

O H R N E T

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PARSHA INSIGHTS

A PIANO LESSON

“...every man at his camp and every man at his banner...” (1:52)

As a small boy, I remember the first time I saw a concert pianist in action. I was fascinated how his hands could caress the most sublime sounds from a few dozen ivory sticks. Being a persuasive sort, I managed to talk my parents into buying a piano so that I could perform the same trick. When the piano arrived, I positioned myself carefully on the piano stool. (Had I been wearing tails, I would, no doubt, have given them a nonchalant flick as I seated myself.) I opened the lid, rubbed my hands to warm them, and held them poised over the center of the keyboard just like I had seen the maestro do.

My hands plunged into the unfortunate keys with a loud and highly unmusical ‘splang’. This was followed by several more ‘splangs’, a few ‘splongs’ rounded off with a ‘grong-grang-grong’ and a long ‘frannnggggggggg’ down to the nether depths of the keyboard.

This was not the magic that I had hoped for. My mother arranged for me to have lessons.

“Now,” said Mr. Szfortzo, my new piano teacher, “...the first thing we need to learn is order...”

“But I want to be a child prodigy,” I protested.

Realizing the sort of a pupil with whom he had been blessed, Mr. Szfortzo rolled his eyes heavenward. After a few seconds of contemplation, he began to speak.

“To achieve anything, a person must have order. Music is all about order. One note has to follow the other in the correct order. One movement must follow the next in the correct order. In order to get anywhere in music – sorry no pun intended — (he grinned), you must order your day so that every day you will be able to sit down and practice your scales, the basic order of music. You can’t just pick up your hands and expect them to produce Rachmaninoff.”

Of this last fact, I was already painfully aware.

“Order, Order, Order.”

“...every man at his camp and every man at his banner...”

The whole Torah is based on order: A split-second divides Shabbat from the weekdays. A hairsbreadth between kosher and *treif*; one drop of water divides a kosher *mikve* from one that is unfit; a millimeter separates the camp of the *Kohanim* from that of

the *Levi'im*; a Levi must not do the service of a *kohen* and vice versa, nor may a Levi do the service of his fellow.

With “every man at his camp and every man at his banner,” the Jewish People are able to give a flawless performance of our Sonata of life – the Holy Torah.

• Based on *Tenuat Hamussar* Rabbi Zimcha Zissel of Kelm

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PARSHA OVERVIEW

The Book of Bamidbar — “In the desert” — begins with G-d commanding Moshe to take a census of all men over age twenty — old enough for service. The count reveals just over 600,000. The *levi'im* are counted separately later because their service will be unique. They will be responsible for transporting the *Mishkan* and its furnishings and assembling them when the nation encamps. The 12 Tribes of Israel, each with its banner, are arranged around the *Mishkan* in four sections: east, south, west and north. Since Levi is singled out, the tribe of Yosef is split into two tribes, Efraim and Menashe, so there will be four groups of three. When the nation travels, they march in a formation similar to the way they camp. A formal transfer is made between the first-born

and the *levi'im*, whereby the *levi'im* take over the role the first-born would have had serving in the *Mishkan* if not for the sin of the golden calf. The transfer is made using all the 22,000 surveyed *levi'im* from one month old and up. Only *levi'im* between 30 and 50 will work in the *Mishkan*. The remaining first-born sons are redeemed with silver, similar to the way we redeem our first-born today. The sons of Levi are divided in three main families, Gershon, Kehat and Merari (besides the *kohanim* — the special division from Kehat’s family). The family of Kehat carried the *menorah*, the table, the altar and the holy ark. Because of their utmost sanctity, the ark and the altar are covered only by Aharon and his sons, before the *levi'im* prepare them for travel.

ISRAEL Forever

THE SPECIAL PEOPLE

“I have taken the Levites from among the Children of Israel in place of the first-born.” This is the declaration by G-d in this week’s Torah portion regarding the special status of the Tribe of Levy. Sanctified by G-d on the day that He slew the Egyptian first-born, the Levites were not only counted apart from the rest of the nation but were also set apart from all other Jews in other ways. This is how the Rambam (Laws of Shemitah and Yovel 13:12) describes their status:

“Why did the Levites not receive a share of Eretz Yisrael or share in its spoils? Because they were set apart to serve G-d, to perform His sacred service and to teach His proper ways and righteous laws to the public... They

were therefore removed from worldly ways. They do not fight in wars. They are the army of G-d and He provides them with their needs.

