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parashas terumah



This week’s parsha sheet is dedicated in loving memory of Sarah Tzipporah bas Betzalel, a”h. May the learning of it be an illuy Neshamah for her.

From every person whose heart inspires him to generosity, you shall take My offering” (Shemos 25:2)

OSTENSIBLY THIS IS a parsha about the building of the Mishkan and the crafting of its implements. As such, it is one of the lesser dramatic parshios, not one that most people look forward to each year. This week’s parsha, and Tetzaveh after it, seems more like an introduction to the drama of Parashas Ki Sisa.

But that is only the way it appears ostensibly. Dig a little deeper and you will see that this parsha, perhaps more than most, is about the most important topic in all of Cre-

ation: FREE WILL. Knowing this turns the tables and makes it appear as if the other parshios are introductions to this week's parsha.

Free will? Who needs a parsha about free will? It's simple, isn't it? You have a choice between things, and you choose one something over the another. Breakfast or no breakfast? Eggs or cereal? Regular coffee or decaf? (As I write this I am trying to decide whether to snack on cashews or pistachios. Tough choice, so I am having some of BOTH. I'll have the Macadamia nuts later.)

It is true that we make choices all day long, all of our lives, ever since we first reached for something as toddlers. Maybe even earlier. That is not the tricky part. To be conscious is to make choices, though very few choices are really that conscious.

The tricky part is the FREE part. We may make choices all the time, but we may make very few actually FREE choices our ENTIRE lives. I know that this is a shocker, especially for people who have grown up in the "the land of the free and the home of the brave." It was the only country created, at least in the West, to guarantee FREE choice.

Heck, the society is so open you can choose to do just about anything you want and get away with it. What could get you locked up or maybe even shot by a firing squad in less "free" countries gets you celebrity status in the States, and a lot of applause. If any place promoted FREE choice, surely it is America!

This is an easy but dangerous mistake to make. And, it is ironic that something so basic as free will choice should be so vastly misunderstood, which is why the Torah chose to teach about it in this week's parsha, as it says:

God spoke to Moshe saying: “Speak to the Children of Israel, and have them take for Me an offering. From every person whose heart inspires him to generosity, you shall take My offering.” (Shemos 25:1-2)

It’s not so obvious at first, but this seemingly simple and obvious verse is creating the CHALLENGE and GIFT of a lifetime. It is creating something rare and valuable that many people try to imitate but don’t quite get right. It is creating a FREE WILL CHOICE.

In everyday terms, it’s called “putting your money where your mouth is.” There’s a reason for the expression, and why people use with respect to money and nothing else. It’s for the same reason it’s mentioned in the “Shema,” which tells us to serve God with “all our possessions,” i.e., money.

“But if we’re told to serve God with all of our hearts and all of our lives,” the Talmud asks, “isn’t it obvious that we should serve God with all of our possessions as well?” Not when someone values their money more than their life, the Talmud answers, and that can be most of us, to some degree.

As someone who has done some fundraising, I have witnessed firsthand how difficult a time people have letting go of their money. As someone who has been fundraised from, I can tell you how difficult it is for ME to give up my money.

Obviously people who have little of it will cherish every dollar (or shekel where I come from) they have. But it’s not just the people with little money who have the difficulty. Even wealthy people sometimes have a tough time parting with their money, and for a good reason too.

Money is many things, but above all, it is independence. The more we have, the freer we feel. It is power, and key to open locked doors. It is the potential to do so much that makes our lives more comfortable and more secure. When we give it away, it feels as if we're giving up some of that, no matter how much we have left.

It's that resistance that we want, or rather, NEED. It's what activates our power of free will because it's the overcoming of that resistance that frees our will. Free will is only free once it overcomes the urge, a.k.a, the yetzer hara, to do the un-Godly thing.

The average person can resist the temptation to choose evil over good. The above average person can resist the desire to choose a lesser good over a better good. But, it is only the GREAT people who can choose amazingly good over very good because, for most people, very good is already amazingly good.

It's that choice, the verse from this week's parsha, God leaves up to us. He doesn't say that it should be easy to give up our possessions to serve Him. He just wants to know how WILLING we are to do it, and that really comes down to how much we understand what free will is, and how much we cherish our free will decisions.

