

OHRNET

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PARSHA INSIGHTS

THE MOST INFECTIOUS DISEASE IN THE WORLD

“...a completely red cow...” (19:2)

Nothing is more frightening than plague. Plague. The invisible killer that stalks the noonday sun as it does the darkest night. A few years ago after the terrible tragedy of 9/11, much of the Western World was reduced to blind panic by the threat of plague-infected letters sent through the mail.

The most infectious disease in the world, however, is neither bubonic plague nor anthrax. It is something with which we are all quite familiar.

In this week’s Torah Portion, we learn of the mitzvah of the *Para Aduma*, the Red Heifer. An essential part of the mitzvah required a red cow of at least three years old that was completely red. If more than one hair on its entire body was any other color than red, the animal was invalid. In addition, the *Para Aduma* was disqualified if it had ever been harnessed to a yoke. Needless to say, *Parot Adumot* did not turn up every day.

It once happened that, despite searching high and low, the Sanhedrin could not find a *Para Aduma*. Eventually they learned that a certain non-Jew indeed owned a completely red cow. A delegation was dispatched to verify and negotiate for the purchase of the animal. The owner of the cow proposed a price of 400 gold coins. The delegates accepted and informed the owner that they would return the following day with the money. In the meantime, the owner of the cow told his friends about the prospective sale. As a result of this, he discovered just how rare and valuable the heifer was. When the envoys of the Sanhedrin returned the following day, the owner told them bluntly “I’ve changed my mind. The animal is not for sale.” The delegation offered him more money but he was adamant. Offers and refusals flew back and forth until finally the Sages offered him an extra one hundred gold coins (some say a thousand). To this offer he acquiesced. The Sages told

him that they would return the following day with the full sum.

After they left, the owner of the cow joked with his neighbour: “You know why they offered me so much money? Their religion says that they have to have a cow that’s never been harnessed to a yoke. I think I’ll play a little trick on them.”

That night, he took the *Para Aduma*, harnessed it and plowed with it. The following morning the delegation returned with the money. Before paying, however, they wanted to examine the animal. After a few seconds they turned to the expectant owner and said, “Keep the cow. We don’t need it.” He was dumbfounded as to how the Sages knew what he had done. He said, “Blessed be He Who chose this nation.” And then, broken hearted at losing this vast fortune, he went and strangled himself.

How did the Sages know that the animal had been used for plowing?

A cow that has never been yoked has two particular hairs on its neck that are straight. After it has been yoked they are permanently bent. Also, the eyes of an unyoked animal do not blink. After it has been yoked, it squints, trying to see the yoke.

The question remains, however, why the owner of the cow jeopardized a king’s ransom for a little bit of sport. How could he risk so much to satisfy his vindictiveness? Surely it must have crossed his mind that the Sages weren’t merely going to rely on his word and might have ways of verifying his claim.

Nothing is more infectious than a bad character trait. The owner’s greed and his love of money caused him to renege on his original agreement. But it didn’t stop there. That character flaw provoked other character flaws to surface: deceit, mockery and vindictiveness.

If we don’t make the effort to improve our character in one area, necessarily we will find deficiencies festering in many other areas of our personalities.

For nothing is more infectious than a character flaw.

• Source: Midrash

PARSHA OVERVIEW

The laws of the *para aduma* — the red heifer — are detailed. These laws are for the ritual purification of one who comes into contact with death. After nearly 40 years in the desert, Miriam dies and is buried at Kadesh. The people complain about the loss of their water supply that until now has been provided miraculously in the merit of Miriam's righteousness. Aharon and Moshe pray for the people's welfare. G-d commands them to gather the nation at Merivah and speak to a designated rock so that water will flow forth. Distressed by the people's lack of faith, Moshe hits the rock instead of speaking to it. He thus fails to produce the intended public demonstration of G-d's mastery over the world, which would have resulted had the rock

produced water merely at Moshe's word. Therefore, G-d tells Moshe and Aharon that they will not bring the people into the Land. *Bnei Yisrael* resume their travels, but because the King of Edom, a descendant of Esav, denies them passage through his country, they do not travel the most direct route to Eretz Yisrael. When they reach Mount Hor, Aharon dies and his son Elazar is invested with his priestly garments and responsibilities. Aharon was beloved by all, and the entire nation mourns him 30 days. Sichon the Amorite attacks *Bnei Yisrael* when they ask to pass through his land. As a result, *Bnei Yisrael* conquer the lands that Sichon had previously seized from the Amonites on the east bank of the Jordan River.

