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PARSHA INSIGHTS

THE THANKERS

"...you shall not gather the gleanings of your harvest; for the poor and the proselyte shall you leave them..." (23:22)"

What a fascinating instrument is the telescope! You can bring something far away and see it clearly, or by turning it round the wrong way, you can make what's close at hand seem remote.

It all depends on which way round you hold the telescope.

Seeing G-d in this material world is not something that just happens. It takes work. However, G-d has given us a spiritual telescope that lets us bring Him much closer.

It's easy to divide religion into two categories: our relationship with G-d and our relationship with one another. In fact, if you look at the Ten Commandments, you'll notice that the first tablet deals with our relationship with G-d: *I am the L-rd, your G-d; Don't have any other gods before me; Don't take G-d's Name in vain, etc.* while on the second tablet are *mitzvot* between us and our fellow: *Don't kill; don't commit adultery; don't steal; don't give false testimony about others; don't covet, etc.*

However, on another level, the two tablets are one unified statement. Rashi explains the verse just before the giving of the Ten Commandments, *"And G-d said all these words, saying"*, to mean that G-d said all the Ten Commandments as one indivisible utterance before He enumerated each of them separately.

Our Sages teach that *"someone who is ungrateful to his fellow will eventually be ungrateful to G-d."* Being ungrateful to G-d means that I don't really believe that everything that I have is a gift from Him. If I don't see my life as a gift, then why should I relate to the Giver?

That's the beginning of atheism.

But what does our gratitude to our fellow have to do with belief in G-d?

Just as ingratitude to man leads to ingratitude to G-d, so too is the reverse. Being grateful to our fellow, recognizing the good that people do for us leads us to being grateful to G-d and therefore to recognizing Him in the world.

"...you shall not gather the gleanings of your harvest; for the poor and the proselyte shall you leave them..." (23:22)"

In this week's parsha, the Torah lists the various festivals. Inserted within this list, however, are laws of harvesting apportioning various parts of the harvest to the poor.

What is the connection between the festivals and the laws of charity?

To teach us that someone who gives charity properly is considered to have built the Holy Temple and brought offerings there.

Ostensibly there is no connection between giving charity and bringing offerings. Charity is a *mitzvah* between ourselves and our fellow; offerings are between us and G-d.

The answer is the two are inseparable; giving charity brings the same closeness to G-d as an offering.

Our ego is like a darkened room. When we open up the window of that room to see the person who is standing outside our door, we will also see beyond to the sky, we will connect to the Heavens.

It all depends on which way we look through the telescope.

• Sources: Rashi, Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe

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POB 18103, Jerusalem 91180, Israel • Tel: +972-2-581-0315 • Email: info@ohr.edu • www.ohr.edu

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PARSHA OVERVIEW

The *kohanim* are commanded to avoid contact with corpses in order to maintain a high standard of ritual purity. They may attend the funeral of only their seven closest relatives: father, mother, wife, son, daughter, brother, and unmarried sister. The *kohen gadol* (High Priest) may not attend the funeral of even his closest relatives. Certain marital restrictions are placed on the *kohanim*. The nation is required to honor the *kohanim*. The physical irregularities that invalidate a *kohen* from serving in the Temple are listed. *Terumah*, a produce tithe given to the *kohanim*, may be eaten only by *kohanim* and their household. An animal may be sacrificed in the Temple after it is eight

days old and is free from any physical defects. The nation is commanded to sanctify the Name of G-d by insuring that their behavior is always exemplary, and by being prepared to surrender their lives rather than murder, engage in licentious relations or worship idols. The special characteristics of the holidays are described, and the nation is reminded not to do certain types of creative work during these holidays. New grain may not be eaten until the *omer* of barley is offered in the Temple. The Parsha explains the laws of preparing the oil for the menorah and baking the *lechem hapanim* in the Temple. A man blasphemes G-d and is executed as prescribed in the Torah.

ISRAEL Forever

THE FIRES OF LAG B'OMER

Lag B'Omer is a very special day for Jews everywhere, but even more so for Jews in Eretz Yisrael. This Shabbat will find many Jews in Meron in order to be prepared to pray at the tomb of the great Talmudic Sage Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai whose Yahrzeit (anniversary of passing) is on the morrow, the 33rd day of the Counting of the Omer – Lag B'Omer.

