

OHRNET

THE OHR SOMAYACH TORAH MAGAZINE ON THE INTERNET

PARSHA INSIGHTS

RETURN OF THE PAGANS

"And you shall tell you son on that day, saying 'Because of this, Hashem acted on my behalf.'" (13:8)

A true story. Los Angeles. An orthodox Jew was having a business meeting in a restaurant. His companions were intrigued as to why he would not drink their wine. They pressed him for an answer.

After demurring for a while, he finally explained that the Sages had decreed that a Jew must drink only Kosher wine because wine libations had been used by pagans to worship their gods.

His business colleagues were both bemused and amused by this. They found it hard to believe that in 1997, so many years after idol worship had ceased, there should still be such a decree.

As they were raising their glasses to their lips and about to wish each other "Cheers!" the wine waiter piped up:

"I couldn't help overhearing your conversation. You know, I'm a neo-pagan, and before I serve the wine, **I always pour out a little wine in the kitchen to my gods...**"

The drinkers froze with their glasses in mid-air.

In the Pesach Haggadah, the wicked son says to his father "What is this avodah (service) to you?" meaning: "I grant you that when there was idol worship in the world, it was relevant to bring a lamb, the symbol of Egyptian idol worship, as a sacrifice. But nowadays, who worships idols? What is this service **to you?**"

The answer is "Because of this." History is not a cause, it is an effect.

Events happen so we may do the mitzvos, not the reverse.

Hashem looked into the Torah and created the world. The mitzvos pre-date the world. They come before the world both chronologically and in importance.

The reason that we have a mitzvah to honor our parents is not because we have parents and so we have to be nice to them. Man could have been a single-cell self-replicating organism.

"G-d made it incumbent on every generation...to re-create the events of this great 'concert of nature'"

The reason we have parents is so that we can fulfill the mitzvah of honoring them.

Similarly the reason for the Pesach sacrifice is not to remember a historical event. Rather, the historical event is the method by which we are able to fulfill the mitzvah.

• Based on the Beis Halevi

PLAY IT AGAIN, SAMANTHA

"And it shall be a sign upon your arm, and an ornament between your eyes, for with a strong hand Hashem removed us from Egypt." (13:16)

There was once a child prodigy who, at the age of three, could play Rachmaninoff better than the best.

A concert was arranged for her to

play in public. Months before, posters and TV advertisements proclaimed that she would perform for one concert and one concert only.

In order that this once in a lifetime event would not be forgotten, special mementos of the concert would be sold: For example a tiny white concert piano on a bracelet, or a tiara with a piano on it.

The morning after the concert, the newspapers fell over themselves trying to find superlatives to describe the performance.

About a month later, a couple of louts who had missed the show turned up at the child's home and demanded a 'command' performance.

"Yeah, we know everyone says she was great. We read the newspapers and all, but we don't believe it. If you bring her down from her bedroom now and get her to perform here in your sitting room on this grand piano, then we'll believe she's as good as everyone says she is; if not we don't believe..."

When Hashem created the world, there was no doubt that it was He who had brought everything into existence, that He knew all that was going on in the world, and that He was involved in the smallest event that happens in this world.

From the time of Enosh, Adam's grandson, people started to make mistakes about G-d. Some people denied that there was a G-d at all.

Others conceded the existence of a Divine Power, but said that He was so removed and exalted that He only had knowledge of the spiritual realm, but didn't know what was going on down in this world.

Yet a third group admitted that G-d

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PARSHA OVERVIEW

Hashem tells Moshe that He is hardening Pharaoh's heart so that through miraculous plagues the world will know for all time that He is the one true G-d. Pharaoh is warned about the plague of locusts and is told how severe it will be. Pharaoh agrees to release only the men, but Moshe insists that everyone must go. During the plague, Pharaoh calls for Moshe and Aaron to remove the locusts, and he admits that he has sinned. Hashem ends the plague, but hardens Pharaoh's heart and again Pharaoh fails to free the Children of Israel. The country, except for the Jewish People, is then engulfed in a palpable darkness. Pharaoh calls for Moshe, and tells him to take all the Jews out of Egypt, and to leave their flocks behind. Moshe tells him that not only will they take their own flocks, but Pharaoh must add his own too. Moshe tells Pharaoh that Hashem is going to bring one more plague, the death of the first born, and then the Children of Yisrael will leave

