

O H R N E T

SHABBAT PARSHAT KI TAVO · 16 ELUL 5760 · SEPT. 16, 2000 · VOL. 7 NO. 50

PARSHA INSIGHTS

ON BEING A MENSCH

“You shall be glad with all the goodness that Hashem, your G-d, has given you and your household — you and the levite and the convert in your midst.” (26:11)

Being a “*mensch*” is one of those un-translatable Yiddish phrases which defines what it means to be Jewish.

A few years ago, an El Al flight to London was carrying a young child in need of an urgent and critical operation. Apart from the child’s medical problem, there was another problem — money. The parents had barely enough to cover the cost of the flight to London which involved the purchase of a whole row of seats to accommodate the stricken child and his medical support systems.

During the flight a religious Jew who was traveling in first class came to the back of the plane to pray with a *minyán*. On his way back to his seat he went over to the father of the child and asked how the child was doing. In the course of the conversation the father mentioned that he had no idea how he was going to be able to cover the cost of the operation. He was already way over his head in debt with the medical expenses that he had already incurred. He would need nothing short of a small miracle.

Without further ado, the man walked back to the first class cabin, pulled out his hat and proceeded to tour the aisles of the first class cabin collecting for the operation. In approximately ten minutes his hat contained checks to the value of some \$100,000 — sufficient for both the operation and the flights and all the medical expenses to date.

If Jews excel at anything, it’s *tzedaka*. Charity. Actually, “charity” is not the correct word. Rabbi Uziel Milevsky, *zatzal*, who was one of Ohr Somayach’s great teachers, used to say that national characteristics are evidenced in the language of that nation. In English, we say “my duty calls.” The equivalent expression in Hebrew would be — “I need to acquit myself of my obligation.” The Jew doesn’t see his duty as something that “calls” to him, something external, and which he elects to do out of a higher moral sense. Rather he sees the very fact of his existence as obligating him — “I exist, therefore I am obligated.”

So too, there is no separate word in Hebrew for charity. What the rest of the world calls charity, the Jew calls *tzedaka* — “righteousness.” It’s what’s right — what has to be — no more and no less. It’s not something that I deserve a medal for. It’s not a “calling.” It is a basic qualification of being human.

“You shall be glad with all the goodness that Hashem, your G-d, has given you and your household — you and the levite and the convert who is in your midst.”

Sometimes it seems as if selfishness has become a religion. And ironically, the more proficient we become at being

takers, the less it makes us happy.

The words of this week’s Torah reading come to remind us that we will only “be glad with all the goodness” that G-d has given us if we define our happiness in terms of being able to provide for the poor and the helpless.

That’s what it means “*to be a mensch.*”

Sources:
• Ba’al Haturim

“There is no separate word in Hebrew for charity. What the rest of the world calls charity, the Jew calls *tzedaka* — “righteousness.” It’s what’s right — what has to be — no more and no less.”

PARSHA OVERVIEW

When *Bnei Yisrael* dwell in the Land of Israel, its first fruits are to be taken to the Temple and given to the *kohen* in a ceremony expressing recognition that it is Hashem 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 Hashem has told him to give to the Jewish People. Moshe exhorts them to walk in Hashem's ways, because they are set aside as a treasured people to Hashem. 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 over 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 in between the two mountains. There the *levi'im* will recite 12 commandments and all the people will answer "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. However if the Jewish People do not keep the Torah, Moshe details a chilling picture of destruction, resulting in exile and wandering among the nations.

HAFTARAH

In this, the sixth of the "seven *haftarot* of consolation," the Prophet Yeshaya calls on Jerusalem to rise from the pain of darkness and to shine to the world in full glory. The light of redemption, both physical and spiritual, radiates on her. Her long-banished children are returning, and in their wake are the nations of the world who have acknowledged Hashem and that

the Jewish People are His emissaries. This redemption, unlike those that have preceded it, will be complete and final. "Never again will your sun set, nor your moon be withdrawn, for Hashem shall be unto you an eternal light, and ended will be your days of mourning."

