

INSIGHTS from the SEDRA

Insights from the Sedra is a project of the Scholar's Kollel of Great Neck. It aims to provide several questions and answers about the Sedra, culled from various commentaries, including the following: Baal Haturim, Darash Moshe, Vedibarta Bam by Rabbi Moshe Bogomilsky, Torah Treasures by Dov Furer, Wellsprings of Torah by Alexander Friedman, and Kol Dodi by Rabbi Dovid Feinstein, Great Torah Lights by Rabbi Yitzchak Meir Goodman, Something To Say by Rabbi Dovid Goldwasser, The Vilna Gaon, Growth Through Torah by Zelig Pliskin and The Call of the Torah.

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Ruvane & Stephanie Vilinsky in memory of Tzvi Ben Yakov & Shimon Ben Pinchus z"l**

ואלה שמות בני ישראל הבאים מצרימה את יעקב איש וביתו באו

“And these are the names of the children of Israel who came to Egypt with Yaakov, each coming with his household.” (1:1)

Rashi comments that although Hashem counted them when they were still alive, he recounted them after their death to make known how precious they are to Him.

Most people in the world at large will affect society only during the course of their own lifetimes, if at all. Certainly, those who do merit to have an impact are often forgotten once they are dead and gone. As *Shlomo HaMelech* stated: אין זכרון לראשונים וגם לאחרונים שיהיו לא יהיה להם – זכרון עם שיהיו לאחרנה – *As there is no recollection of the former ones, so too, of the latter ones that are yet to be, there will be no recollection among those of a still later time (Kohelet 1:11).*

In contrast, the impact (*names*, as in this verse) of members of the Jewish people extends long after their departure from this world. Their life is eternal. They implant holiness, faith and fear of G-d – attributes that will never be destroyed. Just as seeds are concealed beneath the ground, only to sprout forth with fruit, so will the traits of holiness implanted by the righteous live on, continuing to bear fruits, forever. (Rabbi Nisson Alpert)

ויקם מלך חדש על מצרים אשר לא ידע את יוסף

“A new king arose over Egypt, who did not know of Yosef...” (1:8)

This was *מדה כנגד מדה*, *one measure corresponding to another measure*. *Yosef* had done his best to try and prevent his people from assimilating into the surrounding culture. He designated a specific place for them to live – *Goshen*, and, in order to remove any possible hesitancy, the Jews might have about becoming circumcised, went so far as to decree that even the Egyptians should undergo the procedure.

Hashem's Name never left *Yosef's* mouth, nor did his father's image cease from appearing before his eyes. *Yosef* further demonstrated his distaste for Egypt by commanding the Jewish people not to leave his bones behind when they would eventually leave the country.

Despite *Yosef's* efforts, however, the Jew rejected his wishes – at least according to one possible understanding of the verse that precedes ours, ותמלא הארץ אתם – *and the land became*

filled with them (1:7). According to this reading, rather than heed *Yosef's* warnings, they had begun to assimilate into the surrounding culture. The Jews had chosen not to emulate *Yosef*, rather they had “forgotten” him. Therefore, מדה כנגד מדה, a new king arose, one who, likewise, did not “know” *Yosef*, but had forgotten him. (Rabbi Nisson Alpert)

כי המקום אשר אתה עומד עליו אדמת קדש הוא

“For the place where you stand is holy ground” (3:5)

Our Sages tell us, “Do not say, ‘When I get free time, I will learn Torah,” for a man tells himself that when Hashem improves his situation, then he will occupy himself in Torah and *mitzvot* – but not now when he is troubled and burdened.

The verse tells us otherwise, *The place upon which you are standing is holy ground*. That is, the present situation and present time – whatever it may be- is “holy ground,” for possibly, Hashem wants you to serve Him precisely now when it is not easy for you. Indeed, our Sages have said, “*If a man learns Torah when it is difficult for him, his reward is one thousand; when things are going smoothly for him, the reward is only two hundred* (Midrash Rabbah, Shir HaShirim, chapter 8).” They also said, “*L’fum tzara agra* – the reward is commensurate with the difficulty involved.”

(Chafetz Chaim)

אלם או חרש או פקח או עור

“...mute or deaf or clear-sighted or blind...” (4:11)

The question arises: Why does the Torah list the clear-sighted among the roster of the physically impaired? It is in order to remind every whole and healthy person that he too has many blemishes, faults, and imperfections.

(Baal Shem Tov)

בני בכרי ישראל

“My firstborn son is Israel.” (4:22)

Why is *Yisrael* referred to as Hashem’s firstborn? Certainly, from a chronological perspective there would not seem to be any basis for such a title. The Torah records the name of many great and mighty nations that existed long before the emergence of *Yisrael*.

The outstanding feature, however, of a firstborn is that by virtue of his birth he bestows fatherhood on his father, allowing him use of the title “father.”

Similarly, by declaring to the universe the sovereignty of Hashem as the sole Creator and Master of all destiny, *Yisrael* caused Hashem to be recognized as the Father, the Prime Cause of all Creation, in effect performing the function of the firstborn. (Meshech Chochmah)

SHABBAT SHALOM!

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