Speaking of which, Sarah Tzipporah bas Betzalel, a"h, in whose memory this week's Perceptions is dedicated was such a person. She gave of herself and her money quite freely to help others, to do the Godly thing. It was important to her to build up others and make them feel important and accomplished. Now that she has ascended to higher worlds, I am sure she will continue to be this way on behalf of all of us she left behind.

Connecting the Dots, Issue #16

In a recent article in Israel Breaking News in which I was quoted, it mentioned a prediction by Rabbi Chaim Kanievsky, shlita. According to the Rav, there would be no need for the upcoming Israeli election, since Moshiach will be here by that time, a result in part because of increased action in the north.

Of course such an article is making the rounds, and some people have contacted me asking if the prediction is authentic. The assumption is that if I am part of the article, I must have signed on because I have verified the quote as being accurate and from Rav Chaim himself.

Unfortunately, that is not true. Like in most cases, I am simply interviewed individually, and then my comments are added to the article. I was certainly made aware of the quote by Mr. Berkowitz, but I'm pretty sure he did not quite direct verification of the quote as well.

It does not mean that Rav Chaim did NOT say what it says in his name. It's just means that it is hard to know if he said it, or how he said it, and to whom he said it, and why he said it, etc. And if he DID say it, does it count as prophecy and we should prepare for its fulfillment, or was it said as a hope, one which many of us share?

One thing I DO know for certain is that Rav Chaim's mindset is that the Final Redemption is imminent. I know this because someone I can rely upon asked his rebbetzin, a"h, about the matter, and she said then, about 10 years ago, that her husband is of the belief that Moshiach will reveal himself in the very near future.

So, whether the Rav said what is quoted in his name about the upcoming elections or not, his overall belief about an imminent redemption says more than enough to warn us about how we should be living today. We should be WAKING up, not hitting the snooze button and

rolling over.

Not a week goes by, and sometimes not even a day, that I don't receive some email about what's going in the States, none of it good. Of course good still happens there, but no one is upset about that. The good doesn't scare, it encourages. It strengthens. It makes people feel better about life.

It's the bad stuff that makes people nervous. They worry about where society is going, especially if they are still a part of it. "If they're doing that today, then what will they be doing tomorrow?" That is the concern.

But every time I get those emails and read them, or watch the clip, I wonder to myself, "What is the point? What is this supposed to do? What is this supposed to change? Who is it supposed to affect? The people who need to listen won't. The people who need to move say they can't. Is it about going down, and just knowing who the culprit is?"

It makes you feel so helpless. That's what led me to write the following for those who did not see it last week, also on IBN.

Dear God,

What's with the Final Redemption? We could really use it now. I know, I know, we have it SO good compared to previous generations, most recently the generation of the Holocaust. I mean, they must have REALLY begged You for YEARS to bring Moshiach, and, well, here we are today, still Moshiach-less.

I am not questioning Your judgment AT ALL. You have Your calculations, and I have learned a little about how complex and MYSTERIOUS they can be. You've known

from “Day One” what has to be accomplished throughout human history, and I am sure everything is just fine by You, and on schedule. The view from Heaven always includes past, present, and this is the best part, FUTURE as well.

Being perfect, everything You DO is perfect. No matter how much we conspire to undo Your good, and do things our own limited and self-destructive way, I know that You’re always tons of steps ahead of us, righting our wrongs before we have even committed them.¹

But I have to tell you, the view from here is, well, let’s just say, not nearly as pleasant as Yours. We don’t have a good handle on the present because we tend to ignore the past and have little or no knowledge of the future. Once upon a time we had prophets. Today, we seem more interested in profits.

We could sure use some of the original kind, although we probably wouldn’t listen to them anyhow. After all, You left us prophecies, and hardly anyone pays attention to them. They warn about events destined to occur at the End-of-Days, but people act as if that will only happen in a parallel universe, not their own. A lot of good that does.

You even allowed us to witness some of those prophecies coming true before our very eyes. I mean, here we are again, after TWO THOUSAND years, back in our land, just as You predicted!² How many other nations have experienced such a national revival after so long? NONE.

You gave us the land in spite of ourselves, and despite so much international pressure to keep it away from us.

¹ Megillah 13b.