ANNUALS & PERENNIALS

"And your people, they are all righteous, forever shall they inherit the Land, a branch of My planting..." (60:21)

People think reincarnation is an Eastern concept. It is a Middle-Eastern one. One of Judaism's gifts to Eastern thought is reincarna-

tion. If a person doesn't follow the path that G-d indicates in this world, his soul may return until he corrects his character flaws. The above verse alludes to this process: "And your people are all righteous..." The question arises: "They're all righteous? I see many people who are a long way from being righteous!" To which the next phrase answers — "a branch of My planting" — those who fail to achieve righteousness will be "replanted" many times until their good deeds finally come to fruition. Even the least righteous person returns and returns to this world until he eventually becomes virtuous and noble.

• Mahram Mizrachi in *Mayana shel Torah*

YESHAYA 60:1-22

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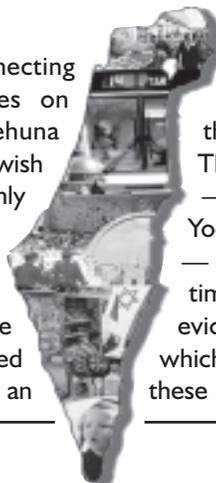
LOVE OF THE LAND

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

SEPHARDIC SYNAGOGUES OF OLD JERUSALEM

The few interconnecting Sephardic synagogues on Mishmerot Hakehuna street right next to the Jewish Quarter parking lot certainly comprise one of the Holy City's most famous landmarks. They were built below street level because the Moslems who controlled the city at the time had an

injunction against Jewish or Christian buildings being higher than Moslem ones in the area. The oldest of these synagogues — the Eliyahu Hanavi and Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai synagogues — go back over 400 years to the time when the Jewish community, evicted from its previous home which became a mosque, established these places of worship.



MYSTERY OF THE WILL

In the will of Bar Mar Shmuel there was a bequest to the Sage Rava of 13,000 zuz of income from his holdings on the Panya River. The specific term “*alalto*” which he used to describe the source for this bequest left Rava and the other sages with a mystery as to exactly what it included.

Rabbi Yosef took a quite limited view. Since “*alalto*” is the *Targum* for the Hebrew word grain, he held that Rava could only collect from the five species of grain, just as one who makes a vow to abstain from enjoying grain is only forbidden to benefit from those five species.

His view was contested by both Rava and his colleague the Sage Abaye, because the term “*alalto*” means anything which improves and brings profit. Rava, therefore, had no doubt that his bequest covered all agricultural produce. He was not sure, however, if it also included the rental income from houses and boats in the Panya River area which now belonged to other heirs.

Why should such rental income be different from the income he was certainly entitled to receive from the fields owned by his benefactor? Rava, says the *gemara*, was not certain whether rental income from houses and boats came under the category of “*alalto*,” as there was a depreciation factor involved, albeit a not very discernible one.

What sort of depreciation is involved in rental income from houses and boats which can distinguish this income from that which is derived from agricultural produce?

Rosh (whose text of the *gemara* substitutes animals for ships) explains this in terms of the level of income. While agricultural income is consistent, houses and animals sometimes have to be hired out at a low price because of a lack of demand.

Rashi, however, takes a more direct approach in explaining the difference: The land which produces income from agriculture does not depreciate, while in regard to houses and ships there is a hardly discernible but gradual depreciation because of wear and tear.

Since Rava could not resolve his mystery, says Ran, he was not able to collect the rent from the houses and ships, and was limited to agricultural produce alone.

• *Nedarim 55a*

A LIAR TILL THE GRAVE

One who makes a vow to abstain from wine “this year” is forbidden to enjoy wine only until Rosh Hashana which begins the next year, regardless of how close he was to the end of the year when he made his vow. Should he make his vow, however, to abstain from wine for “one year,” he is forbidden to enjoy wine until an entire year has passed from the making of his vow.