Egypt. Hashem again hardens Pharaoh's heart, and Pharaoh warns Moshe that if he sees him again he will be put to death. Hashem tells Moshe that the month of Nissan will be the first month in the calendar year. The Children of Israel are commanded to take a sheep on the tenth of the month, and guard it until the fourteenth. The sheep is then to be slaughtered as a Pesach sacrifice, its blood to be put on their door-posts, and its roasted meat to be eaten. The blood on the door-post will be a sign to Hashem to pass-over their homes when He strikes the first born of Egypt. The Jewish People are told to memorialize this day as the Exodus from Egypt by never eating *chametz* on Pesach. Moshe relays Hashem's commands, and the Jewish People fulfill them flawlessly. Hashem sends the final plague, killing the firstborn, and Pharaoh sends the Jews out of Egypt. Hashem tells Moshe and Aaron the laws concerning the Pesach sacrifice, *pidyon haben* (the redemption of the first born son), and tefillin.

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General Editor: **Rabbi Moshe Newman**
Editorial & Web Advisor: **Rabbi Reuven Lauffer**
Associate Editor: **Rabbi Mordechai Becher**
Web Production: **Lev Seltzer - Michael Treblow**

Contributing Editors:
Weekly Daf, Sing My Soul:
Rav Mendel Weinbach
Ask the Rabbi:
Rabbi Moshe Lazerus,
Rabbi Avrohom Lefkowitz,
Insights, Overview, Haftarah:
Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair
Parsha Q&A
Rabbi Reuven Subar

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SING My SOUL INSIGHTS INTO THE SHABBOS ZEMIRO

BARUCH KEIL ELYON

"REMEMBER THE SABBATH DAY TO SANCTIFY IT"

These words, drawn directly from the opening of the Fourth Commandment, have a special meaning against the background of the Midrash (*Tehillim* 92) which describes the judgment of Adam for the sin of eating from the Tree of Knowledge.

When it seemed that Adam would be condemned to death at the very end of the sixth day of creation, the Sabbath came before Hashem with the plea: "Sovereign of the universe, no man has yet been killed. Shall death begin on my day?"

The plea was accepted, and when Adam realized the power of the Sabbath he composed a "psalm which is a song of the Sabbath."

"Remember the Sabbath," we are commanded, because it was this day which preserved Adam and all his descendants, and which preserved all of Israel.

"Sanctify it" in the same manner as anyone honors the day on which a life-saving miracle occurred, and even more so because the Sabbath itself was that savior.

לע"נ

מרת רחל בת ר' נתן נטע ע"ה

י"ד שבט תשמ"ט

ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

PARSHA Q&A ?

1. There is a star called 'Ra.' What does it symbolize?
2. What was Pharaoh's excuse for refusing to allow the Jewish children to go into the desert?
3. How did the locusts in the time of Moshe differ from those in the days of Yoel?
4. To what extent was it that "Not one locust remained in the entire Egyptian border?"
5. How did the first three days of darkness differ from the last three days?
6. Pharaoh told Moshe that he would let all the people go, but that the Jewish livestock must remain in Egypt. What was Moshe's response to this?
7. Where was Moshe when he received the prophecy regarding the plague of the first born?
8. The plague of the first born took place exactly at midnight. Why did Moshe tell Pharaoh that it would take place "about midnight?"
9. Why did the first born of the slaves die?
10. Why did the first born of the animals die?
11. Why did Hashem give the mitzvah of *Rosh Chodesh* to Aaron, and not only to Moshe?
12. How is it possible that Hashem spoke to Moshe and showed him the new moon, since Moshe received prophecy only during the day?
13. Up to what age is an animal fit to be a *Pesach* offering?
14. Prior to the Exodus from Egypt, what two *mitzvos* involving blood did Hashem give to the Jewish People?
15. What inedible substance is expressly forbidden to be eaten during *Pesach*?
16. Who among the first born of Egypt survived the plague of the first born?
17. Why did the Jewish People carry their *matzah* on their shoulders rather than have their animals carry it?
18. What three historical events occurred on the 15th of Nissan, prior to the event of the Exodus from Egypt?
19. What is the source of the "milk and honey" found in *Eretz Yisrael*?
20. The only non-kosher animal whose first-born is redeemed is the donkey. Why were the donkeys favored?

