

Vaera 5776

January 8, 2016

A Taste of Torah

20-20 Hindsight

By Rabbi Yaakov Zions

Did you ever wonder why certain things that are givens for adults are impossible for a child? Why can't a child understand that the cake he craves is still unbaked, or the toy she needs right then doesn't yet belong to her? An honest observer will realize that this phenomenon isn't limited to children; we all possess these qualities, to some degree, within ourselves. In the beginning of this week's Torah portion, we're told of Hashem's answer to Moshe's complaint. The very end of last week's reading relates Moshe's questioning his apparently failed mission to Pharaoh. Moshe's delegation, following Hashem's direct command, pleaded with Pharaoh for a reprieve from the slavery of the Jewish People. In response, they were ridiculed by Pharaoh, their objective overruled and the slavery intensified. Moshe is understandably dejected and cries out, "Why?" Hashem answers him by assuring him of the impending redemption. Rashi, quoting the Gemara (Sanhedrin 111a), understands these verses as a rebuke to Moshe for questioning Hashem's ways. The Patriarchs, says Hashem, also faced challenges, yet didn't question; they trusted Hashem's words.

The lesson for us seems obvious and simple: Not everything is always obvious and simple! To better illustrate this idea, a parable of Rabbi Elchonon Wasserman (1874-1941; Dean of the Baranovitch [Poland] Yeshiva; murdered during the Holocaust) comes to mind. A first-time visitor to a farm is astounded to witness his host, the farmer, ripping up the nice, smooth ground with his plow. When he questions the farmer, he's assured that the outcome will justify this actions. The visitor shrugs his shoulders at the strange farm customs and resigns himself to wait. However, his curiosity is

again piqued when the farmer begins to put edible grain into the ground, covers it with dirt and pours precious water on top of the brown dirt. All of his questions are answered with, "Just wait and see." Months later, he finally realizes just how necessary all those "strange" customs were, and how the loss of a few grains were the key to the full harvest of many.

This idea is true in many aspects, but definitely in regard to *galus* (exile). While we aren't privy to all of Hashem's master plan, we know that the *galus* is necessary to prepare our nation for future redemptions. It is a way of plowing and planting in order to harvest something even greater than before. Even when the heat of *galus* gets turned up, we must remember that this is a necessary step to the finished product. Sometimes, in hindsight, we can appreciate why these pains were necessary. Our Sages teach us that in the case of the Egyptian exile, the intensity of the slavery helped remove some of the pre-ordained years of the exile. Instead of the original 400 years decreed, the Jewish Nation now only had to endure 210 years; a crash course to arrive at the redemption. I once heard an explanation of a verse in Hallel (Psalms 118:21) based on this concept. "*Odcha ki anisani vatihi li li'shua*," which the Malbim (Rabbi Meir Leibush Wisser; 1809-1879) translates to mean, "I thank you, Hashem, for having afflicted me, and it was a salvation for me." The affliction itself is the source of the salvation! Once the salvation has come, we can, at times, look back and thank Hashem for the birth pangs which lead us to the final finished product. May we experience the final redemption, speedily in our times.

Stories For The Soul

The Squeeze is On

Rabbi Yechezkel Levenstein (1895-1974) was once in a taxi in Jerusalem. The driver, a secular Israeli who had served in the army years earlier, related the following story to the distinguished rabbi:

After he had completed his army duty, he had joined a group of soldiers on a safari trip to South America. One day, the group suddenly heard a blood-curdling scream from one of the members of the group. To their horror, they saw that a boa-constrictor had wrapped itself around their friend and was slowly squeezing the life out of him. The group began throwing rocks and sticks at the snake, but to no avail. With his last remaining breath, the man yelled, "*Shema Yisrael!*" As soon as he said those words, the snake inexplicably loosened its grip and slithered away. As a result of the miraculous event, the man joined a yeshiva and became completely observant.

After listening to the driver's incredible story, Rabbi Levenstein asked him, "What about you? After seeing such a miracle, why didn't you become observant?" The driver looked at the rabbi incredulously and replied, "Why should I have become religious? The snake wasn't wrapped around me!"

In this week's parsha, Pharaoh goes to great lengths to avoid acknowledging that there was a G-d Who was more powerful than he and his deities. His behavior ought to serve as a lesson for the rest of us not to ignore Divine messages.

