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PARSHA INSIGHTS

THE GOOD LIFE

“The years of my dwelling have been one hundred and thirty years. Few and bad have been the days of the years of my life.” (47:9)

Most of us think of life as a trip through a treasure house of experiences. “Living it up” is synonymous with living itself: White-water rafting, paragliding, sipping Margaritas around the pool, seeing the Mona Lisa or the Pyramids or climbing Everest — that’s what life is all about!

The eulogy “He had a good life” usually means that the person used his time to maximize his experiences of this world. According to this view, someone who lives his life without tasting any of this world’s countless experiences hasn’t really lived.

Judaism’s view of the world is the total opposite.

Life experiences are like Cinderella. They last, by definition, as long as one experiences them. However sweet, however exciting they may be, there comes the moment when the gilded coach turns back into a pumpkin. Every moment of life is constantly passing and vanishing forever. As soon as the taste of one moment expires, we must seek a new taste, a new experience.

If life is the sum total of our experiences, then life is really a kind of ongoing death, running from moment to moment, never being able to possess the moment itself.

We tend to think of this world and the next world like two chapters in a novel. One finishes and the other begins. This is not the case. There is nothing in the next world that is not in this world already. One of the blessings that we say on the Torah is “and He has planted within us eternal life...” A plant does not make an

appearance out of nowhere. The plant will never be more than what the seed contained. Similarly, our eternal existence is no more than what G-d has planted within us in this world.

If we live for the moment by perceiving life as a series of fleeting experiences, then the taste of the moment lives on our lips for that second and disappears forever.

However, if we take all those moments and connect them to the Source of Life itself, if we understand that our entire life, our entire existence, is just one facet of what the Creator wishes to express and reveal in His creation, then in the next world all those passing moments return to live eternally.

The seed that was planted within is nurtured and flowers into eternal life.

In this week’s Parsha, Pharaoh asks Yaakov, “How old are you?” To which Yaakov replies, “The years of my dwelling have been one hundred and thirty years. Few and bad have been the days of the years of my life”. To answer Pharaoh’s question required no more than a number,

“One hundred and thirty.”

Why, then, did Yaakov see fit to give such a long answer?

You can dwell in this world without truly living in it.

On Yaakov’s level, living meant a life of constant Divine inspiration. Hence, he felt that he had not truly lived during the many years that he had been deprived of Divine inspiration.

Yaakov was telling Pharaoh that life is not a mere compendium of possibilities, and that he who dies with the most toys wins. Life means immortalizing every second through connection to the Source.

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PARSHA OVERVIEW

With the discovery of the goblet in Binyamin's sack, the brothers are confused. Yehuda alone steps forward and eloquently but firmly petitions Yosef for Binyamin's release, offering himself instead. As a result of this act of total selflessness, Yosef finally has irrefutable proof that his brothers are different people from the ones who cast him into the pit, and so he now reveals to them that he is none other than their brother. The brothers shrink from him in shame, but Yosef consoles them, telling them that everything has been part of G-d's plan. He sends them back to their father Yaakov with a message to come and reside in the land of Goshen. At first, Yaakov cannot accept the news, but when he recognizes hidden signs in the message which positively identify the sender as his son Yosef, his spirit is revived. Yaakov together with all his family and possessions sets out for Goshen. G-d communicates with Yaakov in a vision at night. He tells him not to fear going

down to Egypt and its negative spiritual consequences, because it is there that G-d will establish the Children of Israel as a great nation even though they will be dwelling in a land steeped in immorality and corruption. The Torah lists Yaakov's offspring and hints to the birth of Yocheved, who will be the mother of Moshe Rabbeinu. Seventy souls in total descend into Egypt, where Yosef is reunited with his father after 22 years of separation. He embraces his father and weeps, overflowing with joy. Yosef secures the settlement of his family in Goshen. Yosef takes his father Yaakov and five of the least threatening of his brothers to be presented to Pharaoh, and Yaakov blesses Pharaoh. Yosef instructs that, in return for grain, all the people of Egypt must give everything to Pharaoh, including themselves as his slaves. Yosef then redistributes the population, except for the Egyptian priests who are directly supported by a stipend from Pharaoh. The Children of Israel become settled, and their numbers multiply greatly.