This ruling of the *mishna* provides an interesting background for understanding a chapter in Jewish history. In the Book of Yirmiyahu (*Chapter 28*) we read of a dramatic confrontation between this true prophet and a false prophet by the name of Chanania ben Azur, a confrontation which took place in the fifth month, the month of Av. In contrast to Yirmiyahu’s prophecy of impending exile at the hands of the Babylonians, Chanania attempted to delude the people into believing that they would be free of Babylonian control within two years.

The chapter concludes with Yirmiyahu informing Chanania in the name of Hashem that because he misrepresented the Divine will he would die that year. It is in regard to the fulfillment of this prophecy of Yirmiyahu that a problem arises, for in the very last passage we read that Chanania perished in the seventh month (*Tishrei*) of that year. If his death did not take place *before* the seventh month, which begins with Rosh Hashana and ushers in the new year, then Yirmiyahu’s prophecy that he would die in that year seems not to have been fulfilled!

The attempt of one of the great biblical commentators, Radak, to explain Yirmiyahu’s prophecy as a prediction that Chanania would die within a year of their confrontation does not seem to be consistent with our *gemara*, which clearly states that the term “this year,” which is the term used by Yirmiyahu, means till Rosh Hashana, and does not mean a full year from the date of pronouncement. (Rabbi Akiva Eiger, in his “Gilyon Hashas” footnotes, calls attention to this problem with Radak’s approach.)

The solution provided by our Sages to this problem is that Chanania actually died the day before Rosh Hashana, before the year had ended, just as Yirmiyahu had prophesied. Since he was reluctant, however, to serve as a vindication of that prophecy, he ordered his children, before his death, to keep his death a secret and to bury him *after* Rosh Hashana so that the impression would be that he had not died within the year as prophesied. This word “died” in that passage is therefore translated by the *Targum* of Yonatan ben Uziel as “buried,” because the death of the false prophet was actually in the year which the true prophet had designated.

• *Nedarim 60a*

I DIDN'T KNOW THAT!

“And you shall take from the first of every fruit of the earth...and place (them) in the basket.” (*Devarim 26:2*)

By Torah law, *bikurim* have no minimum amount which one must give. The Sages, however, required that one give a sixtieth of his crop (*Rambam Hilchot Bikurim 2:17*). This amount, one out of 60, is hinted in the above verse “and place in the basket.” The Hebrew word for basket — *teneh* — has the numerical value of 60.

• *Vilna Gaon*

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.
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 Channuka. The verses are recited only until Succot.
8. 26:13 - To bless Hashem.
9. 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 Hashem 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.

BONUS QUESTION

Question:

“You shall take from the first of all the fruit...which Hashem, your God, gives you.” (26:2)
Why does the Torah say that a person who is offering his *bikkurim* is “taking” rather than “giving”?

Answer:

When Hashem “accepts” our offerings, it is a merit for us. Thus, we are actually taking rather than giving.

• Nachal Kedumim

WITH LIEBERMAN AND JUSTICE FOR ALL

Dear Readers:

Here are a few samples of some of the many questions we've received over the past several weeks regarding Joe Lieberman:

From: Dan Friedman
<topcopy98@yahoo.com>

Dear Rabbi,

Senator Joseph Lieberman is often described as an Orthodox Jew, yet he is never seen wearing a yarmulke in public. Could you please shed some light on this for me? Thank you.

From: Aaron Moebus in Brooklyn, NY
<mrmmailmaninc@earthlink.net>

Dear Rabbi,

By now we all know that Joe Lieberman, the Democratic nomination for US vice president, is Shomer Shabbos (Sabbath observant). Reportedly, he observes Shabbos unless "serious business" in the Senate requires him to attend (voting is done by voice, not by pressing an electronic button). I am curious: Is he correct regarding this? Would halacha allow him to attend such meetings on Shabbat?