“And it is not for the Levites alone. Every person in the world who takes it upon himself to serve G-d and to abandon all the many material considerations which motivate people, such a person is sanctified and all his needs will be provided just as they were for the *Kohanim* and Levites.”

What a powerful lesson this should offer for those in Israel who still fail to appreciate the role of the modern-day Levites, the yeshiva students who are the best guarantee for Israel forever.

LOVE OF THE LAND - THE SAGES

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

“WHO IS CONSIDERED A RICH MAN? ONE WHO IS SATISFIED WITH WHAT HE HAS, AS IT IS WRITTEN (TEHILLIM 128):

“WHEN YOU EAT FROM THE WORK OF YOUR HANDS YOU WILL BE FORTUNATE AND IT WILL BE WELL WITH YOU” – FORTUNATE IN THIS WORLD AND WELL WITH YOU IN THE WORLD-TO-COME.” — BEN ZOMA (AVOT 4:1)

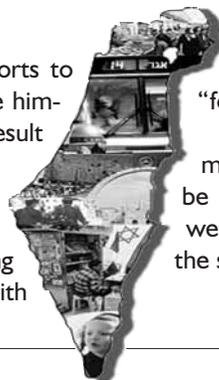
The truly rich man is not frantic in his efforts to acquire wealth. Therefore he can dedicate himself constantly to spiritual matters. As a result he will be blessed in both worlds.

“One who is content to enjoy the work of his own hands is greater than one who fears Heaven,” say Chazal (*Berachot* 8a), because King David promises the former that “it will be well with

you”, while the latter is merely described as being “fortunate”.

This comparison comes from Ben Zoma. Even if a man is G-d fearing, so long as he lacks the capacity to be content with what he has and frantically pursues wealth he will not be able to properly devote himself to the service of G-d.

• *Tosefot Yom Tov*



PARSHA Q&A ?

1. Why were the Jewish People counted so frequently?
2. What documents did the people bring when they were counted?
3. What determined the color of the tribal flags?
4. What is the difference between an “ot” and a “degel”?
5. How do we see that the Jews in the time of Moshe observed “*techum Shabbat*” - the prohibition against traveling more than 2,000 *amot* on *Shabbat*?
6. What was the signal for the camp to travel?
7. What was the sum total of the counting of the 12 tribes?
8. Why are Aharon’s sons called “sons of Aharon and Moshe?”
9. Who was Nadav’s oldest son?
10. Which two people from the Book of Esther does Rashi mention in this week’s Parsha?
11. Why did the *levi'im* receive *ma'aser rishon*?
12. Which groups of people were counted from the age of one month?
13. Name the first descendant of Levi in history to be counted as an infant.
14. Who assisted Moshe in counting the *levi'im*?
15. Why did so many people from the tribe of Reuven support Korach in his campaign against Moshe?
16. Why did so many people from the tribes of Yehuda, Yissachar and Zevulun become great Torah scholars?
17. In verse 3:39 the Torah states that the total number of *levi'im* was 22,000. The actual number was 22,300. Why does the Torah seem to ignore 300 *levi'im*?
18. The first-born males of the Jewish People were redeemed for five *shekalim*. Why five *shekalim*?
19. During what age-span is a man considered at his full strength?
20. As the camp was readying itself for travel, who was in charge of covering the vessels of the *Mishkan* in preparation for transport?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week’s Questions!

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

1. 1:1 - They are very dear to G-d.
2. 1:18 - They brought birth records proving their tribal lineage.
3. 2:2 - Each tribe’s flag was the color of that tribe’s stone in the breastplate of the *kohen gadol*.
4. 2:2 - An “ot” is a flag, i.e., a colored cloth that hangs from a flagpole. A *degel* is a flagpole.
5. 2:2 - G-d commanded them to camp no more than 2,000 *amot* from the *Ohel Mo’ed*. Had they camped farther, it would have been forbidden for them to go to the *Ohel Mo’ed* on *Shabbat*.
6. 2:9 - The cloud over the *Ohel Mo’ed* departed and the *kohanim* sounded the trumpets.
7. 2:32 - 603,550.
8. 3:1 - Since Moshe taught them Torah, it’s as if he gave birth to them.
9. 3:4 - Nadav had no children.
10. 3:7 - Bigtan and Teresh.
11. 3:8 - Since the *levi'im* served in the *Mishkan* in place of everyone else, they received tithes as “payment.”
12. 3:15, 40 - The *levi'im*, and the first-born of *B'nei Yisrael*.
13. 3:15 - Levi’s daughter Yocheved was born while the Jewish People were entering Egypt. She is counted as one of the 70 people who entered Egypt.
14. 3:16 – G-d.
15. 3:29 - The tribe of Reuven was encamped near Korach, and were therefore influenced for the worse. This teaches that one should avoid living near the wicked.
16. 3:38 - The tribes of Yehuda, Yissachar and Zevulun were encamped near Moshe, and were therefore influenced for the good. This teaches that one should seek to live near the righteous.
17. 3:39 - Each *levi* served to redeem a first-born of the Jewish People. Since 300 *levi'im* were themselves firstborn, they themselves needed to be redeemed, and could therefore not redeem others.
18. 3:46 - To atone for the sale of Yosef, Rachel’s first-born, who was sold by his brothers for five *shekalim* (20 pieces of silver.)
19. 4:2 - Between the ages of 30 and 50.
20. 4:5 - The *kohanim*.