² Devarim 30:1-5.

Our “neighbors” even had the audacity to fight You over it, and were beaten back every time. We’ve never had the manpower or machinery to last this long, at least not without YOUR help.

The miracles have been MANY, and AWESOME, and yet too few of Your children seem to notice that. Some have even taken to trying to reverse what You have done, again. There are a few of us who believe that all Your miraculous kindness to allow the Jewish people come home and prosper, materially AND spiritually, is a sign of impending redemption. But for the rest of the nation it’s still a VERY hard sell.

I get their issues, and I sympathize with their problems. My brothers and sisters in the Diaspora are firmly rooted in their foreign lands. They’ve bought homes and taken out mortgages. They have started businesses and built up entire communities. They have good yeshivos and, let’s face it, GREAT lives. For some, it’s like living in the Messianic Era, just WITHOUT Moshiach.

Furthermore, how much were they taught about redemption growing up? Yes, the Talmud says that this is one of the six questions we will be asked on the Day of Judgment: “Did you anticipate redemption?”³ How many people were even told that in yeshivah, or shul? How many rabbis or teachers spoke about that from the bimah during the last 50 years? Exactly!

So most people grow up in the Diaspora NOT anticipating redemption. Why should they, if they believe they are living it while in exile? If you haven’t built a redemption framework as a child, then you end up without a redemption framework as an adult.

³ Shabbos 31a.

Once upon a time, before the Diaspora became so cozy for Jews, great rabbis warned us about giving up on redemption. Even the TALMUD warned us about giving up on redemption.⁴ But how many even learn those seforim or sections of Talmud today?

If only people would study that holy sefer “Ohr Yechezkel,” by the Mashgiach Ruchani of the Mir and Ponovez yeshivos in the 1960s, Rabbi Yechezkel Levenstein, zt”l. In “Emunas HaGeulah,” he tells it like it is, or at least the way it’s supposed to be. And he was brave enough to tell the Torah world how EMPTY their prayers are when they ask for a redemption they do not even take seriously.

You are a MERCIFUL God, however. If it were up to mankind, we’d probably have abandoned the Jewish people long ago.⁵ But there You are, as always, sticking with us, even making events occur to wake us up and smell the coffee, so to speak. You know what I mean.

Antisemitism, of course, is the most obvious of these events. Well, to some of us at least, those who realize that antisemitism is not just racism. Racism is against people with undesirable differences. Antisemitism seems to get worse as differences between “us” and “them” lessen.

That’s why they say things like “There’s nothing better for the Jew than antisemitism.” Unless, of course, the “Jew” is trying to assimilate. It was Hitler, ysv”z, who basically taught us, in no uncertain terms, that all the waters in the world can’t baptize a Jew.

But what do you expect from a religion whose very origin hints to future antisemitism?⁶ As the Talmud con-

⁴ Sanhedrin 97b.

⁵ Shabbos 89b.

⁶ Shabbos 89a.

cludes, Mt. Sinai is called so because it comes from the word “sinah,” which means “hatred,” an allusion to future antisemitism. Its “nickname” is “Chorev,” from a word that means “destruction.”

And some gentiles have STILL wanted to convert to Judaism?

It’s a hot topic, antisemitism. It’s increased so very much in recent times. Actually, it has never really gone away, just our ability to recognize it for what it is. Ya’akov Avinu understood that antisemitism was as natural as the sun rising and setting each day.⁷ He knew about his father-in-law’s hatred for him (Lavan was the Arami that the Haggadah says tried to kill us), and that it was only held in check by God, MIRACULOUSLY, so that he could accomplish what he had to while at Lavan’s home.

Therefore, when Lavan’s “displeasure” with Ya’akov returned one fine “summer day,”⁸ Ya’akov had no illusions about what it meant. He didn’t just see Lavan smiling with less enthusiasm, or just hear his brothers-in-law falsely libeling him. He heard God speaking to him, saying “Good work, the job is done, it’s time to return home.”

So after 20 years of living somewhere else, Ya’akov Avinu uprooted it all. True, he had been living in someone else’s home the entire time. True, he didn’t have a mortgage to pay off, or relatives who could not move with him. True, he was going back to an already established home, where his parents lived and awaited his return, and the chinuch was probably a LOT better.

