

OHRNET

THE OHR SOMAYACH TORAH MAGAZINE ON THE INTERNET

PARSHA INSIGHTS

HELP YOURSELF!

“And Yisrael saw the great hand...” (14:31)
“A person’s sustenance is as hard as splitting the Reed Sea.” (The Sages)

How can anything be ‘hard’ for Hashem? Was splitting the Reed Sea more difficult than the Creation of the whole universe? And that Hashem accomplished with two letters. And how can providing a livelihood for someone be hard for He who spoke and the world came into being?

A person has to make as much of an effort as he can in order to sustain himself and those who depend on him. Although everything that we receive is decreed on Rosh Hashana, nevertheless, Hashem requires us to make an effort to help ourselves as much as possible.

So it was with the splitting of the sea: The Children of Israel had to go down to the sea, to go as far as possible, and only then the sea split before them.

In this way the splitting of the sea and a person’s livelihood can be equated. Beginnings are always hard. It’s hard for a person to start to work, uncertain how things will turn out, pursued by more and more bills — an army of responsibilities which seem to want to drown him.

And it was hard for the Children of Israel to plunge into the Sea of Reeds, pursued by an army of Egyptians who wanted to drown them.

All we have to do is try, and Hashem will make sure that neither the Egyptians, nor the bills, will drown us.

• Adapted from *Ma’asei Lemelech*

HANDS UP!

“It happened that when Moshe raised his hand Yisrael was stronger, and when he lowered his hand Amalek was stronger.” (17:11)

There is a force in this world that seeks to imprison reality within the confines of Man’s understanding; a force that defines what is beyond human reason as non-existent; a force that seeks to bound all existence within the hollow skull of man.

That force is called Amalek. The Jewish People stand

“The Jewish People put action before words. We are the people who said at Sinai ‘Na’aseh V’nishma’ — ‘We will do and we will hear.’”

immutably in opposition to that idea. The Jewish People are eternal witnesses that existence is not limited by Man’s understanding of it.

The Jewish People put action before words. We are the people who said at Sinai ‘Na’aseh V’nishma’ — “We will do and we will hear.”

We commit ourselves to Hashem before we understand or even attempt to understand the meaning of His Torah. What other option

could possibly be intellectually honest?

When Moshe’s hands were raised above his head the Jewish People were triumphant. When action — hands — precede the head — intellect — then the Jewish People are triumphant in their battle against the force of Amalek. But when the head is above the hands, Amalek dominates.

• Adapted from ‘Worldmask’ by Rabbi Akiva Tatz

MAGNETIC ATTRACTION

“Hashem is a Master of war; Hashem is His Name.” (15:3)

Rashi explains that Hashem wages war, not with weapons, but with His Name. How is Rashi enlightening us with this comment? Did we really think that Hashem has an armament factory?

When Moshe killed the Egyptian in *Parshas Shemos*, our Sages teach us that he ‘laid his eyes’ on him and the Egyptian was transformed into a pile of bones (*Berachos* 55a).

Every living thing in this world stays alive only because inside it is a spark of holiness. When Moshe ‘laid his eyes’ on the Egyptian, the spark of holiness that maintained the existence of that Egyptian was inexorably drawn to Moshe’s eyes, and the Egyptian was left as a mere pile of bones.

Something similar happened at the splitting of the sea, but on an infinitely greater scale.

At the sea there was a revelation of G-dliness which drew all the fragments of holiness enmeshed in the bodies of the Egyptians back to the Source of all life. *continued on page four*

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Pharaoh finally sends the Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt. Hashem leads the Jewish People towards Eretz Yisrael with pillars of clouds and fire on a circuitous route which avoids the *Plishtim* (Philistines). Pharaoh regrets the loss of so many slaves and chases the Jews with his army. The Bnei Yisrael are very afraid as the Egyptians draw close, but Hashem protects them. Moshe raises his staff, and Hashem splits the sea, enabling the Bnei Yisrael to cross safely. Pharaoh, his heart hardened by Hashem, commands his army to pursue the Bnei Yisrael, whereupon the waters crash down upon the Egyptian army. Moshe and Miriam lead the men and women, respectively, in song thanking Hashem. After traveling for three days only to find bitter waters at Marah, the people start to complain. Moshe

miraculously produces potable water for them, and in Marah they receive certain *mitzvos*. The people complain to Moshe and Aaron that they had better food in Egypt. Hashem sends quails so they can have meat and provides the 'Manna' for them. It is a miraculous bread that falls from the heavens every day except on Shabbos. However, on Friday a double portion descends to supply the Sabbath needs. Nobody is able to obtain more than his daily portion, but Manna collected on Friday suffices for two days so the Jews can rest on Shabbos. Some of the Manna is set aside as a memorial for future generations. After the Jews complain again about the lack of water, Moshe miraculously produces water from a rock. Amalek then attacks the Jews. Joshua leads the battle while Moshe prays for their welfare.