Kollel Happenings

THE M.B. GLASSMAN FOUNDATION GOLD LUNCH & LEARN PROGRAM

The M.B. Glassman Foundation GOLD Program is a division of the Denver Community Kollel dedicated to bringing Torah study to seniors in the community. Don't miss a great Lunch and Learn class on the weekly parsha at the East Side Kosher Deli, 499 S. Elm St. at 12:00 am. There is no charge for the lunch or the learning! Transportation can be arranged. For more information, contact rmf@denverkollel.org or call 303-820-2855.

WINTER GARDENS WOMEN'S NIGHT OUT THIS TUESDAY, JAN. 12TH

The Kollel Women's Division will hold its 4th annual Women's Wellness Workshop this Tuesday, Jan. 12, 2016. *Winter Gardens Women's Night Out* will feature bestselling author and keynote speaker Debra Fine, *Sense-ational: An Exhilarating Experience Engaging Each of the Five Senses*, great food and camaraderie, and other delights to help you achieve health in mind, body and soul. To reserve, visit denverkollel.org, email info@denverkollel.org or call 303-820-2855.

LEARN 2 LEARN

You have long dreamed of acquiring the tools to achieve proficiency in learning Gemara on your own. But how? The Denver Community Kollel offers a comprehensive, step-by-step, level-by-level program crafted for people just like you. All you need is the ability to read Hebrew; we will teach you the rest. For more information, contact rmh@denverkollel.org.

Increase Your Jewish IQ

By Rabbi Yaakov Zions

Last week we asked: After reciting *Bameh Madlikin*, which discusses the laws of kindling the Shabbos lights, on Friday night, we insert a seemingly unrelated paragraph that begins "Amar Rebbi Elazar." At the close of *Ein Keilokeinu*, which deals with the incense offerings in the Temple, the above paragraph is again recited. Why is this paragraph inserted in these places?

A: Due to an uncertainty if *kaddish* can

be recited after any form of Torah study or only following *aggadic* (non-halachic) material, a small *aggadic* paragraph – *Amar Rebbi Elazar* – is recited, followed by *kaddish*.

This week's question: Which verse is supposed to be the final verse recited as part of the *Az Yashir* (Song of the Sea) recited every morning?

To submit an answer to Rabbi Zions, email ryz@denverkollel.org.

Lives of Our Torah Leaders

Rashi - Part V

The impact of Rashi's commentary on the Talmud cannot be overstated. Written on almost all of the tractates that comprise the Talmud, it allows the student access to a part of Torah that is exceedingly difficult to understand on its own. Rashi seeks to provide a clear, succinct, simple approach to the words of the Talmud. But the terseness can appear deceptively simple, and one with sufficient experience in Talmud study who wishes to learn a passage of Talmud with Rashi will find that he can do so with relative ease. However, when one begins to focus on Rashi's choice of words, what he chooses to say and what is omitted, an entire world opens up. Questions raised by other commentators, or by the student himself, on Rashi's approach or, for that matter, on the Talmud itself, are often resolved by Rashi through one or two perfectly-chosen and well-placed words. Thus, Rashi's commentary on the Talmud is available for the novice as well as the mature, experienced and well-informed scholar. The more one examines and plumbs the depths of his comments, the more one becomes amazed and awed at the wisdom and profundity contained in the unassuming words.

If this is true for Rashi's commentary

on the Talmud, it is a defining characteristic of his commentary on the Chumash (the Five Books of the Torah). Chumash-Rashi is a standard in Torah learning, studied by countless Jews the world over on a weekly basis as they study the weekly Torah reading. And while Rashi on Chumash can be, and is, studied and understood by five-year-old children, it contains unfathomable depths of knowledge that are plumbed by experienced Torah scholars. Entire books have been written to discuss Rashi's choices: why Rashi mentioned one Medrash or Talmudic passage while omitting another, why he chose to make a particular comment in one place and not in another, why he quoted this verse and not another; a person could devote a lifetime and hardly scratch the surface. Many other commentaries to Chumash have been written, but Rashi remains the gold standard, accessible and relevant to all ages, backgrounds and intellects.

In addition to his commentaries on the Talmud and Chumash, Rashi also wrote a commentary on *Nach* – the books of the prophets and other scriptures. He also penned numerous halachic responsa during his life, about 300 of which are still extant and published today.

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