

OHRNET

SHABBAT PARSHAT BEHA'ALOTCHA · 19 SIVAN 5772 - JUNE 9, 2012 · VOL. 19 NO. 33

PARSHA INSIGHTS

GOING UP

“In your lighting...” (8:2)

Once there was a rich nobleman who had a friend who was a simple laborer. The rich man told his friend that he would eat in his home. The laborer did not stint in preparing his home to the maximum of his ability. He cleaned and arranged his meager furnishings, set the table as lavishly as he could, and lit candles to welcome his friend. As it grew dark, the laborer went to the window and saw rising on the horizon a glow. At first, he thought it was the setting sun, but as the sky darkened, the glow continued to get brighter. Suddenly, his friend the nobleman appeared on the crest of the hill with a large group of servants all carrying torches. These torches were so bright that they lit up the night as though it were day. When the laborer saw this entourage approaching his cottage, he turned and looked at his room. The candles that he had arranged paled into insignificance in the glow of the torches that approached his home. Quickly, he extinguished the candles and hid the candlesticks in a drawer. The nobleman entered his cottage and saw the darkness and said, “Were you not expecting me tonight?” “Yes, I was,” said the laborer. “Why did you kindle no lights?” enquired the nobleman. “I did,” replied the other, “but when I saw the wonderful blaze of lights from the torches of your servants, I was ashamed and hid my candles away.”

On hearing this, the nobleman dismissed all his attendants and said, “Tonight I will dine only by the light of your candles so you will see how dear they are to me.”

People often ask why G-d gave us so many commandments.

Altogether, there are 613. It's true, however, that not all of them can be performed by everyone. For example, there

are *mitzvot* that only *kohanim* can do. There are those that only *levi'im* can do, ones that only women can do, as well as *mitzvot* that can only be done when the Beit Hamikdash exists. Nevertheless, that still leaves a tremendous amount of *mitzvot*.

Why does G-d need me to do all these things? What possible benefit is there to the Creator of the World if I put on *tefillin*, or if I love my neighbor as myself? Whatever little light I can shine into this world is infinitesimal compared to His Light. How can the little light that my kindness generates compare with G-d's eternal kindness in creating the world and giving me the opportunity to exist and create a relationship with Him? Isn't my little light swamped completely by His light?

This is exactly how Moshe felt when he entered the Sanctuary. When Moshe went in there he found the Sanctuary bathed in radiance of the *Shechina*, the Divine Presence. Moshe wondered how the poor earthly lights of the menorah could radiate any light. He thought they would be overpowered by the brilliance of the *Shechina*.

What possible use could G-d have for the wicks and oils of mere mortals?

G-d spoke to Moshe using the first word of this week's Torah portion, “*Beha'alotcha*”. This word is usually translated as “*When you light*”; however it can also mean “*In your elevation*.” G-d was telling Moshe that the *mitzvah* of the menorah would elevate him. And so it is with all the *mitzvot*. Every *mitzvah* is a chance to become spiritually elevated.

The Torah is 613 ways to become closer to G-d.

• Based on the Midrash

OHRNET magazine is published by OHR SOMAYACH Tanenbaum College

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

Israel Forever, Love of the Land, TalmuDigest, What's the right thing to do?, The Human Side of the Story written by Rav Mendel Weinbach

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PARSHA OVERVIEW

Aharon is taught the method for kindling the menorah. Moshe sanctifies the *levi'im* to work in the Mishkan. They replace the first-born, who were disqualified after sinning at the golden calf. The *levi'im* are commanded that after five years of training they are to serve in the Mishkan from ages 30 to 50; afterwards they are to engage in less strenuous work. One year after the Exodus from Egypt, G-d commands Moshe concerning the *korban* Pesach. Those ineligible for this offering request a remedy, and the mitzvah of Pesach Sheini, allowing a “second chance” to offer the *korban* Pesach one month later, is detailed. Miraculous clouds that hover near the Mishkan signal when to travel and when to camp. Two silver trumpets summon the princes or the entire nation for announcements. The trumpets also signal travel plans, war or festivals. The order in which the tribes march is specified. Moshe invites his father-in-law, Yitro, to join the Jewish People, but Yitro returns to Midian. At the instigation of the *eruv rav* — the mixed Egyptian multitude who joined the Jewish People in

the Exodus — some people complain about the manna. Moshe protests that he is unable to govern the nation alone. G-d tells him to select 70 elders, the first Sanhedrin, to assist him, and informs him that the people will be given meat until they will be sickened by it. Two candidates for the group of elders prophesy beyond their mandate, foretelling that Yehoshua instead of Moshe will bring the people to Canaan. Some protest, including Yehoshua, but Moshe is pleased that others have become prophets. G-d sends an incessant supply of quail for those who complained that they lacked meat. A plague punishes those who complained. Miriam tries to make a constructive remark to Aharon which also implies that Moshe is only like other prophets. G-d explains that Moshe’s prophecy is superior to that of any other prophet, and punishes Miriam with *tzara’at* as if she had gossiped about her brother. (Because Miriam is so righteous, she is held to an incredibly high standard.) Moshe prays for her, and the nation waits until she is cured before traveling.