ALL true.

Dealing with all THOSE THINGS, as many Diaspora

⁷ Sifri, BeHa’alosecha 69.

⁸ Bereishis 31:2.

Jews have to, definitely warrants divine assistance, some of it, perhaps, even with the help of the Jewish Agency. Absolutely it should invoke a lot of sympathy and empathy from those already living in the Holy Land (Israel, in case someone is confused).

Anyone thinking “I told you so,” should keep it to himself. Okay, so you WARNED people decades ago that the end was near and that they should start thinking about making aliyah. So you chided rabbis for not teaching their congregations and students about redemption. So you WERE prophetic. It still doesn’t give you the right to shove it back in their faces at a time when people need mercy and support. I’m sure God feels the same way.

But if “Churban Europe” taught us anything at all, it is that when it is time to go, it doesn’t matter how rooted we have become in the Diaspora. There were people who saw what was coming and left most of what they owned behind, getting out while they could. They lived and were able to start their lives in better places.

The rest only lived long enough to wish they had. Almost everyone else not only lost their “roots,” they lost their lives, and in the cruelest ways possible. They witnessed the extinction of entire families. More than one must have wondered to himself why he did not get out earlier, like some of his family and friends did—those who at one time had seem to be overreacting.

Which brings me to the reason for this letter, dear God.

Why don’t we EVER get it? Why do we ALWAYS seem to repeat our errors? A terrible act of antisemitism occurs and Jews minimize its meaning. An antisemitic Arab is accepted into the American political system with open arms, and Jewish leaders merely respond to Democrat

leaders by calling it a “slap in the face.” Why don’t they talk about it with YOU instead, and pray for insight into what it REALLY means?

History is screaming “antisemitism!” but Diaspora Jews are only hearing “racism!” They’re hearing the anti-semites talk, and not God. You are saying “Good work, the job is done, it’s time to return home,” but they’re hearing, “Write to your congressperson and right this official wrong!” Aren’t they missing something?

Sometimes when I look back over the millennia, I wonder if everything that has happened, and WILL happen, is truly b’shert. Maybe it just HAS to happen.⁹ Perhaps, for reasons beyond our understanding, the suffering just HAS to take place. Stop the War of Gog and Magog? Maybe it’s simply impossible. Maybe it truly is written in stone, the ones Moshe Rabbeinu descended Mt. Sinai with — the SECOND time.¹⁰

This would explain why we do not learn from history, even though we have been warned to,¹¹ and let it repeat itself at OUR expense. It would explain why some people just NEVER see the truth until it is all over them, and they can’t escape it—literally. It would clarify why, no matter how many sources I marshal, and “evidence” I muster that we are close to the Final Redemption, people just balk.

UGHHHH! It’s SO frustrating, like a splinter in your mind that is annoying you but which you cannot remove. But I guess if Moshe Rabbeinu couldn’t remove it until You told him to, or did it for him, then why should we expect something different? We shouldn’t.

⁹ Koheles Rabbah.

¹⁰ Drushei Olam HaTohu, Chelek 2, Drush 4, Anaf 22, Siman 5.

¹¹ Devarim 32:7.

So, where does this leave me, besides intellectually challenged and emotionally uptight? I guess, where it always does, before You and with a prayer in my mind and heart. It may not help Jewish history, but at least it will help me feel as if I tried.

Anyhow, I'll condense this, since I've already taken up too much of Your time, even if you ARE eternal. Here goes:

Dear God, merciful and almighty, please show us what we need to know and do. Show us mercifully, and in time to avoid any kind of disaster, to expedite the Final Redemption. Show us the right buttons to press so that the rest of history falls into place, in the RIGHT place. Send us Your beloved emissary, our righteous Moshiach, our future king, to lead us to redemption, in a way that impresses everyone and tests no one. Give us the wherewithal to sanctify Your great and holy name through life, and not through death, with pleasure and not with pain. Give us the intelligence and the energy to work hard to earn our portion of redemption in this world, and eternal reward in the next one. As our rabbis have written in the Talmud, "You created the yetzer hara, and You created the Torah to be its spice." Show us, ALL of us, how to use the latter to rectify the former, and make You proud of our accomplishment and happy that You made us in the first place. Amen!