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PARSHA INSIGHTS

THE UGLY DUCKLING

“...and all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by him” (18:18)

About twenty years ago a lonely little character sat on my keyboard. Nobody took much notice of him. He wasn't very useful. He wasn't the SPACE bar; he wasn't CAPS; he wasn't even CAPS LOCK. Almost the only people who ever pressed him were storekeepers and ledger writers who needed a mathematical abbreviation to turn two letters into one. His name was @.

@ was the loneliest character on my keyboard — typography's ugly duckling.

Whoever would have thought a few short years later, @ is a megastar of worldwide proportions. Now he's on everyone's lips. Countless millions of email addresses span the world and everyone has to use that little ugly duckling — @.

The ugly duckling of the world of typography has become a swan.

In last week's parsha, the Torah identifies the failings that led G-d to bring the great flood that destroyed

almost the whole world. The failings of the *Dor Hapalaga*, the Generation of the Dispersal, however, are not so clear. The Midrash explains that Avraham alone proclaimed the Unity of G-d to the world. The generation of the flood saw him and his beliefs as a barren mule devoid of progeny, of a future. To their minds, monotheism would die with Avraham. They wanted to build a tower with an idol at its top; sword in hand it would proclaim that the earth had seceded from the heavens.

They couldn't have been more wrong. Despite being alone in his beliefs, Avraham's gift to the world, monotheism, became the most widespread faith in the world.

The Mishna in Avot (4:3) says, “...do not despise any man, and consider nothing impossible, because there is no man that does not have his hour, and nothing that does not have its place.”

Even the humble @.

THE JEWISH LEARNING LIBRARY PRESENTS

SEASONS OF THE MOON

BY RABBI YAAKOV ASHER SINCLAIR

THE AUERBACH EDITION

COMING SOON!

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PARSHA OVERVIEW

Three days after performing *brit mila* on himself, Avraham is visited by G-d. When three angels appear in human form, Avraham rushes to show them hospitality by bringing them into his tent, despite this being the most painful time after the operation. Sarah laughs when she hears from them that she will bear a son next year. G-d reveals to Avraham that He will destroy Sodom, and Avraham pleads for Sodom to be spared. G-d agrees that if there are fifty righteous people in Sodom He will not destroy it. Avraham “bargains” G-d down to ten righteous people. However, not even ten can be found. Lot, his wife and two daughters are rescued just before sulfur and fire rain down on Sodom and her sister cities. Lot’s wife looks back and is turned into a pillar of salt. Lot’s daughters fear that as a result of the destruction there will be no husbands for them. They decide to get their father drunk and through him to perpetuate the human race. From the elder daughter, Moav is born, and from the younger, Ammon. Avraham moves to Gerar where Avimelech abducts Sarah. After G-d appears to Avimelech in a dream, he releases Sarah and appeases

Avraham. As promised, a son, Yitzchak, is born to Sarah and Avraham. On the eighth day after the birth, Avraham circumcises him as commanded. Avraham makes a feast the day Yitzchak is weaned. Sarah tells Avraham to banish Hagar and Hagar’s son Yishmael because she sees in him signs of degeneracy. Avraham is distressed at the prospect of banishing his son, but G-d tells him to listen to whatever Sarah tells him to do. After nearly dying of thirst in the desert, Yishmael is rescued by an angel and G-d promises that he will be the progenitor of a mighty nation. Avimelech enters into an alliance with Avraham when he sees that G-d is with him. In a tenth and final test, G-d instructs Avraham to take Yitzchak, who is now 37, and to offer him as a sacrifice. Avraham does this, in spite of ostensibly aborting Jewish nationhood and contradicting his life-long preaching against human sacrifice. At the last moment, G-d sends an angel to stop Avraham. Because of Avraham’s unquestioning obedience, G-d promises him that even if the Jewish People sin, they will never be completely dominated by their foes. The parsha ends with the genealogy and birth of Rivka.

