

Light Insight

The Last Scene

“When you go out to battle to meet your enemy... the officers shall speak to the people, saying: ‘Who is the man who has built a new house and not inaugurated it? Let him go and return to his house, lest he die in the war and another man will inaugurate it... Who is the man who is fearful and fainthearted, let him go and return to his house, and let him not melt the heart of his fellows like his heart.’” (Deuteronomy 20:1-8)

The Yiddish Theater was not known for its championing of Torah values and so it was not surprising when two students came running to Rabbi Yitzchak Zev Soloveitchik, breathless with indignation: “Does the Rabbi know about the new play the Yiddish Theater has put on? They’ve made a satire about Judaism!

First, one of the actors says “*Who is the man who has built a new house and not inaugurated*

it? Let him go and return to his house, lest he die in the war and another man will inaugurate it.” Ten people get up and walk off the stage. Then he says “*And who is the man who has planted a vineyard and not redeemed it? Let him go home lest he die and another man redeem it.”* Another ten people get up and leave the stage. Then he says “*And who is the man who has betrothed a woman and not married her? Let him go home lest he die in the war and another man marry her.”* Another twenty people get up and walk off the stage. And then he says “*Whoever is afraid, let him go home so he won’t scare everyone else.”* Now everyone leaves the stage except two actors who play Rabbi Eliyahu of Vilna and another one of the greatest Torah scholars of the last few centuries, Rabbi Aryeh Leib Hacoen. Rabbi Eliyahu says to Rabbi Aryeh Leib, “Please, in your

honor — you take the first shot,” and Rabbi Aryeh Leib replies “No, no, I insist— after you.” As they argue about who’s going to start the war, the curtain falls and the audience laughs and claps. It’s terrible!”

Rabbi Yitzchak Zev paused and then said:

“Well — what’s wrong with that?”

The jaws of the students dropped. They gazed at their Rabbi dumb-struck.

He continued, “The only thing they forgot is the last scene.”

“What last scene?”

“The last scene is where Rabbi Eliyahu and Rabbi Aryeh Leib win the war.”

The strength of the Jewish people is not in the vastness of its numbers nor its military might. The Torah calls us the “smallest of the nations.”

Our strength is a function of our righteousness and our faithfulness to G-d — the “Master of Wars.”

Ethics of the Fathers

Warning: Lying is Habit Forming!

“The world stands on three things – justice, truth and peace”

Even when no harm results from a distortion of the truth it must be avoided. The Talmud relates a problem which the Sage Rav had with his wife, who consistent-

ly prepared a meal for him contrary to his request. When Rav’s son Chiya became old enough to realize what was happening he decided to solve the problem by telling his mother the opposite of what his father had asked. When, in surprise, Rav found the meal he actually wanted and asked Chiya what had happened to his mother’s contrariness he learned of the “white lie” which his son had told. Rav praised his cleverness but condemned his action, citing the warning issued by the Prophet Jeremiah that lying is habit forming and one who tells “white lies” develops a tongue so addicted to distortion that he will find it difficult to tell the truth even when it really matters.

LOVE of the LAND

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

Beit El

*“He called that place Beit El,
but its original name was Luz.”
(Bereishis 28:19)*

Beit El, Luz, where Jacob had his prophetic dream of a ladder reaching to Heaven, reappears in the Biblical account of the tribe of Joseph conquering the city. The entrance to this city was perfectly concealed. A giant luz tree stood in front of a cave which served as

The Hebrew scouts waited until someone exited and induced him to reveal the entrance by promising him protection from the war they were about to wage against his town.

They thus succeeded in invading and conquering the city and allowed their guide and his family to safely leave. He went to the Hittite area of the land and established a city which he named Luz. The new Luz was where the blue

the city entrance, and only the city’s inhabitants were aware that the tree was hollow and could be walked through.

techeiles dye for tzitzis was pressed and its secret location made it invulnerable to the invasions of foreign kings who exiled inhabitants of all the other cities.

The kindness the guide had shown the Hebrews by just pointing his finger towards the entrance received its ultimate reward in the city’s invulnerability to death itself. When its aged inhabitants grew weary of life, they went outside the walls of the city to die.

The modern Jewish settlement of Beit El, established after the Six-Day War on the approximate site of the ancient city, is fifteen minutes north of Jerusalem and near the Arab city of Ramallah.

Response Line

A Blessing on your Neck

Jeff Adelstein from Alabama wrote:

Would you please tell me what the writing is around the neck of the tallis (prayer shawl)? Could you please write it in English and in Hebrew/English? I’m not sure I worded that correctly, but what I mean is I can’t read the Hebrew writing too well. Thanks!

Dear Jeff,
Before putting on a tallis, we say the following blessing: *“Baruch Ata Ado-noi Elo-heiynu Melech ha’olam, asher kid’shanu b’mitzvosav v’tzivvanu l’his’atef batzitzis”* which means *“Blessed are You L-rd, our G-d, King of the universe, Who made us holy with His commands and commanded us to wrap ourselves in a [garment with] tzitzis.”*

Recently, some people began writing this blessing on the neck of

the tallis. This has a practical advantage for someone who doesn’t know the blessings by heart: He can hold up the tallis, read the blessing and then put it on. Traditionally, however, the tallis has no writing on it. Indeed, Maimonides in one of his letters maintains that it is forbidden to embroider verses from the Torah and blessings on a tallis. One reason he gives is that a person may inadvertently wear the tallis in a place like a bathroom, where it is forbidden to bring written words of Torah.