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**Preface**

1. Why doesn’t the Torah ever reveal what its characters are thinking? Wouldn’t it have been instructive to know what Avraham Avinu was thinking as he walked with Yitzchak towards the Akaida or what Yaakov felt like leaving home and arriving at the house of Lavan? What was Dina's emotional state, her thoughts, feeling, anguish and pain upon being abused and raped by Shechem? How crushed and helpless feeling were her parents, Yaakov and Leah? What did Moshe Rabainu do in preparation for receiving the Torah? These are but some examples that demonstrate the fact that the Torah is silent and does not reveal the thoughts of its great heroes. Why is this so?
2. How does Maasei Avot Siman L’Banim work? Is it a function of transcendent spiritual DNA or is there a rational basis for this proposition?
3. What do we mean when we say that the Torah is a “Torat Chaim”? How does it come alive and inform our lives?
4. How do we understand that Yaakov Avinu fails to eulogize his beloved wife Rachel at her death? He is full of emotion when he first meets her, and it seems out of character that he is silent on her death.

**The Longevity of the Ancients** Page \_\_

1. Why did the people living in the first 10+ generations after creation live for such long lives?
2. How is the opinion of the Rambam to be understood? He posits that only the people actually mentioned by name as having lived long are the ones who had such extraordinary longevity. The rest of the world population lived ordinary life spans. Why would this be so?
3. Why did the longevity phenonomun stop during the period of Yaakov Avinu, the last of the Patriachs?
4. Avraham Avinu was born in the year 1948 after creation. Noah, who lived 950 years, died in the year 2006. Thus, Noah was still alive when Avraham reached 58 years of age. If so why didn’t Avraham learn of the existence of G-d from his ancestor Noah? Why did he have to discover G-d by philosophical pursuit of the truth?

**Yitzchak’s Intention to Bless Eisav** Page \_\_

1. Why did Avraham go down to Egypt to avoid the hunger? Did the entire population of Canaan flee the country? Why didn’t Avraham send a trusted servant to Egypt to purchase provisions like Yaakov during did the seven years of hunger? Why didn’t Avraham just go to Avimelech and there ride out the hunger like Yitzchak does when G-d told him not to leave Eretz Yisrael?
2. Why didn’t the Pelishtim, when Yitzchak reopened his father’s wells, contest this action? Yet they contest the one well that Yitzchak dug? Why does Yitzchak move away to dig a new well and in the process distance himself from all the wells of Avraham? What did he gain with one well at the expense of losing so many others?
3. Who cares about all these wells anyway? What is their significance? How does the issue of the wells impact on Yitzchak’s decision to bless Eisav over Yaakov?
4. How do we understand that Yitzchak desired to bless Eisav over Yaakov? How could a father of our nation and a prophet make such a grievous mistake to favor Eisav over Yaakov?
5. How do you steal a blessing from a blind man? He cannot see who is standing before him? It all depends on who Yitzchak intended to bless not who was standing there?

**Yaakov’s Search for Truth** Page \_\_

* 1. How do we reconcile the portrayal of Yaakov as an “Ish Emet”, an icon of truth, in light of his behavior in stealing the blessing?
  2. How can we understand Yaakov’s false response to Yitzchak which left the impression that it was Eisav standing before him? Even if we can twist the simple meaning of the answers and statements he makes to Yitzchak’s inquiries to say he did not lie outright, isn’t what he said and did dressing as Eisav Gerneivas Daat, outright fraud?
  3. Why did fate cause Yaakov to have to leave the house of Yitzchak and Rivka, and why does it lead him to an extended stay at the house of Lavan?
  4. Why doesn’t Yaakov go directly home upon his return from the house of Lavan? Why does delay the return and stop in Shechem first? His delay, 18 months in duration, causes him to miss reuniting with his mother who dies in the interim.

