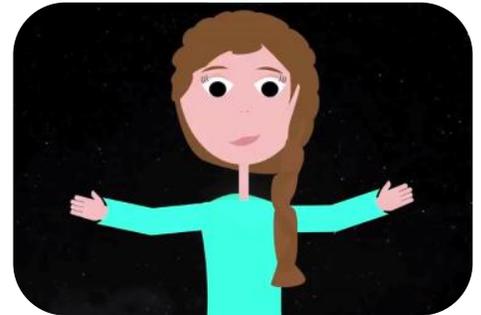


PARSHAT SHOFTIM: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SAVING PRIVATE RYAN

This guide corresponds to the video: [The Significance of Saving Private Ryan](#)

SABBATH TABLE OUTLINE

- I. What are the grand, overarching things we can do in life that, if we did them successfully, could actually give our lives meaning?
- How do I make my life worthwhile?
 - Whole Aleph Beta course devoted to these questions - What is the meaning of life? - Audio series that was on the site and is now being turned into a video series
 - This week's parsha, in the space of a few sentences, puts out a remarkably coherent framework for thinking about these questions of meaning (Deuteronomy 20:5-8)



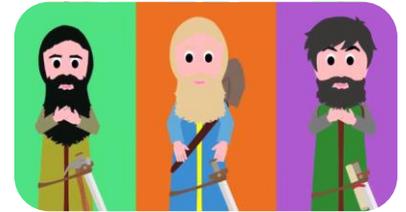
- II. This week's parsha tells us that, before going out to war, community leaders are meant to address the troops on the eve of battle and tell four people to go home
- Who are those four kinds of people?
 - Play which one of these things is not like the other while reviewing
 - Someone who has built a new home and has not lived in it (Deuteronomy 20:5)
 - One who planted a vineyard and hasn't eaten from the fruit (Deuteronomy 20:6)
 - Someone engaged, but not married (Deuteronomy 20:7)
 - Someone who is afraid of battle so that he doesn't melt his brothers' hearts (Deuteronomy 20:8)



- Pretty clear that the last one is different from the others
 - Last one goes home for the good of the community as cowardice is infectious
 - Looking at the other three, there is a private imperative
- III. The reason they are supposed to go home has nothing to do with the interests of the community; it has to do with those individual soldiers
- The guy who has built a house and not lived in it should go home because it would be a tragedy for him if he were not to have a chance to live in the house
 - Same for the guy engaged to be married and the person who planted a vineyard
 - It's about them, not about the community
 - If it's about them and not the community, there is a question
 - There are examples of a private imperative justifying actions
 - Example from "Saving Private Ryan"



- A mother loses three of her children on the same day, and a general decides to send a platoon to extract the final remaining child
- The general risks the lives of servicemen for that private imperative
- It really would be a tragedy for this woman to lose all four of her children on the same day
- The community must understand, sometimes the individual come first



IV. Thinking about the situation here as the Torah describes it

a) A person has planted a vineyard and hasn't tasted those fruits

1. Let him go home - lest he die and someone else take over and taste those fruits
2. If he dies, he's dead...who cares if someone else takes his vineyard?
 - What is the great private imperative here that is motivating the community to these men home?
 - Death is the worst thing that could happen to someone - is it really worse if I died, and I didn't get a chance to live in my house yet?
3. Why are these soldiers told to go home?
 - Evidently, the Torah doesn't see it like that
 - The way the Torah sees it is that there are worse things than death



b) We are all going to die; that's just the way it is

1. It's not the worst thing in the world
2. The worst thing in the world is if you die, and you were really close to achieving some sort of end goal that would have given your life meaning
 - Meaning that would have transcended death, and you didn't do it because you died first
 - That would be a terrible tragedy

V. If you think about meaning in life, you can use death as a kind of litmus test

- a) Is there something for which you'd be willing to die?
- b) If the answer to that is "yes," it means your own life is not just an end to itself, but your life stands for something
 1. Whatever that is - God, country, love
 2. There is some transcendent thing that you're willing to die for
 3. Even if you don't die for it, you're living for it
- c) Think about it this way: What is it that you're living for such that, were you to die, you could still say that your life is meaningful?
 1. The Torah has given three of them
 - Building a home
 - Planting a vineyard
 - Marrying a woman
 2. If you do one of these, and taste the fruits of that success, you feel like it would be okay to die after this
 - Therefore, the Torah sends the soldier who is on the cusp of achieving one of these home; when you're so close to achieving a transcendent meaning, it would be a tragedy to die and not actually have achieved it
 - What is meaningful about these three things?



3. Suggest that the Torah talks about these things all of the way back at the beginning of mankind itself
 - Back in creation, man is described as being created in the image of God
 - God, the great creator, creates a world, a universe to be a home for humanity - God builds a home
 - The next thing God does is to plant a garden
 - After that, he places man in the garden because God is in the garden
 - That way God can relate to the man he's created – sharing the garden
4. God did three things in the same order that the Torah describes them in Deuteronomy - builds a home, plants a garden, and places the being that he loves in that garden to relate to him
 - What are the human versions of these things?
 - Man is described as being created in the image of God - we, too, do these things
 - God did these things because they were meaningful to him
 - We do these things because they are meaningful to us



- d) God created a world - a home for us - and we, too, try to build a home
 1. When we achieve that milestone, it feels that we've achieved something ultimate, something that is an end in and of itself
 2. We could die at that point, and it could be okay
 3. The reason that is so is because that's how God created us - God, the ultimate creator, made us little creators
 4. When we create, we feel ultimate meaning - it's our destiny
 - Once you have a home, it opens up a possibility of having a garden
 - A garden is a special place
 - A home is utilitarian - it's somewhere you need to be because you have to have shelter, but a garden is wonderful - It's aesthetic and beautiful
 - If you have a garden, you can lie back and say, "Ah, this, too, has ultimate meaning"
 5. That opens the door to wanting to share your home and garden - relationship can be had there
 - Can give it as a gift to the one you love
 - Who can you bring into this home and garden that you can relate to and love?
 6. God did it for man when he invited us into the garden and asked us to partake of all of the wonderful fruits
 - We do it when we marry and share the bounty of our lives with a spouse and family
 - That is the third great thing in life - relationship with the one you love in the place you build just for him/her



- VI. Each, alone, is meaningful, but their true meaning lies in a progression of all
- a) In these loving relationships, we find ultimate meaning

1. It's true with people - We build a home and a garden we share with others - wife, family, guest
 2. True with God - on this earth, we try to build a home for God collectively through the Mishkan/Tabernacle/Temple
- b) We built that and made a home - then we invite God in to inhabit it so we could be there connected with the one we love
- c) These three things really are the grand end through which we human beings find a reason to be alive
- d) Cheating death - building, planting, and relating

