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PARSHA INSIGHTS

VERBAL GRATITUDE

“You will come to whomever is the kohen in those days and you shall say to him...” (26:3)

A blisteringly hot Wednesday. Suddenly the power cuts. A visit from the electrician reveals the worst: “It’s the compressor in your a/c. You need a new one. Trouble is the manufacturer can only get it here by next Tuesday.”

“But what are we going to do on Shabbat?”

“Does your Shabbat table fit in the fridge? Listen, I think I can get you a new compressor before Shabbat. I’ll do my best.”

“You’re a *tzaddik!*”

And sure enough, by Thursday lunchtime, the new compressor is in place and the house returns to its regular near-artic temperature.

Friday afternoon the electrician’s mobile phone rings. He notes the caller ID; it’s the people with the new compressor.

“Oh, oh. Trouble...” He thinks to himself as he answers the phone.

“We just wanted to call you and thank you so much for fixing our air conditioner. You’ve really made our Shabbat. Thank you so much! Shabbat Shalom!”

Gratitude should never remain implicit; as much as we feel, so should we express.

In this week’s portion, the Torah instructs us to give *bikurim*, first fruits, to the kohen. However, it’s not enough just to give them.

“You will come to whomever is the kohen in those days and you shall say to him...” Rashi comments on the phrase “and you shall say to him” — “because you are not an ingrate.” In other words, what prevents a person from being an ingrate is the verbalization of his gratitude; anything less is considered lacking.

We learn this principle from G-d: In Parshat Nasso, the princes of the tribes brought gifts for the inauguration of the *Mishkan* sanctuary. The gifts of each prince were identical. Brevity and style would demand that the gifts of the first prince be enumerated and those of the remainder abbreviated.

However the Torah did not stint in recording each and every one separately to show G-d’s specific and verbal “appreciation” of each and every gift.

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PARSHA OVERVIEW

When *Bnei Yisrael* dwell in the Land of Israel, the first fruits are to be taken to the Temple and given to the *kohen* in a ceremony expressing recognition that it is G-d who guides Jewish history throughout all ages. (This passage forms one of the central parts of the Haggadah that we read at the Passover Seder.) On the last day of Pesach of the fourth and seventh years of the seven-year *shemita* cycle, a person must recite a disclosure stating that he has indeed distributed the tithes to the appropriate people in the prescribed manner. With this *mitzvah*, Moshe concludes the commandments that G-d has told him to give to the Jewish People. Moshe exhorts them to walk in G-d's ways because they are set aside as a treasured people to G-d. When *Bnei Yisrael* cross the Jordan

River they are to make a new commitment to the Torah. Huge stones are to be erected and the Torah is to be written on them in the world's seventy primary languages, and they are to be covered with a thin layer of plaster. Half the tribes will stand on Mount Gerizim and half on Mount Eval, and the *levi'im* will stand in a valley between the two mountains. There the *levi'im* will recite 12 commandments and all the people will say "amen" to the blessings and the curses. Moshe then details the blessings that will be bestowed upon *Bnei Yisrael*. These blessings are both physical and spiritual. But if the Jewish People do not keep the Torah, Moshe details a chilling picture of destruction, resulting in exile and wandering among the nations.

ISRAEL Forever

A NATION THAT DOESN'T RESPECT ITSELF

The *tochacha* (warning) in this week's Torah portion echoes in our own days. Here is an item from the June 6th issue of the Jerusalem Post that speaks for itself.

"Chief of Protocol at the Foreign Ministry Itzhak Eldan was dismayed this week to read a report in Maariv claiming that Israel diplomats are fed up with a protocol stipulating that when entertaining guests at restaurants abroad they do so in kosher eateries.

Some of the diplomats have complained that kosher restaurants, if they do exist in the cities in which they are serving, are sub-standard and are calling for a relaxation of the rules.

