



DELVING DEEPER

RABBI DOVID SPETNER



Torah or History?

THE TORAH IS NOT A HISTORY BOOK.

In Rashi's very first comment on Chumash, he suggests, quoting a Midrash, that the Torah should have skipped all of the book of B'reishis and begun with the first law given to the Jews as a nation—the mitzvah of *kiddush hachodesh* (sanctifying the New Moon), establishing the Jewish calendar. Rashi explains that the Torah had a good reason to share the stories of B'reishis: They provide the background that supports our claim to the Land of Israel.

From Rashi, this much is clear: Without a practical purpose, the Torah has no interest in teaching us history.

This week's Torah portion, though, contains what appears to be nothing more than a historical digression. Before Moshe and Aharon embark on their second visit to Pharaoh, the Torah tells us the lineage of the three oldest tribes, concluding with Levi, and with Moshe and Aharon in particular. Included are the respective ages at the time of death of Levi, his son K'has, and his son Amram; and the age of Moshe at the time of the Exodus.

Rashi explains the practical need for this information.

Ramban, however, makes a broader point about the role of history in the Torah. We have the text of a *d'rasha* (sermon) that

Ramban delivered, extolling the virtues of the Torah. In this work, Ramban writes that many historical points in the Torah provide the underpinnings of our belief system. By outlining the ages of Moshe's ancestors, for example, we can appreciate the sense of proximity that Moshe and those around him felt to the Patriarchs, to the Flood, and even to Creation itself. Moshe's father, Amram—most likely he, and if not, certainly his grandfather K'has—personally knew Yaakov. Yaakov in turn knew Shem, who had survived the Flood, and Shem knew his great grandfather, M'sushelach, who in turn knew Adam himself! Ramban points out that no one questions the authenticity of major historical events of even 200 years ago, despite many degrees of separation. No serious person in our time doubts the existence of Napoleon and that he ruled France. Similarly, argues Ramban, to Moshe

— CONTINUES ON NEXT PAGE —

THE RABBI WAS ASKED

ADAPTED BY RABBI DOVID TZVI MEISSNER
FROM ME'AH SHE'ARIM
BY RABBI YITZCHOK ZILBERSTEIN

Somewhere in Europe, a G-d fearing Jew passed away, leaving a large inheritance to his only son, Reuvein—\$10 million! After the *shiv'a* (the seven day period of mourning), Shimon suddenly arrived from a different country, claiming that he was a child of the deceased and deserving of some of the inheritance, bringing many proofs testifying to that fact. Reuvein, however, contended that everything Shimon said was false, and that he alone was the true son.

Shimon, who was not yet religious, decided to take Reuvein to the high court. The court ruled that a DNA test must be performed, to determine if indeed Shimon was a true son. The test

— CONTINUES ON NEXT PAGE —

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A PARASHA Q 4 U

RABBI DOVID SPETNER

We are told, somewhere in Chumash,
that three people in this week's Torah
portion did not die. Who are they?

Bring this question to the Shabbos table
and see who knows the answer! 📖

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as a source of merit for his father, Tuvia Tzvi ben Shmuel Dovid, of blessed memory

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THE RABBI WAS ASKED

CONTINUED

required a hair from the deceased, which in this instance would have to be retrieved from his grave.

Reuvein adamantly refused to let his father's body be exhumed, for this is known to cause grave spiritual anguish to the deceased. The court then informed him that if he refused to comply with the testing, he would be forced to split the inheritance with Shimon.

Q Must Reuvein, who is certain that he's an only child, forfeit substantial money (half the inheritance) to avoid performing this test, or can we say that the test would actually benefit the father, who would rather see his money go to his son, the appropriate inheritor, and not to an imposter?

A This question was asked to Rabbi Yo-sef Shalom Elyashiv, of blessed memory, who answered that there is no room to allow someone to disgrace his father's grave in order to receive his inheritance. It appears that the source for his ruling is the Talmud (Bava Basra 154a), which relates a story: Someone in B'nei Brak sold some of his father's possessions, then died. The family members protested that the sale should not be considered valid, alleging that he had been a minor when he died (and at the time of the "sale"). Rabbi Akiva was asked if they would be allowed to examine him, and he responded that it is forbidden to desecrate the dead. This implies that one may not cause disgrace to the deceased for monetary gain. 🕊

Torah or History? CONTINUED

and his world, seminal events like the Flood were accepted historical facts. He writes that it was only with the advent of Aristotle and the Greeks that the world began to deny what had heretofore been accepted as historical fact.

To the Jew and his Torah, history is not a murky past that must be pieced together like a Sherlock Holmes mystery. It is set forth clearly in our Torah.

But the Torah does not view the account of such a history as an end in itself. Rather, it is there to give us, even today, a clear sense of who we are and where we are in G-d's world. 🕊

TIDBITS OF CINCINNATI JEWISH HISTORY

RABBI MOSHE TZVI CRYSTAL

In **5674 (1914)**, Congressional Medal of Honor awardee David Urbansky was reinterred by his family in the Walnut Hills Cemetery in Cincinnati. When he died, in 1897, he had been buried in Piqua, north of Dayton, Ohio. Born in Prussia, Urbansky immigrated to America at the age of fifteen and settled in Columbus. Urbansky volunteered for the Ohio Army when the Civil War broke out, seeing action in several major battles, including Shiloh and the critical battle of Vicksburg. His bravery under fire in several instances was rewarded with the highest military honor. In fact, seven soldiers identified as Jewish were awarded the Medal of Honor during the Civil War, and four of them served in Ohio regiments; two of the others are also buried in Ohio. A total of 153 Medals of Honor were given to Ohioans during the Civil War, with at least sixteen of the awardees hailing from Cincinnati. 🕊

Rabbi Moshe
Samsonowitz
speaks to the kollel



learning
at night
seder

GREAT ACTS OF ORDINARY PEOPLE

OUTSIDE THE ROOM OF THE GERRER REBBE (also known as the *Beis Yisroel*), many people stood waiting for an audience with the Rebbe. Some came for advice, some for the Rebbe's blessing of success, and some to be uplifted.

Yekusiel and his wife had been childless for many years and had suffered much anguish. He now waited his turn, to ask the Rebbe to bless them with a child.

The night wore on. At some point, the Rebbe's attendant announced that no more people would be allowed into the room, as the Rebbe needed to rest.

Yekusiel jumped forward and demanded to see the Rebbe.

The attendant refused.

Years of pain and frustration welled up within Yekusiel, and, in a moment of anger,

he lashed out and hit the attendant across the face!

In the confusion that followed, Yekusiel dashed through the door into the Rebbe's room. The Rebbe looked up and asked Yekusiel why he had come. Yekusiel shared his story, and the Rebbe gave his blessing for a child.

As he turned to leave, Yekusiel then confessed that he was afraid to leave the room, lest the attendant be waiting to take revenge.

The Rebbe told him not to worry, and then called in the attendant. "Can you forgive Yekusiel?" the Rebbe asked his attendant.

The attendant looked at Yekusiel and the Rebbe, before responding, "I forgive him, on one condition. I'll forgive him if the Rebbe agrees to help him with his troubles." 🕊