The big central bonfire that will be lit there at night, and similar ones throughout the country, pay fiery tribute to the

light of Torah this Sage brought to the world through his teaching of the most esoteric concepts.

The Lag B'Omer fires should serve as a reminder to everyone in Israel of the need to banish the darkness of ignorance of Torah and Jewish tradition which is responsible for the tragic situation of more than a million Jewish schoolchildren who are unaware of the very basics of Judaism.

May the merit of this sainted Sage enable us to penetrate this darkness by lighting the fire of Torah in Israel forever.

LOVE OF THE LAND - THE PLACES

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

BAR'AM – TOMB OF PROPHET OVADIAH

In the north of Israel near the Hiram Junction is the village of Bar'am where there is a tomb that is believed by many to contain the remains of the Prophet Ovadiah.

Our Talmudic Sages describe Ovadiah as an Edomite proselyte whose prophecy, recorded in



the Book of the 12 "Minor Prophets", is entirely directed against Edom.

He managed the household of the idol-worshipping King Achav and Queen Izevel and managed to save a hundred true prophets from their murderous hands by hiding them in two caves and supplying all their needs.

Special Contest! "What are the Top Ten Reasons to be Jewish?"

Ohrnet thanks the many readers who wrote witty, thoughtful and inspiring Top Ten lists last week for this contest. We continue the contest another week — your chance to express your connection to Judaism with sincerity and humor.

Please send your replies to ohr@ohr.edu and your answers just might be accepted for publication, prizes, and furthering a worthy cause!

PARSHA Q&A ?

1. Which male descendants of Aharon are exempt from the prohibition against contacting a dead body?
2. Does a *kohen* have an option regarding becoming ritually defiled when his unmarried sister passes away?
3. How does one honor a *kohen*?
4. How does the Torah restrict the *kohen gadol* with regard to mourning?
5. The Torah states in verse 22:3 that one who “approaches holy objects” while in a state of *tumah* (impurity) is penalized with excision. What does the Torah mean by “approaches”?
6. What is the smallest piece of a corpse that is able to transmit *tumah*?
7. Who in the household of a *kohen* may eat *terumah*?
8. If the daughter of a *kohen* marries a “zar” she may no longer eat *terumah*. What is a *zar*?
9. What is the difference between a *neder* and a *nedavah*?
10. May a person slaughter an animal and its father on the same day?
11. How does the Torah define “profaning” the Name of G-d?
12. Apart from Shabbat, how many days are there during the year about which the Torah says that work is forbidden?
13. How big is an *omer*?
14. On what day do we begin to “count the *omer*”?
15. Why do we begin counting the *omer* at night?
16. How does the *omer* differ from other *minchah* offerings?
17. The blowing of the shofar on Rosh Hashanah is called a “*zichron teruah*” (sound of remembrance). For what is it a reminder?
18. What is unusual about the wood of the *etrog* tree?
19. Who was the father of the blasphemer?
20. What is the penalty for intentionally wounding one’s parent?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week’s Questions!

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

1. 21:1 - *Challalim* — those disqualified from the priesthood because they are descended from a relationship forbidden to a *kohen*.
2. 21:3 - No, he is required to do so.
3. 21:8 - He is first in all matters of holiness. For example, a *kohen* reads from the Torah first, and is usually the one to lead the blessings before and after meals.
4. 21:10-12 - He may not allow his hair to grow long, nor attend to his close relatives if they die, nor accompany a funeral procession.
5. 22:3 - Eats.
6. 22:5 - A piece the size of an olive.
7. 22:11 - He, his wife, his sons, his unmarried daughters and his non-Jewish slaves.
8. 22:12 - A non-*kohen*.
9. 22:18 - A *neder* is an obligation upon a person; a *nedavah* is an obligation placed upon an object.
10. 22:28 - Yes. The Torah only prohibits slaughtering an animal and its mother on the same day.
11. 22:32 - Willfully transgressing the commandments.
12. 23:7-36 - Seven.
13. 23:10 - One tenth of an *eipha*.
14. 23:15 - On the 16th of Nissan.
15. 23:15 - The Torah requires counting seven complete weeks. If we begin counting in the daytime, the seven weeks would not be complete, because according to the Torah a day starts at nightfall.
16. 23:16 - It was made from barley.
17. 23:24 - The *akeidat* (binding of) Yitzchak.
18. 23:40 - It has the same taste as the fruit.
19. 24:10 - The Egyptian killed by Moshe (*Shemot* 2:12).
20. 24:21 - Death.