Eldan, who soon after coming into office introduced another rule, namely that staff from the Protocol office do not go to the airport to greet a foreign dignitary who arrives

on Shabbat or on a Jewish holiday, says that what people do in their private lives is their own business, but when they are representing the state, they must publicly uphold Jewish values. One of his favorite mantras is that 'a nation that doesn't respect itself can't expect to be respected by others.'

Thus anyone acting on behalf of the nation and the Jewish people should not be doing anything that denigrates national and Jewish traditions. Quite a lot of non-Jews are at least superficially familiar with Jewish dietary laws, and when they see a representative of the state violating them, they must surely wonder what else is being violated."

Only by Israel's representatives showing with their behavior that the nation respects itself can we hope that there will be universal respect for 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

SHA'AR HARACHAMIM — THE SEALED GATE

Why is this gate known as Sha'ar Harachamim (Mercy Gate) sealed? At one time this gate was the only direct entrance to the Temple Mount area from outside the city. When the Muslims became aware of an ancient tradition that



Mashiach would come through this gate on his way to redeeming Israel, they sealed it in order to block his arrival. They made another move that they hoped would discourage the redeemer by burying their dead in front of the gate.

PARSHA Q&A ?

1. When historically did the obligation to bring *bikkurim* begin?
2. *Bikkurim* are from which crops?
3. How does one designate *bikkurim*?
4. Who shakes the basket containing the *bikkurim*?
5. What does “*v’anita v’amarta*” mean?
6. Which Arami “tried to destroy my father?”
7. When during the year may *bikkurim* be brought? Until when are the special verses recited?
8. Someone declaring that he separated *terumah* and *ma’aser* says: “And I didn’t forget.” What didn’t he forget?
9. What were the Jewish People to do with the 12 stones on Mt. Eval?
10. Six tribes stood on Mt. Eval and six on Mt. Gerizim. Who and what were in the middle?
11. Who “causes the blind to go astray?”
12. How does one “strike another secretly?”
13. Eleven curses were spoken on Mt. Eval. What is the significance of this number?
14. Why are sheep called “*ashterot*”?
15. How is the manner of expressing the curses in *Parshat Bechukotai* more severe than in this week’s *parsha*?
16. What is meant by “the Jewish People will become a proverb?”
17. Why did all the curses expressed in 48:16-44 befall the Jewish People?
18. “In the morning you shall say, ‘If only it were (last) evening’ and in the evening you will say, ‘If only it were (this) morning.’” Why?
19. To which tribe did Moshe give the Torah first?
20. How long does it take to understand the depth of one’s teacher’s wisdom?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week’s Questions!

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

1. 26:1 - After the Land was conquered and divided.
2. 26:2 - The seven species for which *Eretz Yisrael* is praised: Wheat, barley, grapes, olives, figs, dates, and pomegranates.
3. 26:2 - When he sees the first fruit ripen on a tree, he binds a piece of straw around it to mark it as *bikkurim*.
4. 26:4 - The *kohen* places his hands under the hands of the one bringing it, and they wave the basket together.
5. 26:5 - Speak loudly.
6. 26:5 - Lavan.
7. 26:11 - *Bikkurim* are brought from Shavuot until Chanukah. The verses are recited only until Succot.
8. 26:13 - To bless G-d.
9. 10. 27:2 - Build an altar.
10. 27:12 - *Kohanim*, *levi'im* and the Holy Ark.
11. 27:18 - Any person who intentionally gives bad advice.
12. 27:24 - By slandering him.
13. 27:24 - Each curse corresponds to one of the tribes, except for the tribe of Shimon. Since Moshe didn’t intend to bless the tribe of Shimon before his death, he did not want to curse them either.
14. 28:4 - Because they “enrich” (*m’ashiro*) their owners.
15. 28:23 - In *Bechukotai* the Torah speaks in the plural, whereas in this week’s *Parsha* the curses are mentioned in the singular.
16. 28:37 - Whenever someone wants to express the idea of extraordinary suffering, they will use the Jewish People as an example.
17. 28:47 - Because they did not serve G-d with gladness when everything was abundant.
18. 28:67 - Because the curse of each hour will be greater than that of the previous hour.
19. 29:3 - To the Tribe of Levi.
20. 29:8 - 40 years.