**Yosef’s Final Dream**  Page \_\_

1. Why do our Rabbis consider it meritorious that in Egypt our people did not change their names, language or style of clothing? After all, the enemy protected our ethnicity by making us slaves and preventing our assimilation into Egyptian society. We could not escape our lineage and assume an Egyptian identity for we were slaves. In addition, the Israelites worshiped idols and sunk to the 49th level of tumah. So, what good did speaking Hebrew and not changing their names or clothing accomplish?
2. The next to last sentence of the Book of Joshua states as follows: “And the bones of Yosef, which the Children of Israel brought with them from Egypt, were buried in Shechem…”. Are we to believe that they did not bury Yosef remains until Joshua’s death some 28 years after their entry into the Land of Israel?
3. The death of Yosef is recorded twice in the Torah. Once in Sefer Breishit (Chap: 50:26) and a second time in Sefer Shemot (Chap: 1:6). Why is this so?
4. Why does the Torah tell us, in great detail, about the transactions between Yosef and the Egyptian people when they bartered for food? Why does the Torah tell us that the priests were exempted and apparently received food without having to pay with their possessions? Why do we care about how the priests were treated?
5. In the confrontation between Moshe and Pharaoh, Pharaoh bandies out his magicians but not his priests. The battle was a religious battle, pitting the power of Hashem against deities of the Egyptians, why weren’t the priests integral to this clash?

**Paroah’s Battle with G-d** Page \_\_

* 1. How do we understand Pharaoh? What is his mind-set as he presides over the systematic destruction of his country? Does he have an end game plan, or is he willing to suffer endlessly at the hands of this powerful G-d of the Jews?
  2. Why doesn't Moshe Rabbainu ever say to Pharaoh directly, , שלח עמי הם יוצאים לחירות עולם Let the People of Israel go free, they are no longer your slaves"? Throughout his dialogue with Pharaoh, Moshe never demands the absolute freedom of the Jewish people. He consistently intimates that the goal is to serve and worship ה' three days journey into the מדבר, the desert. ls Moshe afraid to tell Pharaoh the true nature of his mission, to lead the Nation of Israel to the promised land?
  3. Did Pharaoh lose his בחירה חפשית, his freedom of choice? If Pharaoh’s heart was hardened by G­ d, why was he punished? Without the power to exercise his free will, Pharaoh was hardly culpable?

**Moshe, Aharon and Miriam** Page \_\_

* 1. What is the meaning or reason for the reversed letters “**נ** Nun” in Parshat BeHaloscha?
  2. What does Rashi mean when he says that Aharon had to be מוסר נפש, risk his life, to beg Moshe to intercede on behalf of a stricken Miriam?
  3. Why didn’t Moshe feel impelled to pray for Miriam when he saw suffering from Tzaraat? Why didn’t he react even before Aharon’s plea for their sister?
  4. Chazal tell us that G-d established three great leaders at the helm of leadership of the Israelites. What were the leadership qualities contributed by each of the three great leaders Moshe, Aharon and Miriam?

**Casting Out a Jew.** Page \_\_

1. The son of a Jewish mother who was also the son of an Egyptian male cursed the Holy name of G-d. This occurred after he emerged from the Bet Din of Moshe where he was ordered to remove his tent from amidst the Tribe of Dan. They did not want him to camp among them for fear that upon arrival in the Land of Israel, he would seek a parcel of land from their portion. Why couldn’t the Tribe of Dan make an accommodation for this one Jew who sought to live in their midsts?
2. Why didn’t Moshe Rabbainu find a solution for this Jew, the only one in his unique position?
3. This last question gains further force when considering Yisro, Moshe’s father-in-law. When he thought to return to Midyan, Moshe promised him a portion of Land in Eretz Yisrael. Why him, yes, and the Jew, no?

**An Argument for the Sake of Heaven** Page \_\_

1. Our Rabbis cite the Machlokes of Korach as the quintessential example of an argument NOT for the sake of heaven. But how does that inform our lives?
2. No one today, in the Torah oriented world, would dare argue with Moshe Rabbainu’s legacy, the Torah. What does the Mishna in Avot seek to teach us when it cites the argument of Korach as an example of an argument not for the sake of heaven?
3. No one who proffers any opinion in the Torah world stands up and says: my position is offered not for the sake of heaven. All profess that they are L’shem Shamayim, for the sake of heaven. Are there any Torah stated criteria available to us, the innocent bystanders, that can be employed that will enable us to distinguish between an argument not for the sake of heaven and an argument that is for the sake of heaven?
4. The Mishna in Avot also asks: what is the difference between the students of Avraham Avinu and the students of Bilam. Who deems himself a student of Bilam? How is anyone identified today as a student of Bilam?