



A LESSON FROM THE PARASHA

Touching The Soul

RABBI
MICHAEL
SOROKA

The Torah tells us Noach was righteous and without defect. He built an ark over a period of 120 years. Nonetheless, his message of impending doom fell on deaf ears. He had no effect on the people. No one listened to his message and the flood still came and wiped out humanity.

In contrast, regarding Avraham the Torah says "And the souls that he made in Charan." Our sages explain that he brought people under the wings of the Divine Presence, and that Avraham would convert the men and Sarah the women. Avraham was so successful that sources quoted in the Rambam say that tens of thousands of people joined with him.

Why was he so successful? What was his approach and how did it differ from that of Noach? I once saw a fascinating insight in the work *L'nvuchei Hat'kufa*, written by R' Moshe Avigdor Amiel (a student of R' Chaim Soloveitchik of Brisk) who explains as follows:

If you look at how humanity is referred to leading up to Avraham *Avinu*, it is with the word *basar* (literally flesh). If this is how the Torah portrays them, it is logical to assume this is be-

cause of how people viewed themselves. People viewed themselves as just "flesh," albeit in a higher form. In that world, there is destruction and anarchy. It is impossible for anyone to have an effect on another since the people don't view themselves as special and unique.

Avraham came and created a paradigm shift with one word, *Hanefesh*, "the souls." He viewed people as souls. He reminded people of their divinity and saw them through this lens.

Even the wicked king of Sedom picks up on this, as he says later in our *parasha*, "Give me the souls and take for yourself the wealth."

With this Avraham revolutionized the concept of marriage as well. Adam said Chava was a "bone from my bones." It was just a physical connection, as it says they become one "flesh." Avraham, however, says to Sarah, "my soul will live [because her]."

Perhaps, this was why he was so influential. He noticed the dominant feature of the human persona is the *nefesh*, the soul of man and the being created in the likeness of G-d. In a world of *nefesh*, man can connect and be elevated.

Let us follow the blueprint of Avraham *Avinu* and focus on the *nefesh* of our fellow man. We can see the potential greatness within everyone and therefore believe in them. Perhaps more important, though, is to focus on our own *nefesh*. We must remind ourselves that we contain the divine with us. Once we see the potential we each contain, we can then also see a spark of greatness within anyone whose path we cross.

THE RABBI WAS ASKED

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

In a certain yeshiva, the *aliyah* for *Chassan Torah* (the reading of the last portion of the Torah) was auctioned off not for money but for *blatt Gemara* (pages Talmud). Yitzchok won the auction with his pledge to learn 1,000 pages of Gemara throughout the following year.

Yitzchok subsequently forgot about his pledge, and when Rosh Hashana was approaching and he was reflecting on the past year, he suddenly remembered his pledge. He quickly did an accounting of how many pages of Gemara he learned over the course

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THE RABBI WAS ASKED

CONTINUED

of the year and calculated that he had indeed learned more than 1,000 pages of Gemara.

Q Did Yitzchok fulfill his pledge, or did he not? Since he promised to learn 1,000 pages, did he have to have intent while he learned in order to fulfill his promise, as the *halacha* for promises requires?

A *Halachos Ketanos* (Shu"t 110) rules concerning one who vows to fast tomorrow if he doesn't review a certain chapter, and then he unintentionally reviews that material. He has not fulfilled his vow, for he requires intent to exempt himself from it, and his vow remains binding.

Sama Dichaye (Shu"t Y.D. 9) discusses one who vowed to learn 18 chapters of *mishnayos* every day, as well as learning tractate Shabbos every Shabbos. One Shabbos, as he was learning his daily *mishnayos*, he realized that he was learning tractate Shabbos, and he wondered if he must relearn those chapters to fulfill his other vow. After deliberation, *Sama Dichaye* was inclined that he should relearn those chapters.

It would appear that in our scenario, everyone would agree that Yitzchok need not relearn 1,000 pages of Gemara. In the previous examples, the discussion revolved around one who specified to learn particular chapters. As such, his learning with no other

GLIMPSES OF THE KOLLEL



intention in mind is exclusive to his learning with intent to fulfill his vow.

When *aliyos* on Simchas Torah are auctioned off, however, the goal is not that specific chapters or pages should be learned, but rather to ensure the continuity of constant learning throughout the year, which Yitzchok definitely achieved.

We can suggest that all would agree that Yitzchok need not relearn the 1,000 pages of Gemara. 🕊

Mazel Tov

Mazel tov and hatzlacha to ARYEH PRIDONOFF on his election to Golf Manor village council. 🕊

A PARASHA Q 4 U

RABBI DOVID SPETNER

Name a prince and a princess mentioned in this week's *parasha*.

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

BEYOND ELLIS ISLAND

THE TRAILBLAZERS, TRIALS, & TRIUMPHS OF AMERICAN JEWRY

RABBI MOSHE TZVI CRYSTAL

Young, observant Americans at the turn of the century had a somewhat lonely existence. Several social groups were started to create common spaces for people who shared similar ideals. Most of these people faced derision in the outside world for their adherence to laws of *kashrus* and Shabbos, and associating with others in the same situation gave them the strength to continue in their path of *mitzvah* observance. One group, named *Bochurei Chemed* (Precious Sons), was started by Rabbi Shea Gold on the lower east side of Manhattan. A part of this group joined the Zeirei Agudath Israel (Junior Division of Agudath Israel) organization in 1921. Most of the young men worked during the day and then attended night high school, after which they would gather at the Z.A.I. location to learn Torah together. Other branches subsequently opened in Williamsburg, Brownsville, Boro Park, and the Bronx. A counterpart of these groups known as *Bnos Bais Yaakov* was formed for young women in 1930. The activities of both B.B.Y. and Z.A.I. were focused on Torah learning and social activities. Later, under the leadership of Mike Tress, they also turned into volunteer organizations to help their fellow Jews, such as through *tzedakah* drives or other efforts to help Jews in Europe during and after the years of World War II. 🕊

SOURCE: Scheinbaum, Rabbi A. Leib. *The World That Was America*. Pp. 26-35. Living Memorial. 2004..

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