ISRAEL Forever

THE ULTIMATE REWARD

The promises given by G-d to the Patriarch Avraham regarding Eretz Yisrael were given in stages. In his commentary on Torah, Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman (RAMBaN) spells out four different stages, each one expanding on the previous one as Avraham’s merits increased.

At the conclusion of the tenth of his trials, when he demonstrated his love of G-d in his preparedness to sacrifice his son, Avraham was told that not only would his progeny

be as numerous as the stars of heaven and the sand on the shore but that his descendants would “inherit the gate of their enemy”.

This was the ultimate reward — a guarantee that no matter how much the descendants of Avraham would suffer at the hands of their enemies they would inevitably overcome all of them.

What a wonderful promise of 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

DAVID’S CITAGEL – A MISNOMER

Every visitor to Jerusalem is familiar with the impressive structure popularly referred to as David’s Citadel or the Tower of David.

This tower, which has no connection with King David, was built over two thousand years ago as part of



a fortress used to defend the city from invaders. Herod actually constructed three towers at this location, one of which he named Phasael Tower after his brother. It was only after Byzantine rule of the city that this tower became known as the Tower of David.

PARSHA Q&A ?

1. Why did G-d appear to Avraham after the *brit mila*?
2. Why was Avraham sitting at the entrance to his tent?
3. What were the missions of the three angels?
4. Why did Avraham enjoin the guests to wash the dust off their feet?
5. Why did Avraham ask specifically Yishmael, and not someone else, to prepare food for the guests?
6. Why did the angels ask Avraham where Sarah was?
7. When G-d related Sarah's thoughts to Avraham, He did not relate them precisely. Why?
8. What "cry" from Sodom came before G-d?
9. How many angels went to Sodom?
10. Why was Lot sitting at the gate of Sodom?
11. Lot served the angels *matza*. Why?
12. Why did Lot delay when he left Sodom?
13. Why were Lot and his family not permitted to look back at Sodom?
14. Lot's wife looked back and became a pillar of salt. Why was she punished in this particular way?
15. In what merit did G-d save Lot?
16. Why did Avraham relocate after the destruction of Sodom?
17. Why did Avimelech give gifts to Avraham?
18. Why was Avraham told to listen to Sarah?
19. Why did G-d listen to the prayer of Yishmael and not to that of Hagar?
20. Who accompanied Avraham and Yitzchak to the *akeidah* (binding)?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this week's Questions!

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

1. 18:1 - Avraham was sick, so G-d came to "visit" him.
2. 18:1 - He was looking for guests.
3. 18:2 - To announce Yitzchak's birth, to heal Avraham and to destroy Sodom.
4. 18:4 - He thought they were among those who worship the dust, and he didn't want any object of idolatry in his home.
5. 18:7 - To train him in the performance of *mitzvot*.
6. 18:9 - To call attention to Sarah's modesty, so as to endear her to her husband.
7. 18:13 - For the sake of peace.
8. 18:21 - The cry of a girl who was executed for giving food to the poor.
9. 19:1 - Two; one to destroy the city and one to save Lot.
10. 19:1 - He was a judge.
11. 19:3 - It was Passover.
12. 19:16 - He wanted to save his property.
13. 19:17 - As they, too, deserved to be punished, it wasn't fitting for them to witness the destruction of Sodom.
14. 19:26 - She was stingy, not wanting to give the guests salt.
15. 19:29 - Lot had protected Avraham by concealing from the Egyptians the fact that Sarah was his wife.
16. 20:1 - Because travel in the region ceased and Avraham could no longer find guests.
17. 20:14 - So that Avraham would pray for him.
18. 21:12 - Because she was greater in prophecy.
19. 21:17 - Because the prayer of a sick person is more readily accepted than the prayer of others on his behalf.
20. 22:3 - Yishmael and Eliezer.