BONUS QUESTION?

"Moshe had difficulty grasping the prophecy of the new moon [until] Hashem showed him, pointing with a finger." (Rashi 12:2) Why did Hashem have to 'point with a finger,' so to speak? Wouldn't it have been enough to show Moshe, without 'pointing'?

I DIDN'T KNOW THAT!

Moshe warned Pharaoh: "**At approximately midnight I go out amidst Egypt, and every first born will die...**" (11:14) Hashem's 'clock' is set to Jerusalem. The plague of the first-born took place at **exactly** midnight, Jerusalem time. But because Egypt is west of Jerusalem, midnight there occurs later. When Moshe said the plague would be at '**approximately midnight**,' he was referring to local, Egyptian time.

• Kehillas Yitzchak; thanks to Rabbi Sholem Fishbane

HAFTORAH: YIRMIYAHU 46:13-28

GOOD-LUCK CHARM

In last week's Haftorah, the prophet Yechezkel depicted the downfall of Egypt at the hands of the Babylonian king Nevuchadnetzar. This week, it is the prophet Yirmiyahu who speaks of the judgment that will be executed on the Egyptians by the Babylonians.

The Haftorah also deals with the world-historic exile of the Jewish People, and inspires Israel with courage. The prophet directs Israel to the only 'good-luck charm' that will work in all times and all places. The name of that talisman is 'eved Hashem' — 'servant of G-d.'

In spite of great suffering, the only sure protection against the storms of history will be to be a *servant of G-d*. For no-one can be closer to the Master than he who is His servant at all times and in all places, unconditionally.

• Based on Rabbi S.R. Hirsch

RETURN FROM AFAR

"But you, be not afraid, My servant Yaakov, and be not frightened, Yisrael, for I will save you from afar!" (46:27)

When Yisrael does *teshuvah* (returns in repentance to Hashem), the final redemption is hastened and comes before the appointed time. If they do not do *teshuvah*, the redemption will come anyway at the predestined hour.

Therefore Hashem tells Yisrael through His prophet not to fear, for **"I will save you from afar!"** Even if you are far away from Judaism, and *teshuvah* is a word unknown to you, He will surely redeem you when the time for the redemption arrives.

• *Mayana shel Torah*

WEEKLY DAF

BECHOROS 4 - 10

MILK AND HONEY

Whatever is secreted from an animal whose flesh is forbidden to eat is also prohibited. This includes the juices of non-kosher fish and the milk of non-kosher animals.

This rule raises an interesting problem regarding the milk of kosher animals. While such an animal is alive it is forbidden to eat from its flesh. Why then is it permitted to drink the milk secreted from the forbidden flesh?

In response to this challenge the Talmud presents three different passages from Tanach to prove that milk is an exception to this rule. One of these is the description of *Eretz Yisrael* (*Shmos* 3:17) as “a land flowing with milk and honey.” If milk were not permitted for consumption, concludes the Talmud, it would not be employed in the praise of the Promised Land.

Another exception to the aforementioned rule is the honey of a bee. Although the bee itself is a forbidden insect, the honey it secretes is permitted for consumption. The reason is that the pollen ingested by the bees is converted to honey by them without the addition of any of their own secretions.

A Torah leader of the previous generation was once criticized for his activism on behalf of Jewish settlement in *Eretz Yisrael*. If the people in the forefront of the secular Zionist movement are so anti-religious, they asked, what good can we expect to emanate from their efforts? His

clever response was that there are two exceptions to the rule that what emanates from an impure source is also impure — milk and honey. *Eretz Yisrael* is described as the land of milk and honey (even though the honey referred to in that passage is that which flows from dates, the word honey is also commonly applied to bee honey) in order to teach us that in regard to the Holy Land there is the possibility of something positive emanating from a problematic source.

• *Bechoros 6b-7b*

THE DONKEY'S DISTINCTION

“Why are the first born of donkeys different from the first born of horses and camels?”

This was the challenge posed to Rabbi Elazar by Rabbi Chanina in the “*Beis Hamidrash Hagadol*” concerning the Torah command (*Shmos* 13:13) to redeem the first born of a donkey by giving a *kohen* a lamb.