ISRAEL Forever

CHUKAT HATORAH OR "CHUKAH"

One of the hottest issues which the Israeli Knesset has dealt with in its current session is the creation of a constitution. The religious parties are opposed to establishing such a *chukah* which they suspect will be exploited by anti-religious elements to undermine religious life in the country.

Aside from these fears the religious community in the Jewish State finds it difficult to see why Jews need a man-

made constitution when they already have a constitution – the Torah – given to them by the Creator.

When Jews this Shabbat will hear the opening words of the weekly portion – "This is the *chukah* of the Torah" – they will be reminded of the constitution we received more than three millennia ago. This constitution has been the secret of Jewish survival and it is hoped that Israel's leaders will adopt it to guarantee Israel forever.

LOVE OF THE LAND - THE LEGENDS

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael

UNRAVELING STRINGS ATTACHED

One of the greatest builders of Torah education in Eretz Yisrael in the previous generation was Rabbi Yosef Kahaneman, commonly known as the Rav of Ponovez. Arriving in the Holy Land after losing most of his family and community in the Holocaust, he not only founded the great yeshiva in Bnei Brak which bears the name of the community which he led back in Lithuania but also institutions to care for homeless children who had survived the war.

He was not only a brilliant Torah scholar and orator



but also an extremely effective fundraiser. One particular donor was enamored of this great man's personality but did not particularly care for the religious nature of his institutions. "I am prepared to give you the money you need to build another school, he told the rav, "but only if none of its students wear a *kipah* on his head!"

Not missing a beat the rav agreed to this condition and received the gift.

What did he do? He built a school for girls in which not one student kept her head covered.

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PARSHA Q&A ?

1. “Take a perfect *para aduma* (red heifer).” What does the word “perfect” — *temima* — mean in this context?
2. How many non-red hairs disqualify a cow as a *para aduma*?
3. A man dies in a tent. What happens to the sealed metal and earthenware utensils in the tent?
4. What happens to the one who: a) sprinkles the water mixed with the ashes of the *para aduma*; b) touches the water; c) carries the water?
5. Why was the *mitzvah* of the *para aduma* entrusted to Elazar rather than to Aharon?
6. Why does the Torah stress that *all* of the congregation came to *Midbar Tzin*?
7. Why is Miriam’s death taught after the law of *para aduma*?
8. During their journey in the *midbar*, in whose merit did the Jewish People receive water?
9. Why did Moshe need to strike the rock a second time?
10. When Moshe told the King of Edom that the Jewish People would not drink from the well-water, to which well did he refer? What do we learn from this?
11. The cloud that led the Jewish People leveled all mountains in their path except three. Which three and why?
12. Why did the *entire* congregation mourn Aharon’s death?
13. What disappeared when Aharon died?
14. Which “inhabitant of the South” (21:1) attacked the Jews?
15. For what two reasons did G-d punish the people with snakes specifically?
16. Why did the Jewish People camp in Arnon, rather than pass through Moav to enter *Eretz Canaan*?
17. What miracle took place at the valley of Arnon?
18. What was the “strength” of Amon that prevented the Jewish People from entering into their Land?
19. Why was Moshe afraid of Og?
20. Who killed Og?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week’s Questions!

All references are to the verses and Rashi’s commentary unless otherwise stated.