- When in the week a virgin gets married and why
- Support for the betrothed whose marriage has been delayed
- A condition made in a divorce agreement which was not fulfilled because of uncontrollable factors
- When *kiddushin* can be annulled by rabbinic decree
- When danger or death of parent causes change of wedding date
- Relations between husband and wife during mourning period and menstrual period
- Weddings on Friday or Motzaei Shabbat
- Wedding dates for virgins and widows and their significance
- The deeds of the righteous and the caution in listening
- Consummating a marriage on Shabbat or Yom Tov
- The blessings made for newlyweds
- The condolence visit in the house of Rabbi Chiya bar Abba
- The severe penalty for indecent language

THE MOABITE MYSTERY

“**A**nd he (Boaz) took ten men from the elders of the city, and said ‘Sit down here’ and they sat.”
(Ruth 4:2)

This passage from the Book of Ruth, which is read in the synagogue every Shavuot, does not indicate what the purpose was of convening ten elders. Rabbi Nachman sees this as a source for requiring a *minyan* of ten men for making the blessings for newlyweds, in this particular case Boaz and Ruth. Rabbi Aviahu cites another source for this rule and states that Boaz’s convening of ten men was for the purpose of publicizing the ruling that although his bride-to-be was of Moabite descent she was eligible to him for marriage because the Torah’s restrictions on Moabite converts in regard to marriage applied only to the males.

Maharsha raises the question as to how it was possible for the anonymous relative of Naomi and Ruth who was the prime redeemer to refuse to play this role because it

meant marrying a forbidden Moabite. Did he then challenge the public ruling of Boaz who was the judge of Israel for many years? He raises the same question in regard to Doag (Yevamot 77a) who attempted to disqualify David as the descendant of the forbidden Moabite Ruth.

Maharsha there offers a solution to both problems by suggesting that both the anonymous redeemer and Doag believed that the marriage restriction on Moabites applied to women as well but that Boaz was permitted to marry Ruth because the mitzvah of *yibum*, which in those days was practiced by relatives of the deceased aside from his brother, overrode the ban on marrying a Moabite. As a source for this Maharsha cites the commentary of Ramban (*Bereishet* 38.8) who teaches that the marriage between Yehuda and his daughter-in-law Tamar was an extension of the concept of *yibum* to other relatives. The Maharsha’s approach has been attacked by other commentaries because what Yehuda did was before the Torah was given and *yibum* as a mitzvah was limited to the deceased’s brother.

• Ketubot 7b

WHAT THE Sages SAY

“Everyone is aware of why a *kallah* enters a *chupah*; yet in regard to anyone who speaks indecently about this matter, even if he has been assigned by Heaven to seventy good years they will be turned into bad ones.”

• Rabbi Chanan bar Rav - Ketubot 8b

GAMES ON SHABBAT

From: Bradley in Milton, MA

Dear Rabbi,
Can one play a game like Scrabble, Monopoly or Chess on Shabbat?

Dear Bradley,

Let's start with Scrabble. Does the forming of a word by placing letters next to each other on a Scrabble-board transgress the prohibition against "writing" on Shabbat? In addition, since people keep score when playing Scrabble, would that make it prohibited to play because one might come to write down the score by accident?

Rabbi Chaim Pinchus Scheinberg was shown an edition of Scrabble which had a flat board, without grooves for the tiles, and was asked if it is permitted to play this game on Shabbat. He acknowledged that some rabbis forbid it, and others permit it. He ruled that it is permitted, but that great care must be taken to ensure that the players do not forget that it's Shabbat and write down their scores.

