

SHABBAT PARSHAT VAYIGASH · 5 TEVET 5772 · DEC. 31, 2011 · VOL. 19 NO. 11

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 in the 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 says, "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 with-

in 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 Torah portion 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.

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 conse-

quences, 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.

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A PROPHETIC PRECEDENT

When Yosef, in his capacity as master of the land of Egypt, acquired all the land in that country for Pharaoh in exchange for bread in a time of famine, he made an exception of the land belonging to the priests.

This was seen by our commentaries as a hint to future generations of Jews in their own land to show deference to their own clergy.

The special consideration shown by the Israeli government in granting deferment of military service to Yeshiva stu-

dents and in providing some financial support for many of their families is constantly being criticized by anti-religious elements. The lesson taught by Yosef in this week's Torah portion has apparently been ignored by those Jews who have placed "equality" above the age-old veneration that the simplest Jew always had for the Torah scholar.

The time has come for all Jews in a country facing threats to its survival to appreciate that special consideration must be shown to those whose Torah study secures Israel forever.

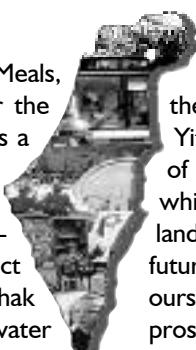
LOVE OF THE LAND

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

ERETZ RECHAVA - A SPACIOUS LAND

In the second blessing of our Grace After Meals, which expresses our gratitude to Heaven for the gift of Eretz Yisrael, we refer to it not only as a "desirable and good land" but also as a "spacious" one.

"Spacious" has both figurative and literal connotations. When the Torah relates the conflict between the shepherds of the Patriarch Yitzchak with the Philistines over ownership of two vital water



sources, it records in subtle, prophetic manner that there was no dispute over the third one uncovered by Yitzchak's men and they named it "Rechovot". This term of spaciousness referred to the end of restrictive conflict, which not only made it possible for "us to be fruitful in the land" (Bereishet 25:22), but was also a hint to a time in the future when local conflicts with our neighbors and among ourselves would come to an end and allow us to multiply and prosper.

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.

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- purpose of tithing
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- Which owners are not required to do tithing
- Tithing before animal is old enough to serve as a sacrifice
- Heirs and partners who are obligated in tithing

A GRAVE PROBLEM

If someone sells his burial plot and the road leading to it, his family has the right to bury him there even if the purchaser does not grant permission. The reason for this is that it is an embarrassment for the deceased's family for him to be buried elsewhere.

In *Mesechta Sanhedrin* (46b) the question is raised whether the purpose of burial is to save the deceased's family the embarrassment of a visible dead relative, or whether it is to serve as an atonement for the deceased. The practical difference is what to do when the deceased has made a request before his death to not be buried. If the reason for burial is concern for the family's honor, his request must be ignored, but if it is for his own atonement, he has the right

to waive such atonement. (The halacha is that his request is ignored.)

Tosefot asks why the *gemara* there did not suggest a proof that his request is ignored from our *gemara* which rules that he is buried in the plot that he sold despite the fact that his sale of the plot indicates that he did not wish to be buried.

The resolution offered by *Tosefot* is that the sale of the burial plot is not considered a statement on the deceased's part that he wishes to not be buried, but is the result of his need to earn money from such a sale. A similar situation is found in *Mesechta Ketubot* (48a), in which someone declares that he does not wish his burial expenses to be paid from his resources. There too we interpret his request as simply attempting to have others pay for his burial and not an indication that he wishes not to be buried at all.

- *Bechorot* 52b

WHAT THE Sages SAY

"The tithing of animals is not practiced when there is no *Beit Hamikdash* — where the tenth one can be offered as a sacrifice — because of the danger that this sacred animal will be misused while waiting for it to develop a physical flaw that enables the owner to use as he wishes."

- *The Sage Rava - Bechorot* 53a

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OLD WARDROBE

From: Melissa

Dear Rabbi,

Let me say from the outset that I am Jewish, and proud of it. But when I see the way traditional Orthodox Jewish people dress, particularly the men, I am embarrassed. It looks so peculiar and out of place that I wonder why it has to be so? Couldn't they dress more with the times?

Dear Melissa,

Your question is right on the button, and I hope to cover it adequately, although there is no uniform response.

Jewish Law dictates only that clothing for men and women fit the guidelines of Jewish modesty. However, it does not cover what general style of clothing should be worn. That is something that was always tailored according to the sensibilities of each particular community in its particular time period and place.