ISRAEL Forever

SUMMER OF DISCONTENT

“**T**he people took to seeking complaints; it was evil in the ears of G-d.” (*Bamidbar* 11:1) The “people” to which this passage refers, comments Rashi, were the wicked who sought an excuse for abandoning G-d.

As Israel faces its second “summer of discontent” and the renewal of protest demonstrations, it is worthwhile reflecting on the subtle sources of the complaints of the demonstrators.

While there is certainly cause for some of the complaints about the high cost of living and the lack of affordable housing, it is interesting to note that we do not find members of

the religious populace taking to the streets to criticize the government. Perhaps it is only when material well-being is the only concern is one motivated to become almost militant in demanding better conditions.

What is particularly disturbing about these demonstrations and the government’s response is the attempt to make a sector of the community the scapegoat by complaining that it places Torah study above participation in the nation’s security and economy. Such malicious and unfounded complaints, as the above passage concludes, are inevitably “heard by G-d and cause His wrath to flare.”

LOVE OF THE LAND

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

ERETZ AVOTEINU — THE LAND OF OUR FATHERS

In the original version of the national anthem of the Zionist Movement and the State of Israel there appeared a phrase about “Hatikvah” — the hope of Jews to “return to the land of our fathers”.

The origin of this phrase is in the Torah and it twice appears in connection with the Patriarch Yaakov. The



first is when he receives a Divine command “to return to the land of your fathers” (*Bereishet* 31:3), and the second is when Yaakov blessed his grandchildren and informed their father Yosef of the gift his tribe would receive when G-d would “return you to the land of your fathers” (*ibid.* 48:21).

PARSHA Q&A ?

1. Toward which direction did the wicks of the menorah burn, and why?
2. From what material and in what manner was the menorah made?
3. Moshe was commanded to cleanse the *Levi'im* by sprinkling on them "*mei chatat*." What is "*mei chatat*"?
4. Which three "*t'nufot*" (wavings) are in the parsha?
5. Why did G-d claim the first-born of the Jewish People as His possession?
6. Why are the words "Bnei Yisrael" repeated five times in verse 8:19?
7. When a *Levi* reaches age 50, which functions may he still perform?
8. Why was the mitzvah of Pesach Sheini not commanded directly to Moshe?
9. What similarity is there between the menorah and the trumpets?
10. What three purposes did trumpet signals serve?
11. How many tribes marched between the Gershon-Merari detachment and that of Kehat? How was the time differential used?
12. The tribe of Dan, who traveled last, was called "the gatherer of all the camps." What did they gather?
13. When the Jewish People entered the Land, who took temporary possession of Jericho?
14. Which aron is referred to in verse 10:33?
15. Which two topics are out of chronological order in the parsha?
16. Which tastes did the manna not offer, and why not?
17. Moshe was commanded to choose 70 elders to help him lead the Jewish People. What happened to the elders who led the Jewish People in Egypt?
18. Who did Moshe choose as elders?
19. What was the prophecy of Eldad and Medad?
20. Why did Miriam merit to have the people wait for her?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

1. 8:2 - They leaned toward the middle wick so people wouldn't say that the menorah was lit for its light.
2. 8:4 - It was made from one solid piece of hammered gold.
3. 8:7 - Water containing ashes of the *para aduma*.
4. 8:11 - The wavings of Kehat, Gershon and Merari.
5. 8:17 - Because in Egypt He spared them during *makat bechorot*.
6. 8:19 - To show G-d's love for them.
7. 8:25 - Closing the courtyard gates of the Mishkan and Beit Hamikdash; singing during the *avoda*; loading the wagons to transport the Mishkan.
8. 9:7 - The people who asked about it were rewarded by being the catalyst for the teaching of this mitzvah.
9. 8:4, 10:2 - They were each made from a single, solid block.
10. 10:2-7 - Announcement of the gathering of Bnei Yisrael, the gathering of the *nesi'im*, and the beginning of a move of the encampment.
11. 10:17-21 - Three: Reuven, Shimon and Gad. In the meantime Gershon and Merari set up the Mishkan.
12. 10:25 - They gathered and returned things lost by the other tribes.
13. 10:32 - The children of Yitro.
14. 10:33 - The aron which held the broken pieces of the first tablets, that was taken to the battlefield.
15. 9:1, 10:35,36 - The Pesach sacrifice, and the traveling of the aron.
16. 11:5 - Cucumbers, melons, leeks, onion and garlic - these are harmful to nursing women.
17. 11:16 - They were consumed in the fire at Taverah (11:3).
18. 11:16 - People who were supervisors in Egypt and had pity on Bnei Yisrael at risk to themselves.
19. 11:28 - "Moshe will die and Yehoshua will lead the Jewish People into the Land."
20. 12:15 - Because she waited for Moshe when he was cast into the river.

