

The Torah Any Times

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Rabbi Zechariah Wallerstein zt"l Not Your Size

Years ago, a young 31-year-old woman with a wonderful spirit and generous heart living in the Five Towns, New York, passed away. The tragedy was compounded even further by the fact that her husband had passed too some years before. Between them, they left a 7-year-old orphaned son with no mother or father. It was a reeling sorrow for the community, aside from the entirety of Klal Yisrael. With no parents to raise him, the boy found a new home with his grandparents. I knew of this woman, as her sister attended my seminary.

The Friday morning of shiva, I headed to the grandparents' home to be menachem avel. As Shacharis was called for 7 a.m. and the young boy wasn't up yet, I took a seat next to the grandfather, the father of the woman who had passed away. I remained silent at first, as my mind raced with thoughts of what I could possibly tell him to provide a dose of comfort. Waiting until I felt it was appropriate, I began relaying the core of my shiur I had given around Purim time about how Esther was born with no parents (her father passing away before she was born, and her mother passing away when she was born). This apparent tragedy turned out to be a necessary precursor, as only the merit of attaining a perfect record of kibbud av va'em—which is considered for one who never

merited to honor their parents due to their early passing—was great enough to grant her the eligibility of becoming queen. "Don't tell your grandson now," I went on to say, "but when he gets older and grows up, this Midrash might be comforting to him. There was someone else who had no parents as a young child, and she ended up becoming Queen Esther. He too can become as great in his own right."

As the grandfather allowed my words to settle, he turned back to me and composed himself. "Rabbi, you speak a lot, and I want to tell you something that you can share. My daughter for the last ten years of her life worked in a clothing store in the Five Towns. A few days ago, my daughter's good friend came here and told me something that I never knew. 'I have something to share with you,' she said. 'Your daughter swore me to secrecy never to tell anybody, but now that she's passed, I think I can tell you. It should be a source of merit for her neshama.' The grandfather had no idea what information his daughter's friend would spring on him.

"Your daughter had a secret," began the friend. "As you know, she herself was very slender. One day she told me that every time a girl walks into the store and she's a little overweight, she does the same thing. She doesn't bring her a dress that is her size and will fit her well; instead, she brings her a size bigger than she

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needs. When she does this, and then the customer puts it on, her reaction is, 'It's too big.' And if her mother is accompanying her, she might add, 'You see! Not everything is too small on me! Look, I lost weight!' Every single girl who may have been conscious or embarrassed of her weight and walked into the store received this response. And every single girl ended up feeling good, knowing that there are other clothes that don't fit her. For ten years this was your daughter's secret."

As the grandfather relayed this to me, I sat still, no words coming to mind. Remarkable. A simple, little idea that meant more to others than would have ever been assumed.

"Seeing" someone else is a Jewish secret. It is the verb used to describe Avraham's behavior when he

"saw" the angels approaching his tent in the scorching heat of the desert, and how Yosef "saw" the butler and baker who looked downtrodden one morning as they sat in jail and he showed them he cared. 'Why is your face downcast?' were Yosef's words.

This 31-year-old woman had a very hard life. You'd think that she was able to worry about everyone else because her life was great. It wasn't. She had lots of personal woes and worries to deal with. But it didn't spell a difference to her. She came up with this little idea, and who knows how many hundreds of girls walked out of that store happy, and perhaps even positively encouraged. "I lost a little bit of weight; who knows, maybe I can lose a bit more?" Daughters walked out uplifted and mothers and daughters walked out together

in good spirits.

Where does this come from? Being a Rosh Yeshiva, a Rebbetzin, Mama Rachel? From a woman who worked in a clothing store. She "looked" at others and saw their struggle. That's the hallmark of greatness. The merits of this young woman will continue to reverberate for her in Gan Eden for eternity.

If you have the sensitive eye to peer beyond the humdrum of life, embedded there behind it all are layers upon layers of opportunity. And when you seize them, you will be capturing a gem. A gem that will brighten up the life of all those around you, and leave them just a little bit more loving of themselves and the beautiful life Hashem gave them.

Rebbetzin Esther Jungreis a"h

The Story of Our People

Every word in the Torah deserves careful thought and consideration. Let us delve into a few such examples and discover its messages for us in our world and lives today.

Our Parsha records how Pharaoh reacted to the rapid increase of Jewish life by remarking, "The nation, the Jewish people, are more numerous and stronger than us" (Shemos 1:9). When we think about this statement of Pharaoh, we cannot help but wonder what he meant. The Jews were a vulnerable, minority nation relative to the Egyptian superpower, containing millions upon millions of native Egyptians. How could Pharaoh have said that the Jews outnumbered them in size and strength?