- Ritual impurity status of the blood of Rebbie's mule
- The procedure for tithing the *machatzit hashekel* coins
- The spiritual benefits of being clean of suspicion and sin
- For what was the *machatzit hashekel* used?
- The holidays of the donors of wood to *Beit Hamikdash*
- The offerings which could only be from Eretz Yisrael grain
- How salaries of grain guards in seventh year were paid
- Which public needs were financed by the money tithed and which from the coins left behind?
- The bridge for the Red Heifer
- Can Sanctuary or charity officials do business for their cause with extra funds?
- What was done with leftover incense
- Use of animals which are part of possessions donated to the *Beit Hamikdash*
- Use of an animal designated for a sacrifice for which it does not qualify
- Dealing with suppliers of grain to *Beit Hamikdash*
- Who were the officials in charge in *Beit Hamikdash* and some stories connected with them
- The system for purchasing the flour, oil and wine for the offerings accompanying sacrifices
- The ideal way of giving charity to the poor
- The shofar-shaped collection boxes and the missing Holy Ark

THE WHEEL OF FORTUNE

When Rabbi Yonah was aware of someone from a well-to-do background who had come upon hard times, he devised a strategy for extending help to him in a way that would not offend him.

"I heard that you have a large inheritance coming to you from somewhere," he said to him, "and therefore I

am lending you this sum of money which you will later return to me."

Once the money had been accepted, Rabbi Yonah would say to him: "On second thought you don't even have to pay me back."

What this Sage did was what the Sages suggested as a way of persuading needy people to accept charity they need when they are reluctant to do so. But how could his original statement about being repaid be reconciled with his second one?

An interesting approach is suggested by the commentaries.

In *Mesechta Shabbat* (151b) we find that Rabbi Chiya told his wife that when a poor man comes begging she should rush to offer him a meal so that others will be as generous to her children when they are in need. When she was shocked by what she perceived as a curse of poverty, he explained that he was merely stating a fact of life hinted at in a particular word used by the Torah in its command to give charity (*Devarim* 15:10). That word can be read as *galgal*, a wheel, to indicate that poverty is like a revolving wheel, sometimes touching one family and sometimes another. Even if a person is prosperous he must pray that his offspring will not be poor and must give charity in a considerate manner so that if they are dependent on others they will be helped with dignity.

Rabbi Yonah cancelled the debt of his recipient so that he would not feel pressure to repay when the imaginary inheritance did not materialize. But he did hint that perhaps someday the "wheel of fortune" could turn and the receiver or his children would be the givers to his descendants.

• *Shekalim* 15a

WHAT THE SAGES SAY

"Whoever has established permanent residence in Eretz Yisrael, speaks *lashon hakodesh* (the holy tongue – Hebrew), eats produce only after it is tithed, and recites the *Shma* morning and evening can be confident that he is a candidate for the World-to-Come."

• *Rabbi Meir Shekalim* 9b

SINAGOGA? SI SENOR!

From: **Andreo in Mexico City**

Dear Rabbi,

I see religious Jews in my neighborhood going to temple and I was wondering what it's like inside. Is a gentile like myself allowed inside? What would I experience there?

Dear Andreo,

First let me explain some terms. The Hebrew word for the Jewish place of worship is “*beit haknesset*”, which means “house of assembly”. This is not only because Jews gather there to pray, but also because it is a place of group learning, communal meetings, family celebrations and other functions. The word “synagogue” is a Greek translation of the Hebrew. Many people use the Yiddish word “shul” (related to school), emphasizing the synagogue’s role as a place of study. Religious Jews prefer these terms over “temple”, which is reserved for the Holy Temple of Jerusalem.