ISRAEL Forever

IS MY FATHER STILL ALIVE?

The Jewish State bears the name with which our patriarchal father Yaakov was crowned — Yisrael. When we look around at how much most of Israeli society is trying to imitate the lifestyle of all the nations, we wonder whether these secularists are living up to the name of their country.

In this week's Torah portion we learn of the dramatic revelation of Yosef to his brothers that the Egyptian potentate giving them such a hard time is none other than the brother they sold into slavery 22 years earlier. The first words he utters upon telling them that he is the

disguised Yosef were "Is my father still alive?"

This seems a strange question to ask of people who have just spoken to him about their father. It may well be then that what he was asking was "Is the spirit of my father still alive within you?"

The name Yisrael, the Torah explains, refers to the successful battles waged by Yaakov against both man and angel. The State of Israel is also waging a battle against the forces threatening its very survival. It is to be hoped that by returning to the sacred spirit of the original Yisrael we can secure Israel forever.

LOVE OF THE LAND - THE PLACES

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

KIBBUTZ KALYAH – TWO MEANINGS OF A NAME

Near Yam Hamelach (the Dead Sea) is a kibbutz with a most interesting name. Kalya is mentioned in the Talmud as the name of a plant growing in the Yam Hamelach area which is used in the manufacture of soap. The kibbutz took on the name of this plant but after the Six Day War this name became popular as an acronym for the revival of the Dead Sea: **KAm Latchiya**



Yam Hamelach (the Dead Sea has come to life).

As any visitor to that area can see, the once "dead" sea today brings life to the many people enjoying its therapeutic waters and luxurious hotels, not to mention the major medical and cosmetic industries that have been developed from its rich mineral content.

PARSHA Q&A ?

1. What threatening words did Yehuda say to Yosef?
2. Why did Yehuda say his missing brother died?
3. Why was Yehuda the one to plead for Binyamin?
4. What do we learn from Yosef telling his brothers "Go up to my father"?
5. What two things did the brothers see that helped prove that he was really Yosef?
6. Why did Binyamin weep on Yosef's neck?
7. Why did Yosef send old wine to Yaakov?
8. What did Yosef mean when he said "Don't dispute on the way"?
9. What happened to Yaakov when he realized Yosef was alive?
10. Why did G-d tell Yaakov, "Don't fear going down to Egypt"?
11. "I will bring you up" from Egypt. To what did this allude?
12. What happened to the property that Yaakov acquired in Padan Aram?
13. Who was the mother of Shaul ben HaCanaanit?
14. When listing Yaakov's children, the verse refers to Rachel as "Rachel, wife of Yaakov." Leah, Bilhah and Zilpah are not referred to as Yaakov's wives. Why?
15. Yosef harnessed his own chariot instead of letting a servant do it. Why?
16. Why were shepherds abhorrent to the Egyptians?
17. Why did Yosef pick the weakest brothers to stand before Pharaoh?
18. What blessing did Yaakov give Pharaoh when he left his presence?
19. Yosef resettled the land of Egypt, moving the people from city to city. What were his two motives for this?
20. Whose fields were not bought by Yosef?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

1. 44:18 - He threatened that Yosef would be stricken with leprosy, like Pharaoh when he took Sarah from Avraham; alternatively, Yehuda threatened to kill Yosef and Pharaoh.
2. 44:20 - Yehuda feared that if he said his missing brother was alive, Yosef would demand to see him.
3. 44:32 - He was the one who took "soul" responsibility for him.
4. 45:9 - We learn that *Eretz Yisrael* is higher than all other lands.
5. 45:12 - He was circumcised like they were, and he spoke *lashon hakodesh*.
6. 45:14 - Binyamin wept for the destruction of *Mishkan Shilo* built in Yosef's territory.
7. 45:23 - Elderly people appreciate old wine.
8. 45:24 - He warned that if they engage in halachic disputes, they might not be alert to possible travel dangers.
9. 45:27 - His *ruach hakodesh* (prophetic spirit) returned.
10. 46:3 - Because Yaakov was grieved to leave Eretz Canaan.
11. 46:4 - That Yaakov would be buried in Eretz Canaan.
12. 46:6 - He traded it for Esav's portion in the Cave of Machpelah.
13. 46:10 - Dina *bat* Yaakov.
14. 46:19 - Rachel was regarded as the mainstay of the family.
15. 46:29 - Yosef wanted to hasten to honor his father.
16. 46:34 - Because the Egyptians worshipped sheep.
17. 47:2 - So Pharaoh wouldn't see their strength and draft them.
18. 47:10 - That the waters of the Nile should rise to greet Pharaoh.
19. 47:21 - In order to remind them that they no longer owned the land, and to help his family by removing the stigma of being strangers.
20. 47:22 - The Egyptian priests.