לע"נ
מרת יוטא רחל בת ר' יחזקאל יצחק ע"ה
ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

- Appointed agents and self-appointed ones
- When the court errs in its evaluation of property
- No agency for committing a sin
- Can an agent also serve as a witness
- Power of a *na'arah* (girl aged 12-12 1/2) to effect marriage and divorce independent of her father
- When a minor (girl under 12) accepts *kiddushin* without previous consent of her father
- When a father accepts *kiddushin* for his adult son without his previous consent
- The child bride promised to one and grabbed by another
- Where *kiddushin* of a *na'arah* was with father's consent but not the *chupah*
- *Kiddushin* made with a number of palm dates or other fruits
- What happens with the money when one makes *kiddushin* with his sister
- *Kiddushin* made with money owed by the woman or with a promissory note of money owed by another
- *Kiddushin* with a *shtar* (document declaring *kiddushin*) which was written without proper intent or without her knowledge
- *Kiddushin* made with wages due for work done
- When there is deception either in regard to the item used for *kiddushin* or regarding the economic status of the man

THE FATHER AS AGENT OF SON

Two people were drinking wine under the shade of a willow tree in Babylon. One took his cup of wine, handed it to the other and declared that this was for the purpose of creating *kiddushin* between his son and the recipient's daughter. Since a father lacks the power to effect *kiddushin* for his adult son as he does for his daughter when she is a minor, it is the conclusion of the *gemara* that we have no reason to assume that the son acquiesced to the arrangement and it is therefore null and void.

When the Sage Ravina was challenged by his colleagues about the possibility that the son had appointed his father to act as his agent, his response was that "no one has the nerve to ask his father to serve as his agent".

In his commentary on this *gemara* Rabbi Yaakov Emden

cites two historical precedents for a son asking his father to arrange a matrimonial match in his behalf. The first is found in *Bereishet* 34:4 with Shechem, the violator of Yaakov's daughter Dinah, asking his father Chamor to arrange a marriage with the young lady. This, he writes, is not a contradiction to the *gemara's* rule, for the special respect of son for father is limited to Jews.

The second precedent, however, concerns a Jew, Shimshon. After being attracted to a Philistine woman he asked his father to arrange a marriage with her after her conversion (*Shoftim* 14:2). This, too, is rejected by Rabbi Yaakov Emden as a contradiction. Shimshon's interest in marrying a woman from another nation despite the strong objections of his parents rules him out as someone from whom we can learn regarding the respect which normally inhibits a son from making his father an agent.

What the SAGES Say

"Since the Prophet (Tzefaniah 3:13) describes the Jewish People as 'the remnant of Yisrael shall not commit injustice and shall not say lie', we can surely assume that a father who promised his daughter as a bride to one will not give her away to another."

• The Sage Abaye - *Kiddushin* 45a

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HIGH ON SINAI

From: Jill in Brookline, MA

Dear Rabbi,

If Moses was on such a tremendously high spiritual level while on Sinai in order to receive the Torah but didn't actually write it down until after coming down from Sinai, thereby lowering his spiritual level, how did he understand while writing as he did on Sinai? Or in other words, how can we rely on Moses' comprehension of the Torah at the time he wrote it as compared to his comprehension at the time it was given to him by G-d while on the mountain?

Dear Jill,

This is a very interesting question. It's based on the teaching of our Sages (Gittin 60a) that since the historical accounts recorded in the Torah took place after the Torah was given to Moses, he must not have written the entire Torah at Sinai. Rather, these events were either recorded piecemeal as they happened, according to one opinion, or at the end of the Israelites' 40-year sojourn in the desert.

Similarly, even regarding the non-historical, legal or spiritual subjects in the Torah, the idea that Moses received the entire Torah at Sinai doesn't mean that he wrote down everything that he received while on Sinai. On the contrary, there's no indication that he alighted the mount with the necessary materials to write the entire Torah. Nor does there seem to be any indication that Moses brought down the Torah in written form other than the tablets containing the Ten Commandments.

In fact, Ramban writes that the events of Genesis and Exodus that certainly occurred before Sinai were only written by Moses after coming down, implying that even what could have been written on the mount was not written until afterward.