While the entrance to the synagogue building may be in any direction, the sanctuary of the synagogue should be built facing Jerusalem. So in the Western Hemisphere for example, once you enter the synagogue complex, the sanctuary faces east. At the front, on the eastern wall, is the Ark. This is a decorative, sometimes elaborate, type of large cabinet facing the entrance in which the Torah scrolls are kept. Also, in front of the Ark, there is a special lamp that is never turned off, called “the eternal light”.

In a typical Ashkenazi synagogue, the community sits facing the Ark while someone leads the services from a special prayer stand near the Ark. In the middle of the sanctuary there is an elevated, decorative table upon

which the Torah scroll is placed when read for the community. According to Sefardi custom, the prayers are often led from this table as well, and the seating may be arranged around it, facing it. In all cases, the main part of the prayer is recited quietly while standing facing Jerusalem.

Non-Jews may enter a synagogue as long as they honor the decorum and respect the practices observed there. This includes formal, modest attire and refraining from conversation during services. A gentile does not have to participate in any way or profess any faith. However, he may follow along and participate in the prayers if he wants, as the prayer book usually has a side-by-side translation. While he should wear a hat or yarmulke (usually available for visitors), he may not wear the prayer shawl, phylacteries or be called to the Torah. Non-Jews should stand whenever the Ark is open and when the Torah is carried to or from the Ark, as a sign of respect for the Torah. Any other time the worshippers stand, non-Jews may stand or sit.

Our sources relate that in ancient times, non-Jews would come from far and wide to witness the miraculous and uplifting events that occurred in Jerusalem around the Holy Temple. Sacrifices were offered on behalf of all the nations with the intention of bestowing upon them G-d’s blessing and bounty (see *Significance of Succot Sacrifices* in **Ohrnet Magazine** for October 15, 2005), and individual non-Jews entered parts of the Temple Mount to present their own sacrifices. Since the synagogue is considered “a miniature Temple”, presumably a gentile should be able to find some inspiration in the synagogue experience as well. To what extent seems to be a highly individual matter depending on each person’s personality, sensitivity and familiarity with what’s going on. Ask your neighbors if you can tag along!

WHAT’S THE RIGHT THING TO DO?

REAL-LIFE QUESTIONS OF SOCIAL AND BUSINESS ETHICS

SAYING A BLESSING ALOUD

Question: The other week I attended a memorable event in Jerusalem sponsored by the Derech Institute on the importance of answering “Amen” to blessings. When taking a coffee-break in the office where I work I would like to make my blessing aloud, as that evening stressed one should do, but I am afraid that there are some non-observant Jewish co-workers who will not respond with Amen and I will be guilty of causing them to sin. What is the right thing to do?

Answer: Although the author of a contemporary halachic work advised saying the blessing quietly in such a case, the opinion of Rabbi Yitzchak Zilberstein, rav of the Ramat

Elchanan community in Bnei Brak, is that you should say it aloud. In his classic *Aleinu Leshabeiach* he makes the following points that directly relate to your question:

If any of the people hearing your blessing will answer Amen you should definitely say it aloud in order to provide them with the opportunity.

Even if no one will thus respond, it is still worthwhile saying the blessing aloud because doing so serves as a sanctification of the Name of G-d.

The only time you should refrain from saying a blessing aloud is if there is a hostile listener who will exploit your action to mock religious observance.

A SPECIAL SICK VISIT

A couple of weeks ago there passed away in Jerusalem a very special Jew. Moshe Boruch Weinberg, of blessed memory, was beloved by those who knew him in Toronto and in the Bayit Vegan and Ramot neighborhoods of Jerusalem. But to the residents of the Romema and Mattersdorf neighborhoods of the city he was loved and appreciated as the gifted and gracious Dr. Weinberg of the local Sick Fund clinic.

While some of the most distinguished rabbis of Jerusalem eulogized him as a Jew who loved Torah study

and faithfully fulfilled his mission as a physician, one person in the large crowd that participated in his funeral despite the late Friday afternoon hour had a very special memory of Dr. Weinberg.

When he was lying in bed after being diagnosed by Dr. Weinberg as suffering from hepatitis, he was surprised to receive a visit from the doctor. "The rules of the Sick Fund prevent me from making house visits," he explained with his usual good humor, "but they can't stop me from fulfilling the mitzvah of *bikur cholim* — visiting the infirm!"

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