לע"נ

מרת יוטא רחל בת ר' יוסף חיים ע"ה

ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

- How and when fire signals were used for publicizing new month
- Varieties of cedar trees, the giant ship and irretrievable loss
- Housing the witnesses of the new moon on Shabbat
- Interrogation of the witnesses to ascertain their credibility
- Declaring the new month by court head and others
- Rabban Gamliel's moon figures and the problem of statues
- The dispute between two Sages and the absolute authority of Sanhedrin
- Sighting of the new moon by the Sanhedrin and timing of declaration
- Why the horn of the cow is not valid for use as a shofar
- Terms whose meaning was learned from Sages and unexpected sources
- The shofar used on Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur of Yovel year and on fast days
- Hearing two sounds at once
- The difference between the ordinary shofar and the *Beit Hamikdash* one
- When the world was created and the prayer expressing that fact
- Physical flaws disqualifying a shofar
- The shofar blown in a pit
- Shofar taken from a sanctified animal, from an animal worshipped as an idol and other disqualifications
- The matzah eaten under coercion and the shofar blown for music
- The need for *kavana* (intention) in performing a mitzvah
- Adding or subtracting from the details of a mitzvah
- The uplifted hands of Moshe and the magic serpent
- Who is obligated in the mitzvah of shofar
- Shofar blowing when Rosh Hashana is on Shabbat

WHEN MONEY COUNTS

The shofar blown on Rosh Hashana in the *Beit Hamikdash* was adorned with gold while the one blown on fast days was adorned only with silver. In explanation of this distinction the *gemara* states that while there is a need for spending money to glorify the shofar used on a holiday, economy is exercised in regard to the fast day shofar because “the Torah had consideration for the money of Israel”.

This concept of Divine consideration for the public's money as it is spent even on mitzvah matters is found in a number of places in the Talmud. It seems, however, to be in conflict with a challenge that Rabbi Papa presented when a colleague attempted to give a lenient ruling in regard to a *kashrut* question on these very grounds that “the Torah had consideration for the money of Israel”. How can we apply

such a concept, he asked, when the transgression of a Torah prohibition is involved?

A resolution of this conflict is presented by Rabbi Zvi Hirsh Chayes in his commentary. In *Shulchan Aruch Orech Chaim* (656) we learn that there is a difference between how much a Jew must spend in order to perform a positive mitzvah and how much he must sacrifice in order to avoid transgressing a prohibition. While sums like a third or a fifth of one's resources are mentioned in regard to the first category, it is clear that one must be prepared to lose all his money in order to avoid transgression.

All of the cases when the Talmud applies the idea of Divine consideration for public money deal with the performance of a mitzvah. The challenges presented by Rabbi Papa (*Mesechta Chullin* 49b and 77a) were in regard to transgression where money doesn't count.

• *Rosh Hashana* 27a

WHAT THE Sages SAY

“Woe to the heathens (who slaughtered the Sages) for whom there is no chance to make compensation. The Prophet Yeshayahu says in the Name of G-d, ‘In place of the copper I shall bring gold, in place of the iron I shall bring silver, in place of the wood I shall bring copper, and in place of the stones I shall bring iron’ — but what can be brought in place of Rabbi Akiva and his colleagues?”

• *Rabbi Yochanan - Rosh Hashana* 23a

GREEN LIGHT ON THE BLACK RUN

From: Ken in CO

*Dear Rabbi,
I am an avid ski-buff gone religious. Is there any reason according to Judaism not to go snow skiing?*

Dear Ken,

There's nothing wrong with snow skiing per se. It's good exercise, invigorating, and in a natural setting that inspires awe of G-d. But there are some spiritual moguls that need to be negotiated before getting the green light on the black run.