- What is *yibum*?
- The 15 women who are not eligible for *yibum*
- The *tzarah* – other, unrelated wife of deceased brother- and her ineligibility
- Reasons for the order of the *mishnah*
- What the numbers mentioned in *mishnah* intend to limit
- Torah source for ineligibility of those 15 women
- When a positive command clashes with a prohibition
- The method of *semuchim* – deriving a rule from the proximity of Torah passages to one another
- Application of this method to *shatnez*
- Learning from the rule that a *metzora* must cut his hair and beard for purification
- Learning from the rule that neither honoring parents nor building the Sanctuary can justify violation of Shabbat
- Respect which must be shown to *Beit Hamikdash*
- No execution on Shabbat and why we might have assumed otherwise
- The rules of interpretation when a particular of a general category is mentioned separately
- Can the cancellation made by the Torah of one prohibition in favor of a positive command be applied to a concurrent prohibition
- Is the ban on a spiritually impure person entering Temple Mount before sunset of his day of immersion in a *mikveh* of Torah or rabbinic origin
- What is derived from the fact that the Torah compared all forbidden relatives to one another
- The status of a *tzarah* when *yibum* is not involved

THE MURDEROUS KOHEN

A kohen who has committed murder is disqualified from performing any sacrificial service. “From My altar,” orders the Torah (*Shmot* 21:14), “take him away to be executed.”

Since this rule is in force even if there is no other *kohen* to perform the service in the *Beit Hamikdash*, the *gemara* concludes that the need to execute the murderer supersedes the need to perform the sacrificial service.

Tosefot challenges this conclusion by suggesting that preventing the murderer from performing the service is based on the fact that he is personally disqualified rather than on his execution superseding the service. This disqualification would be similar to that of a *kohen* who killed

someone, even involuntarily, and is therefore not eligible to raise his hands to utter the priestly blessings.

There is a difference between the two cases is the conclusion of Tosefot. In the case of raising the hands to bless the congregation it is unfitting for the very hands which shed blood to be an instrument for blessing since “the prosecutor cannot be the defender”. This does not apply to the qualification of a murderous *kohen* for sacrificial service, so that preventing him from performing such service must be viewed as proof that execution of a murderer supersedes sacrificial service. (See *Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim* 128:35 in regard to whether a repentant *kohen* can perform the priestly blessing.)

• *Yevamot* 7a

WHAT THE Sages SAY

“The Torah, in the same passage, commands us to observe the Shabbat and show respect to the Sanctuary in order to teach us that just as Shabbat observance is forever, so too must respect be shown to the site of the *Beit Hamikdash* even after it has been destroyed.”

• *Beraita* (*Yevamot* 6b)

BE LIKE MIKE

From: Mike Flisser in Atlanta

Dear Rabbi,

As a beginner to observant Judaism, during my studies and my prayers I have the feeling that what we do as Jews on a daily basis does not hold a candle to what Abraham, Sarah, Jacob, Isaac, Moses, and others did to be blessed by G-d. I know G-d loves all His children and His greatest hope is with us, but it seems like an impossible act to follow. It may be a common feeling with Jews that have started studying again, but I feel somewhat unworthy of all the wonderful things G-d has given to me in my life, as well as my friends and family. I know the blessings are there and I thank G-d for all of them, but how do you fill in the feeling of inadequacy when praying and studying the Torah?

Dear Mike,

I admire your sensitivity and enthusiasm in your newfound interest in Judaism. It is a wonderful period in one's spiritual growth, and may you always feel such novelty in your relationship with G-d, the Torah and prayer.

