

INSIGHTS

Into The Weekly Parsha

DECEMBER 11, 2021

This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Rav Shmuel ben Rav Usher Zelig Halevi, z"l. Sponsored by Kalman & Channah Finkel.
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VOLUME 12, ISSUE 11

7 TEVET

Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

PARSHAS VAYIGASH

The Key to a Good Life

Yaakov said to Pharaoh, "The days of the years of my sojourn are one hundred thirty years; the days of the years of my life have been few and bad, and they have not reached the days of the years of my forefathers' lives in the days of their sojourns" (Bereishis 47:9).

This is a perplexing statement for Yaakov to make. At the time of this exchange with Pharaoh, he was 130 years old and he lamented the fact that his life span had not reached those of his father and grandfather. But how could Yaakov have known that he would never reach their ages? It was certainly possible that he would go on to live for many years thereafter! Even Rashi's explanation – that Yaakov meant that his life hadn't been as good as his forefathers' lives – is difficult to understand. Wasn't it possible that Yaakov would not only live for many more years, but that he would ultimately have many more happy years?

In fact, it would seem that Yaakov should have every reason to have been more pleased with his life than Avraham and Yitzchak were with theirs, for a simple reason: Only Yaakov was blessed with children who were all righteous. Avraham was the father of Yishmael and the sons of Keturah, while Yitzchak had Eisav; only Yaakov had children who were all virtuous. Doesn't that contradict the sentiment he expresses in this *possuk*?

Clearly, none of these things are the basis for defining a person's life as "good." But what, then, is the definition of a "good" life?

The *possuk* in *Mishlei* states that "a person who has found a wife has found goodness," and the Gemara tells us that "one who is without a wife lives without

goodness." The defining feature of a good life is a good marriage; without that, even having longevity and righteous children will not be enough to make one's life considered "good." In that respect, indeed, Yaakov's life did not reach the quality that Avraham and Yitzchak experienced.

We know that by the time Avraham Avinu was 52 years old, he and Sarah were working together on teaching the people of Charan to serve Hashem. Sarah was 10

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years younger than Avraham and died at the age of 127; hence, we can ascertain that they were married for at least 85 years, and perhaps longer. Yitzchak's marriage to Rivka also lasted for many years; they were married for 20 years before Yaakov and Eisav were born, and Rivka passed away when Yaakov was returning from Lavan's home at the age of 99 (as he arrived there at the age of 77 and stayed away from home for 22 years); thus, they were married for a full 119 years. Yaakov, though, was married to Rochel Imeinu for less than 15 years; they married only after he had worked for Lavan for seven years, and Rochel died on the road after leaving her father's house.



Thus, according to this definition, the goodness of Yaakov's life indeed failed to compare to that experienced by his father and grandfather.

Raising children can be very difficult. Indeed, we often find that the children who turn out the best are those who were the most difficult for their parents to raise. Thus, even if a person's children grow up to be outstanding adults, this cannot be the way to measure a "good" life. Rather, the definition of a good life is one in which a man had a positive relationship with his wife.



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No Man Left Behind

And they told him all the words of Joseph, which he had said to them; and when he saw the wagons which Joseph had sent to carry him... (45:27)

Rashi (ad loc) explains that the wagons sent by Yosef hinted to the last Torah topic exchanged between father and son before Yosef departed – the *mitzvah* of *Eglah Arufah*. The *Midrash Beresishis Rabba* 94:3, 95:3) notes the similarity of the words “*Eglah*,” calf, and “*Agalah*,” a wagon. In response to finding a corpse in the land of Israel, the elders of the closest town would decapitate a calf, an *Eglah Arufah*, as a communal atonement for the crime proclaiming that the townsfolk did not shed his blood (*Deuteronomy* 21:1-9).

Perhaps while escorting his son on his journey, Yaakov taught Yosef the *mitzvah* of *Eglah Arufah*, the calf whose neck was axed by the elders of the nearest town upon the discovery of a murdered corpse. It was commonly understood that a person who was not properly escorted from a city would easily fall prey to thieves and murderers. But there is a fascinating element to this law. The Talmud (*Horayos* 6a) explains that this atonement is actually for the generation that left Egypt. In fact, we learn a very important *halacha* from here; that a nation is a corporate entity and that a corporate entity is eternal. Even though the actual generation that left Egypt was long gone, the national identity remains and therefore an atonement can be brought even for those that left Egypt because the corporate entity remains.

Why would Yosef choose this *mitzvah* out of everything he studied with his father to send to Yaakov as a sign? In fact, as Rashi explains, it was something of a contrived message because Yosef didn't actually send the wagons, Pharaoh did! Yosef went out of his way to make sure that the brothers conveyed this lesson to his father. The

question is why? What is so remarkable about this *mitzvah* that made it relevant to the current events that had transpired?

Clearly, Yosef (and pretty soon Yaakov as well) had come to the realization that this was the beginning of the fulfillment of Hashem's punishment to Avraham that his children would be in a foreign country for four generations. The only thing worse would be the possibility that they would never leave. However, in order to leave they first had to become a nation by overcoming the final barrier to achieving nationhood: appreciating the value of each and every member. That is why in the process of *Eglah Arufah* an atonement is brought “for those that left Egypt.” Because it was on that condition that they left Egypt and became a nation.

Yosef, remarkably, had already addressed this issue with his brothers. Firstly, he wanted to see if they would abandon Shimon after he took him captive. When they returned with Binyomin he created the whole charade of accusing Binyomin of stealing his silver “magical” goblet to determine whether or not his brothers had finally internalized the lesson that they must be “one for all and all for one.” The brothers passed this test with flying colors when they all equally agreed to serve as slaves in place of their brother Binyomin.

Yosef never really held them responsible for what they did to him on a personal level. His real issue with them was whether or not they had what it takes to become a nation. They finally proved that they did, and this was the message he sent back to Yaakov. We will survive this exile into a strange land.

Did You Know...

Yaakov had two main wives (Rochel and Leah) and two other wives (known as maidservants) who had a lesser status. The Torah sometimes refers to the latter wives as “*pilagshim*.” A *pilegish*, commonly translated as concubine, actually has *halachic* status of a wife, though with lesser rights (e.g. a *pilegish* doesn't have a *kethubah*, which is the security and financial protection that regular wives are provided).

It is very interesting that the word *pilegish* is really a contraction of two words *plag* and *isha*. *Plag* means half and *isha* means woman. In other words, a *pilegish* means half a woman. This explains a fascinating verse in the Torah. After Leah gave birth to her fourth child the Torah says, “She stopped giving birth” (29:35). What this means is that she was supposed to have four sons and her maidservant was supposed to have two and Rochel was supposed to have four and her maidservant was supposed to have two. Each “*pilegish*” would have exactly half the amount of the main wives! Unfortunately, because Rochel “sold” Yaakov for the *dudaim* she lost two of the children that were supposed to be hers (Yissacher and Zevulun) and Leah ended up with six children.

But in the end, of course, Hashem guides everything to the way that is supposed to emerge. In this week's *parsha* we actually see how it all work out – Leah has thirty two descendants and her maidservant has exactly sixteen and Rochel has fourteen descendants and her maidservant has exactly seven. Each *pilegish* has exactly half the descendants of the main wife!



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