

A LESSON FROM THE PARASHA

Are We Alive?



RABBI
ARYEH
FRIDONOFF

Rabbi Avigdor Nebenzahl, he should live and be well, asks a seemingly simple question on this week's parasha. Why did Yosef ask his brothers, "Is my father alive?" From previous episodes, Yosef surely knew that Yaakov *Avinu* was still alive. "And they said to the master, we have an elderly father" (*Bereshis* 44:20). Rav Nebenzahl answers that Yosef assumed the brothers were lying out of fear and that, in reality, Yaakov *Avinu* was not alive. This assumption was based on Yehuda's statement, "Our brother is dead," even though Yosef knew he [himself] was alive. Rabbi Ben Tzion Rothenberg, a close student of R' Neventzahl explains; perhaps Yosef was asking a deeper question when he asked, "Is my father alive?"

What does it mean for a person to be alive? There is such a thing as people who are alive physically, but have no real existence. Yosef asked, "Is my father full of *simchas hachayim* (joy of life), love of Torah and *chesed*, like he was before I was sold? Or worse...is he depressed?" This is a question we can all ask ourselves. Are we really living? But before we can answer that question, we must be aware of what life is. Ki *b'or panecha nasata lanu ... Toras chaim v'ahavas chesed*, Hashem in His greatness gave us the Torah of life and love of kindness.

Rav Noach Weinberg, ז"ל, always brought a story with this week's parasha. He quoted the Eliyahu Rabba.

One day, Eliyahu approached a man who was acting silly in front of him (*misloteitz k'negdo*). Eliyahu asked him, "Did you learn the entire Torah? The Mishnah?"

"No"

"What are you going to answer Him? Didn't He give you the Torah?"

"Great question, glad you asked. I have this worked out. I'm just going to say, 'You didn't make me smart. I never had a taste for *lomdus*, or Hebrew, or any of that stuff. You never gave me the abilities.'" (*De'ah lo nasata li, bina lo nasata li.*)

Eliyahu asked the man back, "What do you do

for a living?"

"I'm a fisherman."

"Can you explain to me what you do?"

The fisherman gave over an hour *drasha* about how to make the nets, where to place them, what time of day to check, and how to pull them out, all in more detail than anyone not a fisherman cares to know.

Eliyahu replied, "I think I understand you. And who gave you the ability to understand all this?"

The fisherman thought he had Eliyahu, "Obviously Hashem!"

"For this Hashem gave you wisdom, but not His Torah!"

The fisherman began to cry. It was getting out of hand. Eliyahu's response was for all of us. "Don't get too bent out of shape. Every one of us is going to come with the same excuses," Rav Noach continues, "and Hashem is going to say, 'Your deeds contradict your excuses.'"

A major lesson of this week's parasha is that all the excuses in the world will not make up for the fact that human beings live with contradictions. Rav Noach Weinberg understood, "Is my father alive?" was actually not a question. Yehuda said, "You can't keep my brother! Our father will die if he loses his son." Yosef exposed Yehuda's lies for what they were. "I am Yosef. Is my father alive?"

According to R' Noach, the message is clear. The purpose of exposing our lies to reality is not to whet our appetite for 11 months of *gehinnom*. Instead, it's meant to wake us up. We feel uncomfortable when our excuses are exposed, but we also think twice. We have to contemplate the consequences of continuing to live in fantasy. Hashem should give us the strength to do a proper *cheshbon hanefesh* (self-accounting), and use this contemplation for the good. We should stop making excuses for why we aren't doing things right. Let's make excuses to the *yetzer hara* for why we can't afford to listen to its tempting rationales. 🙏

THE RABBI WAS ASKED ON THE PARASHA

THIS WEEK WITH
RABBI MEIR MINSTER

Q) Why don't we count the women when counting the seventy people that went down to Egypt?

This question first needs to be rephrased, because Dina daughter of Yaakov, Serach daughter of Asher, and, according to Rashi (based on *Baba Basra* 123a), Yocheved daughter of Levi are all counted in the number of seventy. The more precise question is why only these women are counted. It is unlikely that, in fact, Yaakov had only three female descendants among sixty-six males. Rashi himself brings the *Midrash (Bereishis Rabbah 82:8)* that cites one opinion that each of Yaakov's sons was born with twin sisters.

The Torah gives us a hint to understand its counting system, when it says that this number is "aside from the wives of Jacob's sons," which R' Yehuda HaChasid (*Chumash Otzar HaRishonim*) explains to mean that husband and wife were counted as one. R' Moshe Feinstein (*Darash Moshe* —as explained by Rabbi Yisroel Reisman) further develops this same idea. The Torah says this was a count of seventy soul[s]. Man is sent to this world with a soul that is unique to him and his mission in life. The greater his role in life, the loftier is his soul. A man's wife, as his partner in life, shares parts of that same soul. They are a team; they are counted as one. There are also women, however, who have additional roles to fill, outside of their marriage, who have a loftier soul independent of their husband's mission. These women and their souls were counted separately here. The other daughters and granddaughters of Yaakov were counted together with their husbands as one.

Were they all married?

R' Reisman notes that in the very beginning of *Shemos*, when it also mentions the

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THE RABBI WAS ASKED ON THE PARASHA

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seventy, it adds these words “each man and his household came.” The *meforshim* (commentators) there explain that Yaakov made sure that all his descendants were married before they came to Egypt in order to give them the spiritual stronghold and security that comes from building a Jewish home together with their wives and to enable them to face the challenges of living there. It was Yaakov’s vision that his children go down to Egypt as couples, as a team, forming one strong household. (One of my *Rebbeim*, a child of Holocaust survivors, told me that his parents were married during the war as very young teenagers, for similar reasons. It was thought that the young people would have more fortitude and strength to survive if they were living not just for themselves, but for their developing Jewish homes.)