1. 19:2 - Perfectly red.
2. 19:2 - Two.
3. 19:14,15 - The metal utensils are impure for seven days, even if they are sealed. The sealed earthenware vessels are unaffected.
4. 19:21 - a) Remains *tahor*; b) He, but not his clothing, contracts *tumah*; c) He and his clothing contract *tumah*.
5. 19:22 - Because Aharon was involved in the sin of the golden calf.
6. 20:1 - To teach that they were *all* fit to enter the Land; everyone involved in the sin of the spies already died.
7. 20:1 - To teach that just as sacrifices bring atonement, so too does the death of the righteous.
8. 20:2 - Miriam’s.
9. 20:11 - After he hit it the first time, only a few drops came out since he was commanded to *speak* to the rock.
10. 20:17 - To the well that traveled with the nation in the *midbar*. This teaches that one who has adequate provisions should nevertheless purchase goods from his host in order to benefit the host.
11. 20:22 - *Har Sinai* for receiving the Torah, *Har Nevo* for Moshe’s burial, and *Hor Hahar* for Aharon’s burial.
12. 20:29 - Aharon made peace between contending parties and between spouses. Thus, everybody mourned him.
13. 20:29 - The clouds of glory disappeared, since they sheltered the Jews in Aharon’s merit.
14. 21:1 - Amalek.
15. 21:6 - The original snake, who was punished for speaking evil, is fitting to punish those who spoke evil about G-d and about Moshe. And the snake, for whom everything tastes like dust, is fitting to punish those who complained about the manna which changed to any desired taste.
16. 21:13 - Moav refused them passage.
17. 21:15 - The Amorites hid in caves in the mountain on the Moabite side of the valley in order to ambush the Jews. When the Jews approached, the mountain on the *Eretz Canaan* side of the valley moved close to the other mountain and the Amorites were crushed.
18. 21:24 - G-d’s command, “Do not harass them” (*Devarim* 2:19).
19. 21:34 - Og had once been of service to Avraham. Moshe was afraid that this merit would assist Og in battle.
20. 21:35 - Moshe.

A digest of the topics covered in the seven weekly pages of the Talmud studied in the course of the worldwide Daf Yomi cycle along with an insight from them

TALMUDigest

SHABBAT 65 - 71

- Tampons, deodorants, false teeth and ribbons
- Crutches and other supports of a cripple
- The daughter of the Sage known as “Father of Shmuel”
- Cures and curiosities
- The source for the toast of “*Lechayim*”
- The Great Principle regarding sacrifices for involuntary violation
- The man who never heard of Shabbat
- Lost in the desert and unaware of which day is Shabbat
- How many sacrifices for a number of involuntary violations
- Why lighting a fire was explicitly forbidden in the Torah
- When two halves combine and two wholes combine in regard to sacrifice

ABOVE SUSPICION

If someone was caught in a downpour on Shabbat or otherwise got his clothes wet, may he hang them up to dry? One opinion of the Sages is that he may do so as long as the wet garments are not visible to the public. The reason is that people who see these wet clothes hanging may suspect him of having violated the Sabbath by washing his clothes.

Rabbi Elazar and Rabbi Shimon, however, rule that it is forbidden to do so regardless of where he hangs them. Their position is that once the Sages have issued a decree forbidding something because of *marit ayin* — suspicion of sin — the decree is binding even when circumstances render such suspicion highly unlikely but not impossible.

The Sage Rav ruled in accordance with the second position. His ruling was challenged by some commentaries from a *gemara* in *Mesechta Chullin* (41a). There we learn that it is forbidden to slaughter an animal or fowl in a manner which causes its blood to fall into a hole because this is the way of the heretics. This ban applies only to the public area and not to a private courtyard.

Although this seems to go against Rav’s position that something prohibited in a public area because of *marit ayin* applies to a private area as well, Tosefot points out that there is a difference. Even if someone would see a slaughter taking place in the private courtyard he would not suspect wrongdoing but would assume that it was being done in that manner in order to keep the area from becoming stained with blood. The position of Rav forms the ruling of the *Shulchan Aruch* (*Orach Chaim* 301:45).

• *Shabbat* 65a

WHAT THE Sages SAY

“All Jews are princes.”

• *Rabbi Shimon - Shabbat* 67a

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WEDDING RINGS

From: Dan Blum

Hi. I was hoping you could help me with a wedding question that I have. I noticed on your website that in a Jewish wedding a ring is given to the bride by the groom. I was wondering if this has always been the case. Does this tradition go back, say, as far as Abraham? If this is a more recent tradition, was there another way in the past that the bride displayed that she was married? Thank you in advance for your help.

From: Rakhel,

Why is the wedding ring placed on the forefinger of the right hand?

Dear Dan and Rakhel,

In Biblical times, women were not necessarily betrothed with rings. For example, when Abraham sent his servant Eliezer to find a wife for Isaac, the betrothal was done with jewelry, but not necessarily a finger-ring. Presumably the custom of betrothing with gifts has been in practice ever since. The custom to place the ring on the right forefinger dates back at least about a thousand years

and is first mentioned by Rabbi Eliezer of Worms (1162-1232).