From: Gerald Gordon in Brooklyn, NY
<gordex@flashcom.net>

Dear Rabbi,

Joe Lieberman proudly says he is an observant Jew. Yet he is pro-choice on abortion and even late term abortion. Shouldn't the Torah direct an observant Jew's vote?

Dear Dan Friedman, Aaron Moebus and Gerald Gordon,

Senator Joe Lieberman is a Sabbath observant Jew. He is a member at the Westville Synagogue in New Haven. In Washington, his 12-year old daughter attends the Orthodox Hebrew

Academy.

Lieberman observes Shabbat not only when it suits him or when convenient, but even when it has threatened to hamper his political career. For example, in 1988 he was nominated senator at the Connecticut Democratic convention on Shabbat. He did not attend.

Leading halachic authority Rabbi Moshe Feinstein ruled that if a person will be denied work because he wears a yarmulke, he may remove it at work. This could be Senator Lieberman's reason for not wearing a yarmulke in public: It may be too visible of a religious symbol for some voters, which could cost him his job.

Regarding attending meetings on Shabbat: In general, Shabbat talk should be in the "Shabbat spirit." Weekday talk should be avoided and planning weekday activities is basically forbidden. But *mitzvah* matters and matters of public concern are exceptions; you are allowed to discuss on Shabbat matters relating to *mitzvot* and matters which affect the public good, even if the discussion doesn't seem to be in the "Shabbat spirit." So, a Jew may participate in a public meeting on Shabbat in order to advance the public good, provided he performs no forbidden acts such as driving, writing, etc.

A more difficult question arises in regard to some of Mr. Lieberman's more controversial legislation. And, no, I don't mean SR 282, proposed by Mr. Lieberman, in which the US Senate formally resolved to congratulate the University of Connecticut Huskies for winning the 2000 Women's Basketball Championship. I mean abortion.

Senator Lieberman's position on abortion legislation does not seem to jibe with the Torah position. In particular, the "Freedom of Choice Act of 1993" — a bill sponsored by Mr. Lieberman himself — aims to protect the "right of a woman to choose to terminate a pregnancy."

A noble sounding law, indeed.

We're all for protecting people's rights, right? The problem is, not in all cases does the Torah recognize a person's right to cut off unwanted parts of his anatomy. This law would condone many cases that Jewish law would not.

Does this mean Mr. Lieberman is not really loyal to the Torah? No, it doesn't mean that. In Judaism, a person is "innocent until proven guilty." As the Torah phrases it, "B'tzedek tishpot — You shall judge favorably." (Leviticus 19:15) The Torah requires that we give others the benefit of the doubt. So, perhaps Mr. Lieberman simply erred in his understanding of this issue.

Judging favorably does *not* mean that we accept improper behavior; rather, it means that if someone is a basically good person, we seek ways to view him in a good light *in spite of* a possible lapse. If we see someone who is basically Torah observant, keeps Shabbat and *kashrut*, we shouldn't jump to label him "non-observant" for this or that halachic infraction. Again, I don't in any way mean to belittle any *mitzvah* which people are lax about or ignorant of. Rather, I mean to stress the importance of judging our fellow man favorably.

The best thing to do is to ask Mr. Lieberman himself. His email address is:

<senator_lieberman@lieberman.senate.gov>

A note about the names of Joseph and Hadassah Lieberman: It's interesting that Joseph and Hadassah were both Jews who rose, each in his own day, to become second in command of the world's superpower: Joseph rose to the position of viceroy of the Egyptian Empire, and Hadassah — also known as "Esther" (Book of Esther 2:7) — became queen of the Persian Empire.