“This is a Torah dictate,” replied Rabbi Elazar. “Another reason is that the donkeys helped the Children of Israel when they left Egypt. There was not a single one of Israel who did not have ninety excellent donkeys to carry the silver and gold of Egypt.”

At first glance it appears that the first reason offered by Rabbi Elazar is not a reason at all, but rather a statement that this is a Heavenly decree whose reason is

unknown to us, just as there are other dictates of this nature. But a look at Rashi's commentary in Chumash of the aforementioned passage indicates otherwise.

“Only the first born of a donkey,” writes Rashi, “and not that of any other impure animals. This is a Heavenly decree based on the concept that the Egyptian first born are compared in Tanach to donkeys.”

Maharsha thus explains Rashi's approach: Rabbi Elazar never intended to apply the concept of “Torah dictate” to the question posed to him, because this seemed inappropriate to a command concerning which the Torah is so specific in declaring its significance as a reminder of the Exodus. He therefore understood that Rabbi Elazar was actually dealing with two challenges: 1) Why should the command to remember the slaying of the Egyptian first born and the sparing of the Israelites necessitate extending a statue of sanctity even to an impure animal?; 2) Why only the donkey? To this he first replied that even though it seems strange, it was a “Torah decree” to extend the sanctity of the first born to the donkey because of the comparison of Egyptian first born to donkeys. He then added that the donkey's role in transporting the wealth of Egypt was a reminder of the fulfillment of Hashem's promise to Avraham that his descendants would leave their exile “with great wealth” and therefore gave this animal a distinction not shared by other impure animals

• *Bechoros 5b*

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PARSHA INSIGHTS

knows what is happening in the lower realms, but He isn't interested in what we do. In other words, He created the Universe, and then, as it were, went off to play golf.

G-d decided once and for all to quash these mistakes. He would bring a series of miraculous events that would show, by altering the course of nature, that He creates nature.

Not only this, but He would take a nation out of the midst of another nation and make them His people. This would show that not only is He aware of what transpires in this world, but He cares and interacts with Mankind.

G-d would do this only once, because by performing these miracles

He would remove the ability of man to have freedom of choice to believe in Him or not — and the purpose of creation was the existence of a being, Man, who has free-will to believe or not.

This is the story of the Exodus. G-d took the Jewish People out of Egypt to prove that He is alive and well and the world is living in Him!

In order that we should not forget this once-and-once-only re-orchestration of nature, He gave us souvenirs of the ‘concert’ — a mezuzah to put on our doors, tefillin to bind on our arms. Someone who has these reminders will go through his life as though he had a string tied around his pinkie — he will never forget.

Not only that, G-d made it incumbent on every generation to *pass-over* — to re-create the events of this great ‘concert of nature’ in every generation at a *Seder* so that each generation would know that it had actually happened. Parents don't lie to their children about things of importance.

For this reason, G-d will not perform at the whim of every boor who comes along and claims that he doesn't believe there was a concert at all. There are millions of fans who still have their tiny white concert pianos carefully handed down from generation to generation to prove the others wrong.

• *Based on the Ramban*

A BLESSING ON YOUR HEAD

Peter Fine
<finefarm@iafrica.com> wrote:

There is a custom for parents to bless their children on Friday night.

We bless our daughters to be like the Matriarchs - Sarah, Rivka, Rachel and Leah. And I was wondering why we bless our sons to be like Ephraim and Menashe - the sons of Joseph? Why don't we bless them to be like the Patriarchs - Abraham, Isaac and Jacob?

Dear Peter Fine,

A fine question! We bless our sons to be like Ephraim and Menashe in fulfillment of the words of Jacob in Vayechi when he prophesies that the Jewish People will always bless their children in that manner.

Jacob chose Ephraim and Menashe to be our role models because they were the first two children to be born in exile; nevertheless, they retained their Jewish identity and even grew to great spiritual heights. In addition, Ephraim and Menashe were elevated to the status of "tribes" by Jacob. This implies that they reached the level of their fathers and thus forged an unbreakable link in the chain of Jewish continuity.