A close look at the verse, how-

ever, shows another layer to the story. Pharaoh's concern was not rooted in believing the Jewish people to be greater in number or power than the Egyptians. His precise words were: "Am bnei Yisroel rav v'atzum mi'menu—The nation, the Jewish people, are more numerous and stronger 'mi'menu,' from us." Pharaoh's objection was that the Egyptians were being taken advantage of. Pharaoh faulted the Jews for exploiting the Egyptians and amassing personal wealth by manipulating Egypt.

I have often repeated the timeless words of our Sages: "That which happened to our forefathers portends what will happen to us, their children, in later generations" (Bereishis Rabbah 40:6). Pharaoh's words can be found on so many of our streets today, thousands of

years later. Think of the time when one Jewish man with a beard walks down the street. The reaction of many is to exclaim, "This neighborhood is full of Jews!" One Jew is there, and suddenly every Jew is there.

I once spoke to a rabbi who had visited Mexico. He had gotten into a taxi and asked the driver, "Are there any Jews here?" to which the driver responded, "Oh senor, millions of Jews!" Would you believe it? Nothing changes across the annals of our Jewish nation. What Pharaoh said are the same words that have been said by global leaders and laymen for years and years, to this very day. When we examine the Torah and glean its messages and lessons, we are not reading a history book. We are reading the daily newspaper.

Our Sages teach that assimilation on part of the Jewish people into Egyptian life was rampant (Zohar Chadash, Yisro 31a). Now, what

precipitated such absorption and integration of Jewish families into Egyptian culture? The Torah states, “U’bnei Yisroel paru... va’ya’atzmu b’moad meod” (Shemos 1:7). Literally translated, these words mean, “The Children of Israel were fruitful...and became strong—very, very much so...” But let us ask: what does the Torah mean that the Jews become very, very strong? In what way did they grow strong?

We recite in the Shema that we are instructed to love G-d “with all your heart, with all your soul, and all your me’odecha.” What does me’odecha mean? It is a codeword for money (Berachos 54a). To some people, in fact, their wealth means more to them than their very life (ibid. 61b). The Jewish nation in Egypt prospered very, very much with wealth. And when money becomes the centerpiece of a Jew’s life, assimilation is right behind. “Yeshurun (a reference to the Jewish people) became fat and kicked” (Devarim 32:15). One thing leads to another. An inflated sense of ego leads one to believe that all their success stems from their own power and doing, and none of it has to do with Hashem. And when that becomes the personal or national belief, assimilation follows. It can be a wonderful blessing to be wealthy, providing that a person is very careful with how he channels this blessing.

At the end of Sefer Bereishis, Pharaoh tells the people of Egypt, “Go to Yosef. Do whatever he tells you” (Bereishis 41:55). The people of Egypt had approached Yosef asking for food. Yosef, hearing their request, agreed to provide them with their needs on one condition: they needed to circumcise themselves first. Taken aback, the Egyptians approached Pharaoh and inquired if they should in fact follow along with Yosef’s directive. To this, Pharaoh responded, “Do whatever he tells you.”

Why, though, was Yosef insistent that the Egyptians circumcise themselves? There is no commandment for an Egyptian to be circumcised.

Yosef was a man of insight and wisdom, and knew that in due time the Jews would grow accustomed to Egyptian culture and life. When that would occur, the distinction between Jews and Egyptians would grow thin. To counterbalance this, Yosef knew that he needed to implement some way that would help the Jewish nation constantly be reminded of their Jewish heritage and mission. But how? Through remembering that they had entered into a covenant with Hashem, as had been passed down throughout the generations starting with Avraham. This reminder most vividly finds itself on the Jewish body in the form of bris milah.

Yosef knew that when the Jewish people would live in the land of Egypt, if all males—both Egyptians and Jews—would be circumcised, the Jews would not be hesitant or ashamed to enter the bathhouse, and in doing so, they could come to remember they were Jewish. Through this process, they would come in touch with their Jewish identities and recall who they were as a nation of G-d.

But what happened? Pharaoh banned the rite of circumcision. And why? Because the Jewish people abandoned it first. And if the Jewish nation abandoned it, Hashem would remove their merit and ability to perform Jewish circumcision.

When we follow the dictates and directives of Hashem, He provides us with ample blessing to fulfill the Torah. When we don’t, however, we must often be stripped of the precious opportunity to carry out the Torah, only for us to yearn for its return and renewal. And in that way, we alter our ways, change our lifestyles, and return to our pristine place as dedicated individuals and communities under our Father in Heaven. Ever there be a period when such circumstances become the reality of our time, there is only one way to turn: up to our Father, Whose love for us never changes and never wanes and is always ready for us with open arms.