Sources:

- Iggrot Moshe, Orach Chaim, vols. 1 & 4; & Choshen Mishpat, vol. 1.
- Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 306:6
- Maimonides, Hilchot Melachim 9:4
- Tractate Shavuot 30a

Re: Liebermania

We received the following description of the first "Liebermania" Shabbat, reported by an attendee:

The sense of surrealism continued and the euphoria was tangible. Senator Lieberman, Hadassah and their daughter Hani were accompanied to *shul* (synagogue) by 15 to 20 secret service agents. Some walked beside; most trailed slowly behind in a SUV and one of those black vans with all the techno equipment. The press was there to film him walking-in. The *shul* gave out a statement letter to the reporters welcoming them to observe the service, but asking that no cameras, laptops, pens, notepads, etc. be used inside the *shul*; and that the media not attempt to interview service-goers on Shabbat. About five secret service agents went into *shul*; by and large, they blended in very well. There was a female agent to protect Hadassah Lieberman, and word is that Hani gave her an excellent tutorial on the services.

Senator Lieberman got an *aliyah* (i.e., he was called up to read from the Torah) after which the *shul* burst into "*siman tov u'mazel tov*" (a song of congratulations). After Joe's *aliyah*, the *gabbai* said a *misheberach* (blessing) for Al Gore.

After the Torah reading, the Rabbi gave a short address on "*Hilchot* Vice President." The major points were that security demands might in the future require a metal detector. The walk-through kind would not be allowable, but the agent-held devices would not violate Shabbat for the person being checked. Press interviews should not be given on Shabbat.

After services, *kiddush* was held. The secret service no doubt has even greater appreciation for Orthodox Judaism after seeing that 11:00 am shots of single malt scotch are part of the observance. (smile) *L'chaims* (toasts) included: "Next year in the White House!" Hadassah said they have not yet thought about whether they would, if elected, build a *sukkah* at the Naval Observatory, which is the Vice President's home.

The Rabbi's *drasha* (talk) was about a verse in that week's Torah portion, *Va'etchanan*, that states that following G-d's commandments will give one wisdom which will be respected by the other nations of the world. The Rabbi said that Senator Lieberman is an embodiment of that verse. Following services, the secret service quickly escorted Joe out of *shul* and walked him home.

• Shelley & Ed Kohl <sekohl@earthlink.net>

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE STORY

Giving People the Benefit of the Doubt

A moment of thought can diffuse an otherwise contentious situation. As an example of this, the following story...

TAKES THE CAKE

It was my husband's birthday, and I wanted to have a decorated birthday cake for our dinner. So I went to our local Jewish business phone book and looked up the number of my favorite bakery. I gave the order and spelled the name to appear on the cake, and the clerk asked me for a credit card number before she would complete the order. That was understandable, as the bakery didn't want to be caught with a cake that couldn't be sold in case I never came to pick it up.

A few hours later I arrived to pick up my cake, but I was

told that they had no record of my order. I was very upset, as it was only a short time until dinner. But they were very kind to quickly decorate another cake for me. I was about to pay when I remembered that I had already given my credit card number by phone, and I wanted to make sure that the credit slip hadn't been processed. The owner told me that they never take credit card numbers by phone.

Now I was really shaken, wondering who had been in the bakery who now knew my card number and was probably using it all over town. The owner asked me, "Are you sure you gave your order to Abe's Bakery?"

"Abe's Bakery? I didn't call Abe's Bakery! I called Sam's Bakery!" I paid for the cake and hotfooted it over to Sam's, and my husband had two birthday cakes that year!

• Submitted by Glenna Ross, Baltimore, MD

YIDDLE RIDDLE

Last week we asked: "My older brother is my twin. Although he is perfectly healthy in every way, he will not fast this year on Yom Kippur, although I will. Why?"

Answer: I am a girl. Therefore, I become *bat mitzvah* (obligated to observe the commandments) at age 12. My brother, because he is a boy, does not become *bar mitzvah* until age 13. So, even though he is older, I am a year ahead of him in regard to the obligation to fast on Yom Kippur.