You mention your feelings of inadequacy in comparison to the Patriarch's and Matriarch's phenomenal level of service of G-d. However, they didn't view themselves or their service as great. David referred to himself as a worm, Abraham called himself dust and ashes, and Moses and Aharon barely recognized their existence by asking, "What are we?" This was not feigned humility — they were honestly aware of their insignificance in comparison with G-d and thereby felt unworthy of His blessing. In truth, this awareness and sensitivity did not discourage them from serving G-d. On the contrary, it motivated them to serve Him even more and was thus the very source of their greatness. So you see, as a descendent of our illustrious Patriarchs, you are actually walking in their footsteps.

Another point to ponder is related to what you yourself mention regarding G-d loving His children.

"Children" is the key word here. Consider the great joy and love a parent feels when his child takes his first steps or utters his first words. The wellspring of emotions is so great that it's indescribable. Yet these steps are so awkward, uncoordinated, imbalanced, and short-lived — the baby falls. Similarly the baby's first words, far from eloquent, are a combination of barely perceptible syllables mixed with drool. Yet the parents are ecstatic as baby mutters, "maw-mee" – "daa-dee". Far from repulsing the parent, baby's cumbersome and inadequate movements and speech are all the more endearing.

This is, to a certain extent, how our deeds and prayers appear before G-d. Nevertheless, the fact that we have embarked on the path of growth and are making an effort despite our inadequacy is very endearing to G-d. It is regarding people and situations such as these that our Sages in the *Midrash* understood the verse "v'diglo alai ahava" to mean, "The omission of these people is beloved to Me." Even if they read the word 'v'avta' (and you shall love your G-d) as 'v'oyavta' (and you shall estrange), since it comes from simple and wholehearted people, it is beloved to Me, says G-d (*Shir HaShirim* 2:4).

A last point to keep in mind is that what we are taught about the amazing way in which the forefathers served G-d is not intended to mean that we must be just like them. They were extraordinary men and women who thereby merited being the foundation of the Jewish people. Rather, what we are told about them is intended to spur us to realize our own individual potential to the greatest degree possible as they did, even though both quantitatively and qualitatively we cannot come close to them. This is an important lesson regarding all of the stories we hear of the ways in which the righteous *tzaddikim* served G-d. We are to be encouraged to try our best as they did, even if we can't do what they did. This is what the great Reb Zusha meant when he said, "After Zusha dies, the Heavenly court won't ask, 'Why weren't you Moses' but rather 'Why weren't you Zusha?'"

Remember: The awareness of your "inadequacy" makes you greater; your "shortcomings" make you dearer; and G-d only compares you to the best Michael you can be.

DO IT YOURSELF

Question: I am expecting some guests for Shabbat who will be sleeping over. Is it sufficient to just place sheets and blankets on the beds reserved for them or am I expected to make their beds as well? What is the right thing to do?

Answer: The story is told about a guest who arrived at the home of the sainted Chafetz Chaim in Radin. When the guest saw his aged host making a bed for him he insisted that he wanted to spare him the trouble by doing it him-

self.

"Well, if that's the way you feel about it," responded the host, "perhaps you will also put on my *tallit* and *tefillin* for me tomorrow morning."

When the guest protested that these were *mitzvot* which one could not do for another, the Chafetz Chaim pointed out that the mitzvah of *hachnasat orchim* was no different because hospitality was the mitzvah of the host and not of the guest.

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

A GRANDFATHER TALE

"Did you know that I learned together with the grandfather you are named for?" This is what the head of a yeshiva in Jerusalem said to one of his students, recalling memories of half a century earlier.

This conversation came about as a result of a telephone call the rosh hayeshiva received from someone in the USA who asked him to pay special attention to the young grandson of an former classmate who passed away at a relatively young age.

Memories brought on memories of a family connection with the boy's grandmother and of the strange coincidence that the grandfather had succeeded the rosh hayeshiva in a teaching position way back when.

Then came the turn of the student to surprise the rosh hayeshiva whom he had met for the first time.

"Did you know," he asked, "that I am impersonating you in the Purim play of the yeshiva coming up in a couple of days?"

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