First, of course, you may not ski on Shabbat. In so far as doing so may involve travel, paying money, having people do work for you, carrying in the public domain, and simply not being in the spirit of the day of rest, skiing on the Sabbath is a non-starter. Even without skiing, if you are in a ski area over Shabbat, you must be able to properly honor the Sabbath with prayer and Sabbath meals.

Second, even on weekdays, a Jewish man is required to pray three times a day — morning, afternoon and

night — with a *minyan*, for services which sometimes require a Torah scroll. Some resorts have enough observant guests to make a *minyan*; do your research. If praying with a *minyan* and having a Torah scroll is not possible, you should speak to a local Orthodox rabbi. Of course, access to kosher food is a must.

Third, you may not do anything reckless or eminently dangerous on the slopes that might endanger you or others. A Jew is commanded to guard his health and avoid injuring others, within normal bounds. Recreational sports are permitted even though injuries may occur, as long as reasonable caution is taken. This includes abiding by the safety rules of the ski area.

Fourth, you must avoid situations that may be spiritually dangerous as well. The excessive social scene at many venues is likely to be hazardous to your "spiritual health."

Last, you'll have to dig in your poles and avoid going down the slippery slope of the ski culture nightlife. The socializing in general doesn't pull the tow in Judaism and are off limit trails for the Jewish skier.

If you can safely avoid these obstacles and no-ski zones, you can put on your spiritual ski pass and get on the lift.

WHAT'S THE RIGHT THING TO DO?

REAL-LIFE QUESTIONS OF SOCIAL AND BUSINESS ETHICS

IS THIS MONEY REFUNDABLE?

Question: The failure of a number of boys in my son's yeshiva to come to prayer services on time caused the yeshiva heads to penalize latecomers with a substantial fine. One of his friends, a boy who lost his father, was fined by the yeshiva mashgiach who saw a need to teach him an important lesson for life. Aware of this orphan's precarious financial situation, my son and some of his friends put together the money needed for paying the fine. Upon receiving the payment the mashgiach promised him that if he would come on time for an entire month he would get the money back. Now that he met the challenge and received the money, he wants to know whether he has to give it back to the friends who supplied him with it. What is the right thing to do?

Answer: This question actually came before Rabbi Yitzchak Zilberstein, the rav of the Ramat Elchanan community in Bnei Brak. He ruled that the orphan could hold on to the money for his personal use and gave two reasons for his decision.

First of all it was unusual in that yeshiva for money paid for a fine to be returned to the offender so that it must be assumed that all of his friends gave him that money as an unconditional gift.

Secondly, in addition to providing financial assistance for a needy orphan, these friends saw their somewhat embarrassing collection of funds a way to motivate this latecomer to improve his behavior. Since they achieved their goal they certainly consider their money well spent.

THE ECHO OF LIFESAVING CHARITY

Charity to the poor as a lifesaver is a theme that spans the centuries. Back in Talmudic times it saved the life of Rabbi Akiva's daughter. When she was born the astrologers informed her father that the stars indicated that she would die on the day of her wedding. The morning after her wedding she discovered in her room a poisonous snake that she had unknowingly killed with a jewelry pin she had placed near the wall. Her delighted father asked what merit she had to deserve such a lifesaving miracle. She replied that a poor man had come to the door of the wedding hall begging for food but had not been noticed by any of the guests because of the noise of the celebration. She alone heard him and gave him her portion.

In our own times there is a legend about a poor Jew with

a large family who somehow managed to acquire two chickens for the holiday meals. A poor woman knocked on the door and cried that her family had nothing to eat. When he complained that all he had was two chickens that would barely supply his family members with tiny portions, she insisted that he give her one of the chickens. As he opened the refrigerator door he found inside his unconscious infant child who had turned blue from cold after entering the fridge that closed on him. The rescue team that quickly arrived and brought the child around told the father that had he opened the fridge a minute later it would have been too late.

Both cases vindicated the Divine promise that "charity saves from death".

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