

Bringing the Farbrengen Home

DON'T LOOK BACK

by Tzipah Wertheimer

She looked back over her shoulder. It was a rushed, stressful and tense time. She had two married daughters that refused to join. The family had to pick up their belongings and escape.

It was a frantic race against the clock and she couldn't keep to that one single condition: **don't look back.**

Just like that, the wife of Lot became a pillar of salt.

And indeed one of the reasons that we dip the Challah in salt each week on Shabbat is to remember the wife of Lot.

She seems like hardly the martyr to bring to memory each week. She doesn't even have a name in the Torah – how could she be so important?

Maybe it's not about her, maybe it's about the salt?

I once read in a magazine that if you add just the right amount of salt to seltzer it turns sweet. I tried. It tasted like seltzer with a drop of salt. So I added more and more and more. It never worked and the drink was undrinkable in the end.

While that exercise failed, salt has a way of giving delicious flavor IF and ONLY IF it's used in proper measure. Too much salt becomes the dead sea where life cannot live and a good tour guide can point out the pillar which they say is Lot's wife.




The salts of life are the difficulties, the challenges, the regrets, the bad choices and so on. The struggle and the hardship adds flavor, appreciation and meaning to the joyous experience. But only a pinch of salt. Just a pinch of hard times is more than enough!

Lot's wife was stuck in regret, confusion, and indecision. She wanted to go forward but it meant leaving her beautiful and comfortable life behind. The challenge overtook her and she couldn't conquer it. She was stuck in the salt.

She looked over her shoulder, dwelling and ruminating on the past. She couldn't proceed in a healthy way. She was stuck in the image of the life she thought she would be living and was therefore unable to live her life.

So on that fateful day she turned back and became a pillar of salt.

We dip the Challah in just a pinch of salt each week on Shabbat to remind us that we never need more than a pinch. It's ok to reflect and even regret but the main purpose is always to proceed to the next adventure. 

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Just שׁו"ת Me A Question

Q: In this week's parsha it says that Avraham planted an "eishel." What is an Eishel?

A: Our sages explain that the word Eishel is a Roshei Teivos (acronym) for: *Achila* (eating), *Shtiya* (drinking) and *Lina* (sleeping). Alternatively, the *shin* may stand for *sheina* (sleeping), and the *lamed* stands for *leviya* (escorting). According to Rambam, escorting your guests on their way out is the fundamental part of Hachnasas Orchim.

Source: *Likkutei Sichos vol.25, p.74, note 40*

Q: What is Mayim Acharonim and what are the reasons for it?

A: Mayim Acharonim literally means "final waters," and refers to washing your fingertips before Birkat Hamazon. Two reasons are given: Among the salts used in the Talmudic era was Sodomite salt which could cause blindness if it touched the eyes. There was reason for concern that a person's hands had touched a grain of Sodomite salt or other salt with the same characteristics as Sodomite salt that was mixed together with other, more common salt of which one partook after the meal. Thus if he would touch his eyes with his hands without washing them first, it would cause blindness.

Additionally, it is a mitzvah to wash before Birkat Hamazon as an expression of holiness, to sanctify oneself prior to blessing Hashem for our food, for hands that are soiled with the grime of food are unacceptable when reciting a blessing.

Source: *Shulchan Aruch HaRav O.C. 181:1*

It's a boy! Yitzchak is born

A Bris at 8 days or 13 Years?

by Tzipah Wertheimer

Yishmael, the oldest son of Avraham Avinu, says to Yitzchak, "I am more beloved than you – I was circumcised at 13 years old." Yitzchak responds, "I am more beloved than you because I was circumcised at 8 days."

Yishmael can argue that by age 13 he was old enough to protest, and he made a difficult decision that he knew would cause pain with full awareness. Even though the 'right' time for a bris is at 8 days old, Yishmael wasn't commanded until he was 13. So Yishmael could easily say that 13 years old was the 'right' time for him! Of course his bris is better....

The strength of Yishmael's argument is precisely its weakness. The mitzvah 'made sense' to Yishmael - he could wrap his brain around it. His bris was an expression of an intellectual decision.

Yitzchak was just 8 days old; he had no capacity to analyze or intellectualize anything. His bris was a pure and untainted expression of his connection to the One Above. The relationship between Yitzchak and Hashem would be deeper than what the human brain could understand.

The King of kings is Infinite, while mankind is finite. It's unnatural for a limited being to have a link to the Master of all masters - yet despite the unmeasurable distance between creation and Creator we are gifted the Mitzvot.

Mitzvot serve as a means for humanity to engage with the Divine, and Bris Milah



was a direct command from Gd. Yitzchak's bris in the right time (way before his pre-frontal cortex fully developed) ingrained his bond to the Being of all beings into the root and essence of his soul.

If a foot soldier tells the commander in chief that he won't march until he understands the purpose of the mission, he would be discharged immediately. The soldier's limited experience and myopic understanding of strategy make him unfit for higher level decisions. Perhaps one day he'll become a general, but for now his job is to follow orders.

A person can learn Torah and excel but they will never be able to reach the Highest of All Highs - Hashem himself. The baseline for a Jew's connection to Hashem runs a lot deeper than his/her understanding. This joining of finite to the Infinite was achieved with the bris of Yitzchak at 8 days old. ☺

Hayom Yom

17 Cheshvan

Time must be guarded. It is urgent to "accept the yoke of Torah." Every bit of time, every day that passes, is not just a day but a life's concern.

Days go by; as the Talmud says (Yerushalmi Berachot 1:1), "A day enters and a day departs, a week enters etc.,... a month etc.,... a year etc.,..." My father quoted the Alter Rebbe: A summer day and a winter night are a year.

Chassidic Story

Nosson was a learned, pious, wealthy & respected merchant in Cracow. Peisha was his distinguished coach driver that brought him to the big fairs in Leipzig where he conducted business.

Piesha was considered a baal midos - a man of great character - yet not much of a Torah scholar. One Friday afternoon, the merchant and driver arrived in a small Jewish village on the way to Leipzig. They decided to spend Shabbos at the local inn.

Nosson got himself ready for Shabbos and went to the Bais Medresh early. He hoped to invite some of the poor people to join him for a Shabbos meal at the inn. Just as he was about to pull a Gemora off the shelf a man came running in...

"There is a Jew, just outside of town, whose horse and wagon are stuck in the mud. He needs our help!"

Nosson closed his Gemora and ventured out to help. The heavy rains had caused the wagon to fall especially deep into the mud. The frightened horse was kicking and splashing. Nosson was not used to this type of manual labor. After a short while a few experienced coachmen rode by and were able to free the horse and wagon.

By the time Nosson came back to the inn, he was covered in mud from head to toe, bruised, and his Shabbos clothes were ruined - he quickly rinsed his face and came late to shul for Friday night davening.

Meanwhile Piesha had also gotten ready for Shabbos, when he heard about the coach that was stuck in the mud, he figured someone else would surely help.... (to be continued) ☺

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25 Tishrei 5786

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