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SING My SOUL
INSIGHTS INTO THE SHABBOS ZEMIRO

EISHES CHAYIL "A WOMAN OF VALOR..."

"She opens her *palm* to the poor and extends her *hands* to the destitute"

The singular term '**palm**' is followed by the plural term '**hands**' in this tribute to the charitable nature of the Woman of Valor. When someone has a strong desire to give charity to the poor, even when her own means are so limited that she can offer no more than a single palm's worth of assis-

tance, the reward she gains is the ability to give generously with two full hands. The switch from '**poor**' to '**destitute**' also communicates the sensitivity of the charitable person who recognizes the varying needs of those who are dependent on others. The *Eishes Chayil* **opens** her **palm** to the **poor** man to take from it what he needs, but to the extremely needy **destitute** she takes the initiative of **extending** her **hands**.

לע"נ
ר' יקותיאל פנחס בן ר' נפתלי ז"ל
נלב"ע י"א שבט תשנ"ד
ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

PARSHA Q&A ?

1. What does 'nacham' mean in the beginning of the Parsha?
2. What percentage of the Jewish people died during the plague of darkness?
3. Why did the oath that Yosef administered to his brothers apply to Moshe's generation?
4. Why did Pharaoh decide to pursue the Jewish People?
5. How was Hashem honored through Pharaoh?
6. When, besides the week of Parshas Beshalach, do we read from Parshas Beshalach?
7. Why did the Egyptians want to pursue the Jewish People?
8. From where did the Egyptians obtain animals to pull the chariots?
9. What does it mean that the Jewish people "took hold of their fathers' profession" (*tafsu umnus avosam*)?
10. What other waters divided, besides the waters of the Yam Suf?
11. Into how many 'watches' (*ashmoros*) is the night divided?
12. Why were the dead Egyptians cast out of the sea?
13. Why are the Egyptians compared to stone, lead and straw?
14. Why did "fear seize the inhabitants of *Pelashes*"? (15:14)
15. The Jewish women trusted that Hashem would grant the Jewish People a miraculous victory over the Egyptians. How do we know this?
16. Which sections of the Torah did the Jewish People receive at Marah?
17. What is a *chok* (statute)?
18. What lesson in '*derech erez*' does the Torah teach concerning the eating of meat?
19. How did non-Jews experience the taste of the *manna*?
20. Why did Moshe's hands become heavy during the war against Amalek?

BONUS QUESTION?

"Moshe took Yosef's remains with him ..." (13:19). The Talmud praises Moshe for this by saying, "Look how Moshe loved *mitzvos*: While the rest of the people were busy gathering the wealth of Egypt, Moshe was busy with *mitzvos*" (*Sotah* 13a). But weren't the other people also fulfilling *mitzvos* by gathering the wealth of Egypt? After all, Hashem commanded that "each man shall request from his neighbor, and each woman from her neighbor, vessels of silver and vessels of gold" (10:2). So why was Moshe singled out for special praise?

I DIDN'T KNOW THAT!

They [the Jewish People] said to Moshe, "Weren't there any graves in Egypt? Is that why you took us to die in the desert?" (14:11) This verse is 'humorous.' Did you not know that? The ability to see humor and irony within tragedy and despair is an inherently Jewish characteristic, exhibited here in the nation's early beginnings.

• Rabbi S.R. Hirsch

HAFTORAH: SHOFTIM 4:4-5:31

SILENCING 'THE SILENCER'

Just as the subject of this week's Parsha is the *Song at the Sea*, so the subject of the Haftorah is the *Song of Devorah the Prophetess*.

Both the Parsha and the Haftorah depict the holiness of the Jewish Woman: In Egypt, Yocheved and Miriam were instrumental in saving Moshe who was the agent of the redemption.