Rabbi YY Jacobson

On A Mission

November 2008 spelled a dark time for the Jewish community in Mumbai, India. Amidst a series of terror-

ist attacks, Rabbi Gavriel Holtzberg and his wife, Rivka, were murdered, along with six other Jews who were present in the Chabad

House at the time.

In the aftermath of this terrible incident, Rivka’s parents, Rabbi and Rebbetzin Rosenberg, sat shiva. In the middle of the week, a young Israeli woman walked into the shiva home and approached Rebbetzin Rosenberg. Taking a seat next to her,

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the woman held out a box for Rebbetzin Rosenberg to take. "This is from your daughter," said the Israeli woman. "What is it?" the Rebbetzin asked, curious and surprised. She hadn't been expecting anything, especially not from her own daughter. "Open the box," insisted the woman.

Following along, Rebbetzin Rosenberg opened the box to a beautiful diamond ring along with an exquisite and elegant gown, the likes of which would be worn at a wedding of a sister or very close friend. Rebbetzin Rosenberg instantly recognized it. "This is Rivka's. How did it come to you?" "I'll tell you the story," began the Israeli woman.

"I grew up in a secular home and when I was eligible by age, I joined the army. After completing my service, like many others, I decided to head to the Far East. I was hoping to find myself there and also catch up on some much-needed relaxation. So India it was. Now, India is a complicated country for various reasons, but eventually, I got into trouble and wound up in prison. The prison there was worse than you can imagine. It was absolutely abysmal. I was a nice Jewish girl, and there I was housed with other serious criminals. My situation was dire and I had no way out.

"Eventually, I realized that there would be one way I could get out, though I knew it wasn't simple. I'd need to bribe one of the prison officials. After gathering enough information how I could go about it, I took my chances and approached the right people. It worked. Two months later, in the middle of one night, I was let go. It was a miracle.

"But what I hadn't been able to do was plan where my escape would take me next. I knew to get out, but

where to go from there was unknown until the very night I actually found myself outside the prison. So there I was, alone in the middle of night. My instincts were to find another Jew, and that's exactly what I did. I headed to Mumbai and found the local Chabad House there. The only problem was that it was right in the middle of the night. But I was a fugitive and I needed to be somewhere safe. I did what I needed and knocked on the door.

To my fortune, thank G-d, it opened. And there she was. Your daughter, Rivka. "Where are you coming from?" Rivka asked. That was the last question I wanted to answer, but I needed to tell her. "I'm coming from prison," I said, not adding much else. Now, what would you do if someone came to your house in the middle of the night and said they had just come from prison? But Rivka wasn't fazed. I was a Jewish girl and that's all that mattered. "Come in!" Rivka said. So I did.

Taking a seat in the warmth of her home, I laid out my anxieties. I didn't know what to do or where to go. "You need to get out of India," Rivka told me. That she made clear. "Immediately," emphasized Rivka. "There's a lot of corruption here, and you need to leave. If they catch you, who knows what can happen? They might keep you in prison for life." Hearing this, I began growing even more uneasy. "But they'll investigate, find my records and track me down!" I belted out. "Don't worry," Rivka assured me, calming me. "I'm going to help you. The computer systems here are not as advanced as elsewhere, and they won't figure everything out. Just do what you need to do, and leave the rest behind."

But even with Rivka's reassurances and sound guidance to leave the

country, there was a fairly obvious complication. How would I be able to get out of the country? "I have an idea," said Rivka, as if a light bulb went off in her head.

Removing from the closet her most beautiful gown, she handed it to me. And then she took off her diamond ring and placed it in my hand. "If you walk around like you're dressed now—an Israeli tourist—you'll be cause for suspicion. But if you wear such a gown and diamond ring, no one will suspect you of being a foreigner who was imprisoned, and you'll be able to leave India under the radar."

And so it went. I escaped India and safely returned to Israel. For a long time, I always knew that I needed to return the gown and ring to Rivka, yet I never did. But now, after hearing of Rivka's passing along with her husband and finding out that you came here to sit shiva, I came to return these items."

Rebbetzin Rosenberg remained wrapped in her own thoughts for a moment, until she spoke up again. "I want to tell you something. I saw my daughter a few weeks ago, and I noticed that her diamond ring was missing. So I asked her, 'Rivka, where's your diamond ring?' She turned around and looked back at me. 'Imma, my diamond ring is on shlichus (an emissary on a mission). I'm on shlichus, and my diamond ring is on shlichus.' That's all Rivka said. At the time, I had no idea what my daughter was up to or what she was talking about. But I let it go, figuring to myself that perhaps there's something she doesn't want to tell me. But now, I understand what she meant."