Now, since Moses was on an extremely high spiritual level atop Sinai, such that he required no food, water or sleep, but rather communed with G-d in an angel-like state for 40 full days and nights, and all this in order to be able to comprehend the Torah in all its breadth and depth, and communicate this to the Jewish people, your question is quite apropos: how was he able to do so after having come down from such a spiritual high?

First, remember that when Moses returned his face radiated such intense spirituality that the people could not gaze at him, but rather he had to cover his face to hide the rays of light

beaming from his forehead [parenthetically, the Hebrew word used for these rays of light – 'keren' – can also refer to horns, which might be the source for certain misrepresentations of Moses in particular, and the Jewish people in general, as having horns.] This indicates that even after descending from Sinai, he still maintained a great degree of the spiritual Sinai high.

Also, before Moses ascended Sinai, and before his receiving the teachings of the Torah, the holiness of the Torah literally was in heaven and not on earth. This means that pre-Sinai such a level could only be obtained and maintained on Sinai in a heavenly, angelic state. But once G-d brought the wisdom of the Torah into the world by giving it to Moses, and Moses brought it down to the people, it became possible to attain that state even after the Sinai experience.

This is what the Torah describes regarding the Tent of Meeting, which was the dwelling place for G-d Himself within the midst of the people. There, clouds of glory surrounded the tent, and Moses alone entered the tent to commune with G-d and gain instruction from Him for guiding and teaching the people. This was a miniature Sinai, then, where Moses was able to attain and maintain the Sinai high even after coming down. Accordingly, it is not coincidental that Moses uncovered the veil when entering the Tent to continue his solo, Sinai-like commune with G-d, and then covered the energy emanating from his face when departing the Tent.

Last, it is instructive to consider the Talmud's description of how Moses recorded the historical descriptions written in the Torah. Namely, even though Moses himself lived through these events, according to both opinions above, he did not record them in his own words but rather it was G-d who literally dictated to Moses word for word how to record the events. Similarly, regarding the laws and beliefs recorded in the Torah, it was not Moses who summarized in his own words his Sinai experience, but rather G-d who dictated to Moses word for word exactly what and how to write the Torah after having come down.

So to summarize, Moses was able to write and teach the Torah with Sinai-like comprehension even after descending from the mount because in large measure he maintained the spiritual Sinai high even after coming down. He was able to spiritually recharge through the Sinai-like Tent of Meeting and, ultimately, it was G-d who was communicating through Moses.

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A SEAT IN SHUL FOR ALL

Question: The shul in which I pray can become very crowded for Kaballat Shabbat services because of the many guests who join the regular worshippers. This often leads to an embarrassing situation when a regular worshipper arrives to find that his seat has been taken by a visitor. What is the right thing to do on the part of that displaced person and on the part of the shul trustees?

Answer: While the regular worshipper certainly has a right

to politely ask the visitor to vacate the seat, this is most uncomfortable both for him and the visitor. The only real solution to the problem, one that has already been implemented in some shuls, is to have spare benches that can be set up especially for such occasion. This allows for visitors to find a seat and enables the noble regular who has been displaced and does not wish to embarrass the visitor to at least have a seat for himself.

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

ANOTHER USE OF A GIFT

A military vehicle pulled up one day in front of Kollat Beit David in Holon headed by Rabbi Yitzchak Zilberstein. In walked a high-ranking army officer escorted by police. He asked for a blessing in regard to some matter and handed the rabbi an envelope with money as a contribution to Torah institutions.

When the rabbi asked him his name and that of his mother he was shocked to discover that the office was a Druze!

Unwilling to accept funds from a non-Jew for Torah

study, the rabbi informed the officer that he would gladly give him the blessing he requested, but that he had a better suggestion for use of the money he offered. Inform the heads of one of the Arab schools in Jaffa, he advised, that you wish to apply this money to the establishment of a fund to help wipe out violence in the school, violence which sometimes leads to the bloodshed, the prevention of which is the responsibility of all mankind.

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