torah scholars who have refined and perfected their character and closeness to G-d are known to have such powers. Until his passing many years ago, tens of thousands flocked to Rabbi Yaakov Yisrael Kanievsky (the “Steipler”) for his blessing.

It’s known that prior to their highly dangerous but successful air strike on the Iraqi nuclear reactor in 1980, the Israeli pilots appeared before the “Steipler” and asked for his blessing. He told them “go in peace and return in peace”, which they did!

Sources:

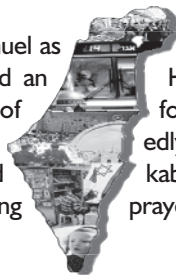
- *Bava Batra 116a*
- *Ta’anit 23a*

LOVE OF THE LAND

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

YARCHA — TOMB OF A LOCAL HERO

Chushai Ha’Arki is described in the Book of Shmuel as the loyal supporter of King David who played an instrumental role in foiling the rebellion of Avshalom against his father. By countering the wise counsel of Achitophel with strategic advice that appealed to Avshalom as even wiser, he succeeded in convincing



him to take a step that led to his destruction.

His tomb, which is located in the village of Yarcha, some four miles northeast of the Achihud Junction, was reportedly visited in 1742 by the great Torah commentator and kabbalist Rabbi Chaim ben Attar who studied Torah and prayed together with his disciples at the site.

PARSHA INSIGHTS

continued from page one

sought to incorporate the expansion of the universe into its framework. Edwin Hubble had shown in 1929 that galaxies are moving away from one another at remarkable speeds, implying that the space between galaxies is constantly expanding. A few physicists, led by George Gamow, had taken this notion and argued that the separation between galaxies must have been smaller in the past.

If one extrapolated this idea to its logical conclusion, it meant that at one point in time the universe had been infinitely dense. Using the laws of physics Gamow and his colleagues were able to show that this point — which was also infinitely hot — corresponded to the moment of creation. Everything in the universe had emerged from this incredibly dense and hot state in a cataclysmic event astronomers call the ‘Big Bang’.

In 1965, Penzias and Wilson discovered that the mysterious radio signal was cosmic radiation that had survived from the first moments of the universe. It was proof of the ‘Big Bang’.

We know when that ‘Big Bang’ happened. In the Talmud, Tractate Rosh Hashana we find “Says Rabbi Eliezer, the world was created in Tishrei.” As we say in the prayers of Rosh Hashana: “This is the day of the beginning of Your works, a remembrance of the first day.”

Judaism is not fundamentalist, but it is rooted in the fundamentals.

And even when conventional wisdom seems to be at odds with the Torah, if you wait patiently you will see that the unconventional wisdom of the Torah turns out to be the truth.

SHEMONAH ESREI - EIGHTH BLESSING - PART 2

“Heal us, God — then we will be healed; save us — then we will be saved, because You are our praise.”

There is a question one can ask regarding all requests from G-d, including a request for healing. Since a person can only be sick if G-d decides so, why should a request to be healed cause G-d to heal the person?

Whatever the degree of sickness a person suffers from, he becomes more limited. When ill, praying, learning and doing *mitzvot* are all very difficult. Accordingly, when one asks that G-d heal us from sickness, it should be so he could serve Him better. This is implied in the reason we give for why G-d should heal us, “Because You are our praise.” G-d is praised through the Jewish People when they sanctify His name in the world through Torah and prayer. Such a request for healing can merit a merciful response from G-d, bringing about a complete healing.

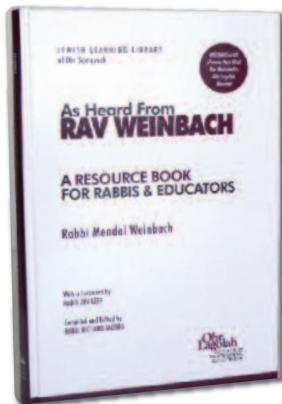
Heal Us – Save Us

It is well known that man is made of body and soul. As such, a person must be concerned both with his physical and spiritual health and well-being. In fact, considering that the

soul continues to live after one’s physical death, one could contend that the well-being of the soul is ultimately more important than one’s material well-being. According to this rationale the Sages teach that one should minimize the pursuit of vein pleasures, giving priority instead to the true purpose of being placed in this world – to serve G-d.

In light of the above we can explain the double reference to “healing” and “saving” – in the opening of this blessing. “Healing” refers to the physical body, while “saving” refers to the soul.

Regarding the soul, it is explained that G-d placed within the heart of man an inclination to follow both a direction of Divine service as well as sin. The purpose for this is to give man a challenge through which he can attain self-perfection, thereby earning a great reward in the World-to-Come. This spiritual battle within a person can be extremely difficult at times. In fact, the Talmud states that the inner desire of a person towards evil grows stronger each day. It is only with G-d’s help that man can overpower his evil inclination (*yetzer hara*) within. So we ask G-d to “save us” by illuminating the soul from above, giving it dominion over the heart (*Tanya*).



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