After crossing the sea, the Jewish women, led by Miriam, wanted to voice their total trust in Hashem, with their own song of praise.

The Jewish People had completely forgotten its mission, and "taken the daughters of the Canaanite population among whom they lived, for wives, and given their own daughters to their (the Canaanite) sons, and served their gods."

Hashem decrees that they should undergo suffering as a result of this. Part of this suffering comes in the form of an immensely cruel Canaanite general whose name is Sisera, literally "The Pacifier" or "The Silencer."

However, in this extremity, Yisrael turns its heart to Hashem.

In the glorious *Song of Devorah* we see this change in

heart of the people, brought about by the awakening and purifying power of suffering.

All was due to the unforgettable merit of a glorious woman, borne up by the Spirit of Hashem, fired through and through with enthusiasm for His Word, who put the men to shame, who with her "flaming words" inflamed the courage and steeled their powers of action.

Not the sword of Barak, but the spirit of Devorah, the words of Devorah, won the victory.

• Adapted from Rabbi Mendel Hirsch and Artscroll Stone Chumash

WOMAN OF FLAMES

"Devorah was a prophetess, a fiery woman;" (4:4)

We usually find that women are not permitted to act as Biblical Judges. The reason being that a Biblical Judge has to have a certain harshness, and "Women are naturally merciful."

Devorah, however, was an exception. She was like a 'torch,' able to overcome her natural feminine softness, and searing like a fire, judge the wicked.

• Ahavas Yonason in *Mayana shel Torah*

WEEKLY DAF

BECHOROS 11-17

LITTLE GAMBOLING LAMB

To fulfill the mitzvah of redeeming the first-born male donkey one must do one of two things. Either give the *kohen* a live lamb or kid, even if it is worth much less than the donkey, or give him money or anything else equivalent to the full value of the animal.

In order to use the first option he can give only a live lamb or kid — not a calf or any other live animal, and not a slaughtered lamb or kid.

This raises an interesting question. What about a *ben pakuah* — a live lamb found in the womb of its slaughtered mother? We rule that such an animal does not require slaughtering because the slaughtering of its mother in its prenatal state is considered as *shechita* for it as well (*Chullin* 74a).

We can therefore consider this *ben pakuah* as being a chunk of meat on the hoof rather than a live lamb, and thus invalid for use in redemption. On the other hand, this lamb is running around like any live animal, so it should be considered a bona fide lamb for the purpose of redemption.

The Sages were split on this issue with Rabbi Ashi ruling that a *ben pakuah* can be used for redemption and Mar Zutra that it cannot.

The latter opinion draws its support from the fact that the same designation of lamb or kid is used in regard to the animal to be used for the *Korban Pesach*. A *ben pakuah* is disqualified for use as a *Korban Pesach* because only animals born in natural fashion are eligible for sacrifice. Mar Zutra's conclusion,

therefore, is that just as the *ben pakuah* is ruled out for *Korban Pesach* so is it ruled out as redemption material.

Rabbi Ashi challenges this conclusion because a comparison with *Korban Pesach* would also require it to be male and unblemished, requirements which do not apply to this mitzvah. Rambam and Shulchan Aruch rule like the opinion of Rabbi Ashi.

• *Bechoros* 12a

MITZVAH OR PENALTY?

If a Jew does not wish to redeem his first-born male donkey by giving a lamb to a *kohen* as commanded by the Torah he is obligated to behead that animal. This is explicitly stated in the Torah (*Shmos* 13:13) and detailed in the final *mishnah* of the first *perek*.

The *mishnah* refers to this act of beheading as a mitzvah, but reminds us that the mitzvah of redeeming is preferable to the mitzvah of beheading. Rambam, accordingly, lists the beheading as one of the 613 mitzvos.

A problem arises, however, from the statement of the Sage Levi (*Bechoros* 10b) explaining the Torah's command to behead the unredeemed first-born donkey: "He caused a loss to the *kohen* (by not giving him a lamb as redemption) so he must also suffer a loss." This seems to indicate that the beheading is a penalty for not complying with the mitzvah of redemption, and should therefore not be considered a mitzvah as well. It was this problem which moved Ravid to challenge Rambam (*Laws of Bikurim* 12:1) in his description of beheading as a mitzvah.

A solution to this problem is suggested, however, by the author of *Minchas Chinuch* (mitzvah 23). Beheading the unredeemed first-born donkey is indeed a penalty as Levi declares, but there is a mitzvah to comply with this penalty.