Now for Monopoly. Monopoly is a game that mimics business transactions. Rabbi Scheinberg said that even though it is technically permitted to play Monopoly on Shabbat, nevertheless, playing a business-oriented game on Shabbat is not conducive to creating the proper Shabbat spirit.

Playing chess on Shabbat is discussed in the Shulchan Aruch. The Rama rules that it is a pastime that is permitted on Shabbat. Some of the *poskim* note, though, that in order to differentiate between Shabbat and weekday, some people had a special chess set made of silver just for Shabbat play.

A halachic consideration that should not be overlooked when playing these games on Shabbat is the prohibition of "borer". "Borer" refers to the act of separating items from a pile or mixture of others when you don't

plan to use them immediately, but rather for future use. With games that have many different pieces, this is something that can occur when cleaning up. Don't separate the pieces when putting them away.

Until now our discussion permitting these games has been limited to the letter of the law. However, one must certainly consider whether playing these games is conducive to the spirit of the law. Is this the way to spend the precious moments of Shabbat? Shabbat is a beautiful time to pray, learn Torah, sing *zemirot*, enjoy and appreciate G-d's wonderful creation and cultivate relationships by conversing with family and friends. You're the final arbiter — could you be spending your Shabbat time more wisely?

Rabbi Dr. Abraham Twerski told a beautiful story about loving rebuke that he once received from his saintly father, the Hornesteipel Rebbe, *zatzal*. One Rosh Hashanah when Rabbi Twerski was a young boy, a guest staying at their house asked him to play chess. The boy felt that it wasn't right to play chess on Rosh Hashanah, but the man assured him, "What could be wrong with a game of chess?" They played, and the young boy checkmated the older guest.

After Rosh Hashanah, Rabbi Twerski called young Abraham to his study. His father, never taking his eyes from the book that he was studying, chided the boy, "You played chess on Rosh Hashanah?" His tone revealed that he considered his son to be above this kind of behavior, and that he was disappointed with him. The rebuke struck deep in the little boy, who felt very ashamed.

After his father was certain that he had made his point, he lifted his head from the book he was studying, peered above his spectacles and with a proud twinkle in his eyes he pried his son, "Did you win?"

Sources:

- *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim, 338*
- *Chayei Adam 38:11*
- *The Halachos of Muktzah - chapter 1 note 24*
- *Shemirat Shabbat k'Hilchata 16:32*

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THE STRATEGY OF SELLING

Question: With the Torah reading of the *tochacha* chapter of reproof coming up this Shabbat I am reminded of the great difficulties I have encountered in trying to persuade fellow Jews to become observant. What is the right thing to do?

Answer: The Chafetz Chaim compared your situation to that of a storekeeper. Does he lose his temper because the buyer is too choosy, or too stubborn, or because he bargains too much? Does he ever consider refusing to sell to him? Did you ever see a storekeeper put a sign on his door that he sells only to easy cus-

tomers and that tough ones are unwelcome? The answer to all these questions is that a storekeeper has to be patient and forgiving, and speak softly to a tough customer if he wishes to make a living.

The same is true in regard to "selling" a Jew on observance. If you run into a tough customer who finds fault with the merchandise or haggles over the price, you must remember to try a little harder to win him over. The reward for such an effort, concluded the Chafetz Chaim, is assured, for even the toughest customer eventually buys something from a patient storekeeper.

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY _____

DANGER IN THE AIR

When the passenger on an El Al plane sat down on his seat he did not feel at all unusual. But when he later had difficulty getting up he realized that his trousers were stuck on a piece of chewing gum.

A damaged suit and the agony experienced certainly entitled him to some compensation, and he sued for 1500 *shekalim*. The court sympathized with his problem

but felt that 800 *shekalim* was enough.

But this is small time in comparison to the suit filed by a passenger on a plane belonging to a foreign airline.

The complaint in that case was that the overhead baggage compartment unexpectedly opened and a heavy object came crashing down on the passenger's head.

And what was it?

The safety manual!

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