That being said, a common thread in Jewish dress throughout the generations is that, despite being influenced by local taste and functionality, the Jewish wardrobe was interwoven with some distinctly Jewish fashion, meaning or symbols. This might include cutting, sewing, using colors or numbers of pieces of a garment or a number of layers worn that are of some significance in Judaism. In this way, modes of dress were clad with the import of religiosity, and enwrapped within tradition.

While many Orthodox Jewish communities have adopted in varying degrees a more modern, Western apparel, and that's fine, those who have not should not be criticized. Rather, they should be lauded for their real, and often

uncomfortable, commitment to Judaism. This may not wear well with other Jews as yourself, but a question no less on the button than your own is, "Why not?". Ascribing to a societal view that celebrates multi-culturism and ethnic tolerance, why would a Jew feel embarrassed by another's traditional garb?

Is it possible that seeing a fellow Jew clothed so "Jewishly" feeds one's own insecurities vis-à-vis the prevailing non-Jewish environment, and/or vis-à-vis one's own Jewish self-conscience?

A non-religious elderly man was once riding the subway. He saw what looked to him to be a young Jewish Orthodox man bedecked in a big black hat, long black coat and long beard. He berated the man in Yiddish, while Jewishly gesticulating his derision by pointing at the man from head to toe. The young man replied politely, and in perfect English, "It seems from the way you're pointing at me that you disapprove of my people's dress. Do you have such a dislike for the Amish?"

Extremely embarrassed and guilt-ridden, the older man apologized profusely, explaining that he thought that the young man was a fellow Jew, and assured him that he has absolutely no dislike of the Amish at all. On the contrary, he affirmed, "I have nothing but respect for the preservation of your traditional way of life which is a good and pleasant and healthy one!"

The young man then replied in perfect Yiddish, "If you have such a respect for the Amish yet so dislike the *Heimish* (Yiddish word for observant coreligionist) then you must not think very highly of yourself!"

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At Cambridge University, Dr. Jared Rael Greenblatt, B.A., M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D., developed a fascination for modern Aramaic, leading him to Israel to interview Jewish refugees from Kurdistan who speak Aramaic as their mother tongue. He even published a dictionary on the subject: *The Neo-Aramaic Dialect of Amedia*.

His turning point came when his rabbi suggested he attend the Ohr Somayach "Mentors Mission" Shabbaton in Tsefat:

Jared Greenblatt won five academic scholarships, was offered a professional Rugby contract, and served with the Cambridge University Jewish Society.



"After Shabbos, a man strikes up a conversation with me; finally he says, 'Next time you're in Jerusalem I'd like you to come and see me.'"

It was Rabbi Nota Schiller.

"I walked into that meeting with my 'fifteen unanswerable questions'. Rabbi Schiller answered ten. The answer to the other five, Rabbi Schiller said, I could appreciate only after some full-time Yeshiva study."

Today, Yitzchak is married, studies in Ohr Lagolah and teaches Torah at Ohr Somayach, Jerusalem, researches for Tel Aviv University, translates from five languages, and leads High Holiday services in Sydney, Australia.

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY**THE SILENT APPEAL**

The Vishnitzer Rebbe of blessed memory was in the habit of taking a short evening stroll for his health in the company of some of his followers. One evening he stopped in front of the luxurious home of the Jewish head of a local bank and informed his escorts that he was going inside for a visit. This raised some eyebrows, for this banker was not a particularly observant Jew and certainly not one of the rabbi's followers.

The banker was even more surprised as he invited the rabbi to sit down. To his even greater surprise the rabbi took a seat but uttered not a word. His continued silence so rattled the nerves of his host that he finally asked him the purpose of his visit.

"I came to fulfill a mitzvah," explained the rabbi. "Our Sages rule that just as it is a mitzvah to admonish someone who will heed your reproof, it is a mitzvah to refrain from saying something which will not be heeded. I am convinced that what I want to say to you will be ignored but if I stay home and refrain from saying it I will not really be fulfilling

that mitzvah. I therefore came here where I have the opportunity to say it, and refrain from doing so because it will be counterproductive in making your guilt greater by ignoring the reproof."

The banker's curiosity was aroused and he repeatedly begged the rabbi to reveal the nature of this secret message. The rabbi then told him that the bank he heads was about to foreclose its mortgage on the home of a widow in the community and he wanted him to show special consideration for her. The banker countered by pointing out the large sum of money involved and the fact that he was only the manager and not the owner of the bank.

"You see," said the rabbi as he rose to leave, "I told you that I didn't want to say anything because I knew you wouldn't listen."

The banker's conscience, however, was so touched that a few days later he took money from his own pocket to save the widow's home.

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