The author cites an interesting parallel. The same aforementioned *mishnah* states that the mitzvah of *Yibum* — marrying the widow of a childless brother — is preferable to the mitzvah of *Chalitzah* — the ritual performed by the brother who refuses to marry her. The author of the *Hilchos Gedolos* — one of the earliest Halachic authorities whose words are quoted by the *Beis Shmuel* in his commentary on *Shulchan Aruch Even Haezer* (169:82) — writes that the reason a shoe is removed from the foot of the man in the *Chalitzah* ritual is to communicate to him that because he refused to do what was expected of him, he must remove his shoe like a mourner or one who has been excommunicated for rebelling against a mitzvah. Even though *Chalitzah* is thus viewed as a penalty it does not prevent a consensus that it is counted as a mitzvah.

(This last point is a little difficult to understand in our own day when *Yibum* is never done, even when the brother wishes to do so. The proper perspective on this is already suggested in our *mishnah*, which states that with the decline of the generations and the fear that *Yibum* will not be performed with the proper motivation, the mitzvah of *Chalitzah* is now preferable. It is perhaps this decline which requires this symbolic act of mourning involved in removing the shoe.)

• *Bechoros* 13a

PARSHA INSIGHTS

continued from page one

Thus, the Egyptians were left devoid of the life-force that sustained them.

There is a mystical principle that the left hand corresponds to *Din* — strict justice — and the right hand corresponds to *Rachamim* — mercy.

Our Sages teach us that the left hand pushes away, while the right hand brings close. When a person is punished for his wrong-doing, it is referred to as the left hand — strict justice — pushing him away.

However, Egypt was different. Their downfall came not at the hands of the messengers of justice, but totally the reverse. The Egyptians were punished by the right-hand of G-d bringing close all the fragments of holiness that were embedded within them.

Now we can understand what Rashi meant when he said that Hashem doesn't wage war with weapons.

Hashem's ultimate weapon is His

Great Name — the Name of Mercy, which represents His Essence. When this is revealed, all life must flock to It like metal to a magnet.

This also is the explanation of the verse "Your Right Hand, Hashem, is exalted in power; Your Right Hand, Hashem, smashes the enemy." The Right Hand draws close all the sparks of holiness.

• *Shem MiShmuel*

THE RIGHT GUARD

Guy <guy@easynet.co.uk>
wrote:

Dear Rabbi,
Hi. I am a university student researching the mezuzah; can you please send me information on its history, and its potential use as an amulet. Thanks

Dear Guy,

When you ask about the history of the mezuzah, are you asking about its origin? If so, the answer is that the mezuzah has the same origin as all the commandments in the Torah: They were revealed by Hashem to the Jewish People at Mount Sinai.

Interestingly, though, the mezuzah was soon singled out for criticism by a group of people rebelling against Moshe. "If a room is filled with holy books," they asked, "does it still need a mezuzah on its door?!" They were basically trying to ridicule Moses, but their point was this: Does the 'House of Israel' (the holy Jewish People) need a 'mezuzah' — i.e., a leader or priest who adds to their holiness?

The answer to them was simple: Everything Moses did, whether appointing priests or affixing mezuzot, was commanded by Hashem. That answers your question as well.

The mitzva of mezuzah is to write two paragraphs from the Torah — "Shema" and "V'haya" — and affix them to the door-post of all gates, houses and rooms. Among other things, these two paragraphs state that Hashem is One, and that we should take the Torah's words to heart and teach them to our children.

Wearing the mezuzah as an amulet stems from ignorance. One negative outcome of this practice is the dese-

cration that occurs when, for instance, someone walks into the bathroom wearing a mezuzah.

Fortunately, what is often worn around the neck and called a mezuzah isn't really one, but simply a decorative case like those used to cover real mezuzot.

However, placing a valid mezuzah on your door-post in fulfillment of the mitzva earns special protection from Hashem for you and for your children. This idea is related by the Talmud in the following most unusual episode:

Onkelos, the brilliant nephew of the Roman Emperor Titus, converted to Judaism and became a disciple of the Sages. Hearing this, Titus sent a brigade of soldiers to bring him back to Rome. But when Onkelos engaged the soldiers in discussion and showed them the beauty of Torah, they converted to Judaism.