- The effect of fear on the menstrual cycle
- Propriety in marital relations
- Perspective on predestination
- Some health hazards to be avoided
- Doubts as to the source of menstrual blood

- Conflicting indications in cases of doubt
- Which colors of menstrual blood make a woman impure
- The power of smell in judging nature of blood
- Which sort of birth causes impurity
- The difference between creation and formation

A SECOND OPINION

A woman brought menstrual blood before the Sage Rabbah bar Bar Chanah and he ruled that she was ritually impure. She then took the same blood to Rabbi Yitzchak, the son of Rabbi Yehuda, and he ruled that she was ritually pure.

The *gemara* discusses why the second Sage could rule as he did, but Tosefot asks how was it permissible for this woman to consult another authority after receiving a ruling from the first. The *gemara* (*Avodah Zarah 7a*), after all, states

that if one has received a ruling of impurity from one authority he should not consult another in order to receive a different ruling.

This restriction, answers Tosefot, applies only to the second authority who assumes the right to reverse the ruling of the first, and not to the person seeking a second ruling. The one seeking a ruling can ask as much as he wishes because this will motivate the authority to be more careful in making a judgment and can also result in revealing any error made in the original ruling.

• *Nidah 20b*

WHAT THE Sages SAY

“My sons, do not bury me in black clothes or white ones. Not black because I may be resurrected among the righteous and will look like a mourner among the grooms; not white because I may not merit and will appear like a groom among the mourners.”

• *Rabbi Yanai to his sons - Nidah 20a*

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OLD MEMORIES

From: Jonathan

*Dear Rabbi,
My grandmother is in the final stages of dementia and she could leave us at any time now. We just don't know when. My question is about her memories. I wonder where her memories are. Are they gone, are they in Heaven or will the memories "catch up" with her when her soul is in Heaven?*

Dear Jonathan,

I truly empathize with how you must feel. It's so difficult to see a loved one slowly become detached from the world and from those who were such an important part of his or her life.

And what's really hard about your grandmother's situation is that so much of our love for a person is bound with our wonderful memories of everything we shared together. We therefore assume that that person's love for us fades and is lost with his or her fading and lost memory. It is a very hopeless feeling, and the sense of void over the loss of that person is, unfortunately, felt so acutely, even while he or she is still among us.

I understand that this is at least part of what's troubling you about where your grandmother's memories are and whether they will be regained.

From the Jewish perspective, the impact of one's life experiences on the psyche, which we call memory and perceive as a function of the brain, also affect the soul. But while the brain, as a finite, physical instrument wears out and eventually expires, the soul, which is spiritual and eternal, does not.

This means that although the brain may longer be able to access the memories accrued in the mind, the soul is still very aware of every experience accumulated through one's lifetime. So even if your grandmother seems detached or totally disconnected from her surroundings, that's only because her brain no longer functions properly as the interface between her body and mind/soul. But from a Jewish point of view, her soul is perfectly aware of everything happening around her.

And when she passes, and is fully liberated from the limitations of body in general, and from her ailment in particular, she will remember you and her other loved-ones, and all that you shared together, with exquisite detail and vividness.

It's for this reason that you should continue your relationship with her in as much as a natural way as possible until she passes, and continue to cultivate it after she moves on by maintaining a spiritual connection with her through prayer, Torah study, mitzvah observance and charity on her behalf.

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THE BITTER LITTER

Question: While waiting for a bus I looked down at a small pile of litter and saw something I believed was of value. After picking it up I saw it was worthless and my instinct was to throw it right back. Something in my conscience, however, made me hesitate. What is the right thing to do?

Answer: Your conscience was telling you to consider a couple of factors before deciding to return that litter to its pile.

First of all, you were standing in a public place and it is very likely that there were people there who didn't see you pick up that object and will interpret your act of returning it as wanton littering. Seeing someone litter with impunity

encourages others to do the same, especially if you are a person respected in your community.

Any littering in a public area is condemnable because it can create an obstacle for a pedestrian and because it abuses the esthetics of the environment. Even if you are not civic-minded enough to remove that entire pile of litter, why not at least place the piece you have already removed in the nearest disposal bin?

This is especially important for Jews living in Eretz Yisrael. The Talmud relates that Rabbi Chanina used to clear away the rubble from the streets in the Holy Land so that no one should ever have complaints about the condition of its roads.

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

HALF-HEARTED TIP, WHOLE-HEARTED CONFESSION

During a recent condolence visit to a neighbor whose mother passed away at the age of 95, one of her sons told a touching story about her piety.

One of her relatives observed the earnest manner in which she would always say the *viduy* confession of sins. On one occasion he asked her what sin could such a righteous woman be guilty of.

Her reply took her back more than seventy years to Frankfurt, Germany, where her mother ran a little restaurant in their home. As a waitress in this very homey eatery, it was customary for her to receive tips from the customers whom she served. "I suspect," she concluded, "that there was one client who gave me a tip but failed to do so wholeheartedly and it is for accepting such a tip that I am doing penitence."

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