

Bereshit

The Midrash states that if man behaves nobly God says to him, "Look how I pre-prepared everything in Creation for you to enjoy, like a table fully and beautifully laid, just waiting for the arrival of an honoured guest." But if man behaves ignobly, God says, "Look how even the gnat and the flea pre-empted you."

Within the concept of the "honoured guest" lies an entire moral and ecological philosophy, a challenge of global significance.

Noach

For all flesh had corrupted its way upon earth (6:12). Today it is not merely 'the flesh,' but also 'the mind' that has been universally corrupted. How else do we explain a United Nations brain-washed into a rabidly anti-Israel bias, an indifference to Jewish suffering and an insensitivity to Jewish aspirations?

Lekh Lekha

Go for yourself...And I shall make you into a great nation (12:1-2). In the spiritually inhospitable Diaspora Abraham's offspring could never have achieved that objective.

The summons to put down firm and permanent roots in the only land where Jews could further their own national and spiritual destiny is as urgent now as it was at the dawn of our history. *Go for yourself*: 'Go' - to find yourself. 'Go' - to be yourself.

Vayeira

God appeared to Abraham 'in the heat of the day.' Most people, when things 'get hot' for them, become totally preoccupied with resolving their own problems. Abraham – suffering the combined effects of the heat and the pain of his circumcision, - sought to take his mind off things by seeking out those whose difficulties were even greater than his own.

Chayyei Sarah

There is a Yiddish expression, *a bitterer gelechter*, 'a sad joke.' An example of this is Ephron's strenuous efforts to enable Abraham to 'bury his dead.' This has been the policy of Israel's enemies throughout history. They have strenuously denied us the right to live out our lives in comfort and peace, but have done everything in their power to ensure that we bury our dead!

Toldot

Not only does Esau swear a solemn oath confirming his sale of the birthright to Jacob, but he also ‘despises the birthright’ (Gen.25:33-34). In the typical mode of the anti-Semite, it isn’t that the Jew possesses something that the former covets that rankles, but the fact that the Jew has possessions, however legitimately worked for, acquired and deserved.

Vayeitzei

Jacob is on the run, fearful for his life. While others enduring such a plight might have nightmares of devils in pursuit, he dreams of protecting angels. How succinctly does that sum up the faith and spiritual preoccupation of our people throughout the dark millennia of our history!

Vayishlach

Jacob strives with an angel who wounds him, and yet his own assessment of the experience was that, ‘I saw God face to face, yet my life was preserved’ (Gen.32:31). Adversity, rather than comfort is the natural context for the attainment of spiritual clarity.

Vayeishev

The central message of the Judah/Tamar episode is that Judaism does not tolerate the sexual exploitation of women. The Torah was, once again, millennia before its time!

Mikketz

‘Poor poor Joseph!’: His ‘rags to riches’ story runs along predictable lines: He is the object of jealousy from his brothers, desire from his master’s wife, grudging admiration from the butler, self-serving patronage by Pharaoh, fear and suspicion from the brothers he, in turn, patronises – and the ingratitude of silence on the part of succeeding Pharaohs.

Vayyigash

And he (Joseph) saw him (his father) and he fell upon his neck and wept (Gen.46:29). Jacob seems to have been overwhelmed by tears. When he first met Rachel, tears sprung to his eyes (29:11). When he returned from Laban’s home, Esau ‘fell on his neck and wept’ (33:4). When he reached Bet El he names an oak, ‘Oak of Tears’ (35:8). Tears flowed at his reunion with Joseph (56:29); countless must have been the tears he shed, pining after him, and Joseph’s tears fall upon his face at his death (50:1). The Rabbis appositely observed that ‘God counts the tears of the righteous.’

Vayyechi

May God make you like Ephraim and Menasseh (48:20). We bless our children by invoking the names of Joseph's offspring because they were the first generation to be born into the morally-challenging Egyptian environment. They nevertheless retained their religious identity and moral values. They are ideal role models for our own children, growing up amid the secularism and moral enticements of modern society.