The one exception was Yocheved, who was first born as they arrived in Egypt, and obviously was not married. This is an additional reason why she was counted among the seventy. 🕯

Something always bugged you about the upcoming parasha (or last week’s)? Ask! If you would like to submit a question on the parasha, please email it to parasha@cincynkollel.org. Questions will be selected to address at the discretion of the Rabbi who is answering that week. Questions may be edited for brevity/clarity.

A SHINING EXAMPLE

As the Genack and Gelman families celebrated the engagement of their children, Bubby Genack and Gelman sat at the dining room table enjoying a vigorous round of Jewish geography. While they were talking, though, there was something nagging at Bubby Genack’s mind. “Where have I seen her before?” ran through her mind. Suddenly, it clicked. She flashed back to when her mother had tried to enroll her and her sister into school in Brooklyn. Her mother was informed that the tuition was non-negotiable. The school was very hard up even paying the paltry salaries that they could offer their teachers; they were not in a position to offer scholarships. Her mother thanked the director and left, all of them knowing there was no way they would have the money for the girls to go to school. Despondent, Mrs. Genack knew there was no way, barring a miracle, she could come up with the money. As she slowly walked home with her girls, another Jewish woman noticed her downcast expression and

NEW FRIDAY PROGRAM FOR BOYS

All boys 1st-5th grade are invited to join us for “Erev Shabbos Torah Time” on zoom from 4:20-4:50pm on Fridays. R’ Heinemann will share Halacha, Parshah and Stories followed by a raffle!

The Zoom link to join is:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82614131979?pwd=UjVSdE5pVDhVR2hnbzJoNl0rM0QwZz09>

Meeting ID: 826 1413 1979

Passcode: 2241

call in # (646) 568-7788

A BA’AL HATURIM FOR YOU

The *parasha* relates that Yosef brought all the money of Egypt which had been earned through the sale of grain, *baisa Paraoh*, into the house of Paraoh. *Ba’al Haturim* brings that the other place that the words *baisa Paraoh* are used is regarding the plague of wild beasts, where the Torah describes that the animals went *baisa Paraoh*, into the house of Paraoh. The connection, says *Ba’al Haturim*, is that since Paraoh ignored the good that Yosef did for him, the wild animals entered Paraoh’s house first. 🕯

Yaakov ben Asher, known as the *Ba’al Haturim*, was a scholar and biblical commentator who lived most of his life in Spain from approximately 1275 to approximately 1340. His classic commentary is printed in many editions of the *Chumash*.

asked kindly what the problem was. Mrs. Genack tearfully related her issue, to which the stranger responded, “Come with me.” They walked back to the school and back into the office. “I just am coming in to confirm enrollment for these two girls here,” the woman said. “I will also be taking responsibility to raise the money for their tuition, so please send me the invoices. Thank you.” Speechless, it was all Mrs. Genack could do to thank her benefactor. The Genack girls never really knew who this woman was, who had agreed to raise all that money for tuition. Until now. Bubby Genack suddenly said to Bubby Gelman, “Do you realize who I am?” When she told her, and the rest of the family assembled soon after, the celebration and the union of these two families took on quite an added meaning. 🕯

THE FALSE MESSIAHS OF JEWISH HISTORY

RABBI NOSSON WIGGINS

SHABBTAI TZVI (PART I)

The Jewish nation didn’t fast on the 9th of Av, 1626, not because Moshiah had arrived, but simply because the 9th of Av coincided with Shabbos. Coincidentally, on the very same day, a baby boy was born in Izmir, Turkey, to Rabbi Mordechai Tzvi and his wife. Since their son was born on Shabbos, his parents named him Shabbtai. Mordechai Tzvi, originally from Greece, had crossed the Aegean Sea and settled in the coastal town of Izmir. Mordechai soon became a prosperous merchant in Izmir, which had recently developed into a busy trading post between the east and the west. As a young child, Shabbtai Tzvi received a classic Torah education in Izmir, and subsequently studied under one of the prominent spiritual leaders of Izmir—Rabbi Yosef Escapa. Aside from his gifted intellectual abilities, Shabbtai Tzvi stood handsome and tall above his peers, and by his late teens had already received his rabbinic ordination and was awarded the prestigious title of *Chacham*. Shortly after, Shabbtai Tzvi began to delve into the study of *kabbala*. In the beginning of his *kabbala* studies, Shabbtai Tzvi would maintain a rigorous learning schedule in his father’s home in Izmir, but would occasionally venture out to the fields to study the deep secrets of *kabbala*. Gradually, Shabbtai Tzvi’s desire to delve deeper into the mystical spheres intensified. In order to attain the proper level of sanctity needed for such immersion in *kabbala*, Shabbtai restrained himself from worldly pleasure and would often ritually immerse his body in freezing cold waters. However, Shabbtai Tzvi’s conduct in public was vastly different; thus the eligible bachelor earned himself a reputation as an outstanding and diligent Torah scholar.

Shabbtai Tzvi’s first wife, the daughter of a prominent and wealthy family in Izmir, was rather shocked by the extreme behavior her new husband displayed in their home, and she discreetly reported her uneasiness to her father. Just a few months after their marriage, Shabbtai Tzvi was forced to divorce his new wife. His next attempt at marriage was a dismal failure as well, which likewise ended in divorce. Around this time, Shabbtai Tzvi’s behavior became noticeably stranger. Mood swings were common, and Shabbtai Tzvi would experience bouts of severe depression followed by feelings of intense ecstasy. These schizophrenic outbursts pointed to Shabbtai Tzvi’s mental and emotional instability and caused many locals in Izmir to keep a distance from him. But others were enchanted by his gracious personality, his fantastic musical talents, and his outstanding oratory skills. 🕯