Sources:

- Genesis 48:20
- Oznaim LeTorah, *ad loc.*

TWO BROTHERS

Eliezer Shemtov
<shemtov@chasque.apc.org>
wrote:

I am curious about the story about two brothers, one was married and the other, single. At harvest time, each one took some bags of grain secretly to the other's field. The married one felt sorry for the single one and the single one felt that the married one, who had many children, needed more. One night, as they were sneaking over to each other's field, they bumped into each other, realized what the other one was doing, and embraced. Hashem said that He wants that place where such love was expressed to be the site of the Holy Temple. I've heard and read the story many times in contemporary Jewish books. The other day somebody asked me what the source was and I was stumped.

Shmeina-K
<lserebry@hornet.liunet.edu>
wrote:

We have been trying for years to find a Jewish source for the story of the two brothers who bump into each other on Mount Moriah during the night when they are trying to bring grain to each other.

Dear Eliezer Shemtov and Shmeina-K,
The story isn't found in the Talmud, and apparently not in any of the well-know Midrashic sources either.

That doesn't necessarily mean it's false, however. In fact, I think I found a hint for this story in the Torah itself!

The most sacred place in the Holy Temple contained the Ark of the Covenant. On top of the Ark stood two golden figurines. These figurines, called *Cherubim*, were winged, human-like figures that faced each other.

The hint to the story about the two brothers is simply this: To describe their facing position, the Torah says the *Cherubim* should face as "a man to his brother!"

Source:

- Shemot 25:20

YIDDLE RIDDLE

Last week we asked:

What is the relationship between the button on a man's trousers' back-pocket being on the **left** side, according to American standards, and one of the 613 commandments of the Torah?

Answer: Most men have more 'padding' in back on the left side than they have on the right (perhaps due to the right side being generally more muscular). The button on the left pocket encourages people to put their wallets there. Since the left has more padding, the wallet causes less pinching of the sciatic nerve — otherwise known as the *Gid HaNashe* — than were it to be placed on the right.

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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.

- 10:10 - Bloodshed.
- 10:11 - Since children don't bring sacrifices there was no need for them to go.
- 10:14 - The plague brought by Moshe was composed of one species of locust, whereas the plague in the days of Yoel was composed of many species.
- 10:19 - It applied even to dead ones salted and pickled for food.
- 10:22 - During the first three days the Egyptians were unable to see. During the second three days they were unable to move as well.
- 10:25 - Moshe said that not only would the Jews take their own livestock, but that the Egyptians would even give of their own livestock to the Jewish people.
- 11:4 - In front of Pharaoh.
- 11:4 - Moshe thought Pharaoh's astrologers might miscalculate. If he said the plague would begin exactly at midnight, they might make a mistake and accuse Moshe of being a fake.
- 11:5 - They too subjugated the Jewish People and rejoiced in their suffering.
- 11:5 - Because the Egyptians worshiped them as gods, and when Hashem punishes a nation He also punishes its gods.
- 12:1 - As a reward for toiling together with Moshe in bringing about the plagues.
- 12:2 - He heard the prophecy with the sunset and saw the moon as it got dark.
- 12:5 - One year.
- 12:6 - Circumcision and *Korban Pesach*.
- 12:19 - Sourdough (*se'or*).
- 12:29 - Pharaoh.
- 12:34 - Because the commandment of *matzah* was dear to them.
- 12:41 - The angels came to promise that Sarah would have a son, Yitzchak was born, and the exile of the "covenant between parts" was decreed.
- 13:5 - The milk is from goats and the honey is from dates and figs.
- 13:13 - They assisted the Jewish People during the exile.

BONUS ANSWER!

Moshe's prophecy exceeds that of all future prophets. Future prophets received visions and dreams, whereas Hashem spoke to Moshe 'face to Face' (see *Bamidbar* 12:6,7). If Moshe had merely seen the moon, his prophecy regarding it would be no better than that of future prophets. By 'pointing with the finger,' Hashem elevated this prophecy to the same level of clarity as Moshe's other prophecies.

• Heard from Rabbi Betzalel Rudinsky, quoting the Netziv

RECOMMENDED READING LIST

RAMBAN

- 10:14 Locusts and Crocodiles
10:23 A Different Darkness
12:2 Jewish Months
12:3 Symbolism of the *Korban Pesach*
12:31,51 Timetable of the Exodus

- 13:5 Five and Two Seven Canaanite Nations

SEFER HACHINUCH

- 7, 16 Eating Like Kings
18 Recognizing Hashem's Gifts
21 The Significance of the Exodus

LET MY PEOPLE KNOW

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