Titus then sent another brigade, instructing them not to speak to Onkelos, but with the same result: They too converted to Judaism.

Finally Titus sent a third brigade and instructed them not even to listen to Onkelos. When they were leading Onkelos away, Onkelos placed his hand on the mezuzah and said, "What is that?"

"You tell us," the soldiers said.

"Normally, a human king sits inside and his servants stand outside and guard him. But, the Holy One Blessed be He, His servants are inside and He guards them from outside."

They too converted. Titus sent no more soldiers.

Sources:

- Deuteronomy 6,9
- Shulchan Aruch Yoreh De'ah 284
- Tractate Avodah Zarah 11

HOLY ROLLERS

Andrew V. Ettin

<ettinav@wfu.edu> wrote:

Many ornamental mezuzot are displayed with the scroll text exposed and facing outward. First, is this halachically acceptable? Second, won't this hasten the deterioration of the lettering, necessitating more frequent replacement?

Dear Andrew Ettin,

The mezuzah must be rolled with the writing facing inward. A mezuzah rolled the other way, with the writing exposed, is halachically unacceptable.

Your second concern is also essentially correct, because the mezuzah contains Hashem's name, and it's a Torah prohibition to erase Hashem's name.

There's a custom to write the name of Hashem on the back of the mezuzah. Since this is visible when the mezuzah is rolled up, therefore the mezuzah should be covered. Otherwise, over years and years of people touching the mezuzah, this name of Hashem will get erased little by little.

Source:

- Shulchan Aruch Yoreh De'ah 288:14,15
- Tractate Menachot 31b

YIDDLE RIDDLE

"I've always been healthy and a I'm a first born male, my parents are observant Jews and I'm exempt from circumcision. "Who am I?"

• Riddle concept: Eli Weiszc

Answer next week!

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PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

1. 13:17 - Lead.
2. 13:18 - 80 per cent (four fifths).
3. 13:19 - Yosef made his brothers swear that they would make their children swear.
4. 14:2 - When he saw that the Jewish People turned back toward Egypt, he thought that they had lost their way.
5. 14:4 - Through punishing him. When Hashem punishes the wicked His name is glorified.
6. 14:5 - The seventh day of Pesach.
7. 14:5 - To regain their wealth.
8. 14:7 - From those Egyptians who feared the word of Hashem and kept their animals inside during the plagues.
9. 14:10 - They cried out to Hashem.
10. 14:21 - All the water of the world.
11. 14:24 - Three.
12. 14:30 - So that the Jewish People would see the destruction of the Egyptians and be assured of no further pursuit.
13. 15:5 - The wickedest Egyptians floated around the water like straw, taking a long time to die. The average ones suffered less, sinking like stone. Those who were still more righteous sunk like lead, dying immediately.
14. 15:14 - Because they slew the members of the tribe of Ephraim who had escaped from Egypt at an earlier time. They feared vengeance for this act.
15. 15:20 - They brought musical instruments with them in preparation for the miraculous-victory celebration.
16. 15:25 - Shabbos, Red Heifer, Judicial Laws.
17. 15:26 - A law whose reason we don't understand.
18. 16:8 - One should not eat meat to the point of satiation.
19. 16:21 - The sun melted whatever *manna* remained in the fields. This flowed into the streams from which animals drank. Whoever ate these animals experienced the taste of the *manna*.
20. 17:12 - Because he was remiss in his duty, since he, not Yehoshua, should have led the battle.

BONUS ANSWER!

Caring for Yosef's remains brought Moshe no personal benefit; other than a love of *mitzvos*, no motive could be ascribed to it. The others chose to gather wealth, a mitzva whose performance could easily become self serving. Moshe was praised for his **choice** of *mitzvos*.

• Heard from Rabbi Avraham Eliezer Gordon, *shlita*

RECOMMENDED READING LIST

RAMBAN
14:4 The Miracle of Egyptian Pursuit
14:13 Promise or Command?
14:15 No Need to Cry
14:21 Nature or Miracle?

15:19 When the *Shira* was Sung
16:4 (second part) The Purpose of Trial
17:9 The War Against Amalek
MALBIM
14:11-12 Red or Dead

14:16 The Ten Miracles of the Crossing of the Sea
IBN EZRA
14:13 Slave Mentality
14:29-30 Drowning and Dry Land

LET MY PEOPLE KNOW

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A Light of Joy, A Light of Knowledge