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Names of Hostages in Gaza

(Updated: 24 Tevet)

עמית אסתר חיה	יצחק בן גילה	אנדריי בן יבגניה	אבינתן בן דיצה
בת אילנה אלן	(גלרנטר)	(קוזלוב)	תרצה (אור)
(בוסקילה)	ירדן בן פנינה	ארבל בת יעל	אביתר בן גליה
עמרי בן אסתר	(ביבס)	(יהוד)	(דוד)
ורה (מירן)	כפיר בן שירי	אריאל בן סילביה	אברהם גלעד בן
פרננדו סימון בן	(ביבס)	מוניקה (קוניו)	ליאת (מונדר)
טניה (מרמן)	כרמל בת כנרת	אריאל בן שירי	אגם בת מירב
צחי בן דבורה	(גת)	(ביבס)	(ברגר)
(עידן)	לואיס נורבטו בן	בר אברהם בן	אוהד בן אסתר (בן)
קית' שמואל בן	נורה (הר)	ג'וליה (קופרשטיין)	(עמי)
גלדיס (סיגל)	ליאור בן מיכל	גד משה בן שרה	אוהד בן אסתר
קרין בת אירינה	(רודאיף)	(מוזס)	(יהלומי)
(ארייב)	לירי בת שירה	גיא בן מירב	אור בן טלי (לוי)
רום בן תמר	(אלבג)	(גלבוע דלאל)	אורי בן עינב
(ברסלבסקי)	מישל בן סולמירה	גלי בן תמר	(דנינו)
רומי בת מירב	(ניסנבאום)	(ברמן)	אוריאל בן נעמי
(גונן)	מקסים בן טלה	דוד בן סילביה	(ברוך)
רון בן חנה	(הרקין)	מוניקה (קוניו)	איתי בן אורית
(בנימין)	מתן בן ענת	דולב בן יעל (יהוד)	(סבירסקי)
רן בן טלי (גואילי)	(אנגרסט)	דורון בת סימונה	איתי בן חגית (חן)
שגב בן גלית	מתן בן ירדנה	(שטיינברכר)	איתן בן רות אדית
(כלפון)	(צנגאוקר)	דניאל שמעון בן	(הורן)
שגיב בן נעמית	נדב בן חנה	שרון (פרץ)	איתן אברהם בן
(חן דקל)	(פופלוול)	דניאלה בת אורלי	אפרת (מור)
שירי בת מרגיט	נועה בת ליאורה	(גלבוע)	אלון בן עידית
(ביבס)	(ארגמני)	דרור בן דורית	(אהל)
שלומי בן רוזיטה	נמרוד בן יקי	(אור)	אליה בן סיגי (כהן)
(זיו)	(כהן)	הירש בן רחל	אליהו בן חנה
שלמה בן מרסיל	נעמה בת איילת	(גולדברג פולין)	(שרעבי)
(מנצור)	(לוי)	זיו בן תמר (ברמן)	אליהו יעקב בן
תמיר בן חירות	עדן בת שרית	חיים בן נחמה	הדסה עדי-נעדר
(נמרודי)	(ירושלמי)	(פרי)	אליקים שלמה בן
תמיר בן יעל	עודד בן בלהה	חן חנן בן ורד	אבישג (ליבמן)
(אדר)	(ליפשיץ)	(יבלונקה)	אלכס בן אוקסנה
	עומר בן ניבה	טל בן ניצה (שוהם)	(לובנוב)
	(ונקרט)	קורנגולד)	אלכסנדר סשה בן
	עומר בן שלי (שם)	יאיר בן רות אדית	ילנה (טרופנוב)
	(טוב)	(הורן)	אלכסנדר בן נינה
	עומר מקסים בן	יאיר בן פלור	(דנציג)
	אורנה אסתר	(יעקב)	אלמוג בן אורית
	(נאוטרה)	יגב בן אסתר	(מאיר ג'אן)
	עידו בן כוכבה	(בוכשטב)	אלמוג בן נירה
	(קלדרון)	יוסף בן חנה	(סרוסי)
	עידן בן יעל	(שרעבי)	אלעד בן חנה
	(אלכסנדר)	יוסף חיים בן מרים	(קציר)
	עידן בן דלית	(אוחנה)	אלקנה בן רוחמה
	(שתיזי)	יורם בן בלה	(בוחבוט)
	עמירם בן שרה	(מצגר)	אמילי תהילה בת
	(קופר)	יצחק בן אנטה	אמנדה פרנסיס
		(אלגרטי)	(דמארי)