Teshuvot Maharim Mintz (No. 109) explains that in those days women would wear their rings on the right forefinger and therefore this custom has remained. Another reason is suggested in Nachalat Shiva (12:2) based on the idea that the right forefinger is the most prominent of all the fingers. There was a custom amongst some Sephardim to place the ring on the left middle finger. The reason is that just as one winds the *tefillin* strap around this finger as an expression of being bound to G-d, so the ring on this finger represents the bond between bride and groom. Aruch HaShulchan (27:4) states that all customs are valid, and it makes no difference how the ring is given.

Nevertheless, there are Kabbalistic explanations for placing the ring on the right forefinger. The Zohar explains that the reason the ring is placed on the right hand is because the right hand represents giving and loving-kindness. Maharich (Likkutim 3:133a) offers a beautiful idea as to why the forefinger. The *chatan* gives the ring with his right hand, which is opposite the left hand of the *kallah*. The giving is accompanied by seven blessings. The seventh finger from the *kallah's* left hand is her right forefinger. Therefore it is symbolic that the "seventh" finger should be the one that ring is placed on, as the giving of the ring is the moment that the *kiddushin* is sealed.

OHR BITS

Witty Advice for Circling Life

"In reality, killing time is only the name for another of the multifarious ways by which time kills us."

• Sir Osbert Sitwell

לע"נ
ר' יצחק אייזיק בן ר' אליעזר בער ז"ל
ומרת שרה חנה בת ר' משה לויב ע"ה
ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

READING FOR EVERYONE

Question: It recently came to my attention that in the old days every Jew called up to the Torah for an *aliya* read his portion by himself. I expressed an interest in doing so the next time I would receive an *aliya* but I was told that it is almost a universal practice in post-Talmudic times for a *ba'al koreh* (an official Reader) to read the Torah even if the one who received the *aliya* is capable of doing it himself. What is the right thing to do?

Answer: Two reasons are given by our Talmudic commentaries for establishing the institution of a *ba'al koreh* who reads for everyone.

One approach is based on what happened in regard to the mitzvah of making a declaration when bringing *bikkurim* (first crops and fruits) to the *Beit Hamikdash*. Since some people were not sufficiently literate to make this declaration, they fulfilled their obligation by listening to a *kohen* making it on their behalf. This could lead to embarrassment for the unlearned Jew and sometimes discouraged him from bring-

ing the *bikkurim* in order to avoid this shame. It was therefore instituted that a *kohen* would make that declaration on behalf of everyone, even those capable of doing so themselves.

The same situation of potential embarrassment existed in regard to the public reading of the Torah on special days. A Jew who was not capable of doing the reading by himself and would suffer the embarrassment of someone reading for him, while other Jews did the reading themselves, might easily be tempted to absent himself for the Torah reading altogether. For this reason it was instituted that a *ba'al koreh* would read the Torah even for those who could do so themselves.

Another approach to understanding the reason for the institution of a *ba'al koreh* is that it was based on the fear that someone called up to the Torah might mistakenly consider himself capable of properly reading the Torah and would do an improper job. This fear was eliminated by having a *ba'al koreh* who had proven himself capable read for everyone.

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

LOVE AND UNDERSTANDING

“How should we pray for Heavenly help in solving this problem?” The problem at hand was understanding some extremely difficult point made by one of the classic commentaries in the Talmud.

The one faced by this challenge was Rabbi Meir Simcha Hacoen, the rav of the Latvian community of Dvinsk and author of the *Ohr Somayach* commentary on the *Mishneh Torah* of Rambam for whom Yeshivat Ohr Somayach is named. He and a study partner had decided to pray for Divine assistance in solving their problem and he now asked his *chavruta* how he intended to pray.

“I will ask G-d to open my eyes to the wisdom of Torah,” came the reply.

“And I,” countered Rabbi Meir Simcha, “will pray for a

greater love of Torah!”

To his *chavruta*'s query as to how greater love of Torah would help solve their problem, Rabbi Meir offered this explanation:

“It is a common occurrence for a baby to cry for no obvious reason, and all attempts to stop the crying prove unsuccessful. Neither pacifiers nor sweets nor cuddling calm the child. Then the mother walks into the room, takes the baby in her arms and silence prevails. What is the secret? The mother, who has the greatest love for the baby, also has the greatest capacity for understanding its needs. The same applies to us. The more we love the Torah the better we shall be able to understand it.”