

# OHRNET

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## A WING AND A PRAYER

*“This is the decree (chok) of the Torah...”*  
(19:2)

*The mitzvah of the Parah Adumah (red heifer) is the quintessential ‘chok’ or decree which defies human understanding.*

The world is like a 747. No pilot would dream of getting behind the control column of a 747 until he knows how to fly his craft in all kinds of weather and under all conditions. He has to know how to take off, to land, to trim the ailerons. He has to know what every button and switch in front of him can and cannot do. He has to be a professional. The lives of 500 hundred people are hanging on his judgment and experience.

In much the same way, every Jew is a ‘pilot’. We have to know how to fly the 747 of life. Every halacha is like a switch in that 747 cockpit. And only with the Torah’s help can we navigate life’s airways without nose-diving into the sea.

We can never understand the depth of a mitzvah, for a mitzvah is an expression of the Will of the Creator and transcends the knowledge of His creations. But we know that the mitzvos are the control panel to the spiritual world.

We can never know how a mitzvah works, but this mustn’t interfere with our precision and care in doing them. No pilot knows *why* his plane flies through the sky. But he has to know *how* to fly the plane. The fact that he cannot explain *why* the air passing under his wings should cause the plane to fly, in no way detracts from his concentration as he sits on top of two tons of metal hurtling down the runway at over 100 mph. At that moment he’s not in the slightest bit concerned that he doesn’t understand how flight

## INSIGHTS

works. He knows that unless he performs flawlessly, *this flight* will certainly not work!

• Heard from Rabbi Simcha Wasserman zt”l

## SOUL FOOD

Similarly, if someone asked us why we eat, we would answer that we must eat in order to live. If we were questioned further as to why we eat bread and not stones, we would answer that stones don’t contain the necessary nutrients to sustain life, but why humans need these nutrients, and why we can’t extract them from stones — that we would not be able to explain, for that only Hashem knows. Even though we eat to stay alive, Hashem created the world in such a way that our food also has a pleasing taste and aroma. But that taste should never be confused with our reason for eating.

Mitzvos are spiritual food for the *neshama*. Why or how a particular mitzvah sustains our soul, we cannot know, anymore than we know why a particular protein sustains our body. Hashem wanted the mitzvos to be palatable to us, so he infused them with taste — ideas and lessons — that we can understand. However, we should never confuse the *taste* of a mitzvah with its real reason, as we should never eat merely to satisfy our taste buds.

• Rabbi Z. Leff in *Outlooks and Insights*

## WRITTEN IN STONE

*“This is the decree (chok) of the Torah...”*  
(19:2)

There are two kinds of letters. Letters which

are written, and letters which are engraved. The difference is that letters which are written are ultimately separate from what they are written on. They are not *one* with the paper or the parchment. The letters are of ink and they adhere to the paper, and only then are they one.

However, when letters are engraved, the letters themselves are from the same medium as that on which they are written. There is no distinction between *what* is written and *on what* it is written. The letters are not something external, separate entities, rather they emanate from the stone itself.

The Torah was given in the form of engraved tablets to teach us that we should relate to it not as separate from ourselves, rather the Jewish People and the Torah are indivisible and identical. “Yisrael, the Torah and the Holy One, Blessed is He, are One.” The words of the Torah are engraved in the fabric of our heart, not merely embroidered there. They must penetrate to the deepest and innermost chambers of our identity, they must go through and through us - just like the tablets of the Torah which could be read from both sides.

The word in Hebrew for ‘engraving’ is from the same root as the word for a decree that surpasses human understanding - *chok*. Our attitude to the entire Torah should be the same as to a *chok*. Even though we don’t understand the *chok*, we still do it because it is the Will of our Father in Heaven. With this same attitude we should do all the mitzvos, *even those that we think we understand* — for no other reason than the fact that they are engraved on the tablets of our hearts as decrees of the King of kings.

• Adapted from Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Zevin zt”l

**T**he laws of the *Parah Adumah* — the red heifer — are detailed. These laws of ritual purification are to be used when someone has come into contact with death. After the nation “wanders” for nearly 40 years in the desert, Miriam passes away and is buried at *Kadesh*. The people complain

about the loss of their water supply which until then has been provided for them miraculously in the merit of Miriam’s righteousness. Aaron and Moshe pray for the people’s welfare. Hashem commands them to gather the nation at *Merivah*, and speak to a designated rock so that water will flow forth from it. Distressed by the people’s lack of faith, Moshe hits the rock instead of speaking to it. He thus fails to produce the intended public demonstration of Hashem’s power over the world which would have

resulted if the rock had produced water as a result of him only speaking to it. Therefore, Hashem tells Moshe and Aaron that they will not bring the people into the Land. The *Bnei Yisrael* resume their travels, but because the King of Edom, a descendant of *Eisav*, denies them passage through his country, they do not travel the most direct route to *Eretz Yisrael*. When they reach *Mt. Hor*, Aaron passes from this world and his son *Elazar* is invested with his priestly garments and responsibilities. Aaron was beloved by all the people, and they observe a national mourning

period of 30 days. The *Bnei Yisrael* battle *Sichon* the Amorite, who fights against them rather than allow them to pass through his land. As a result, *Bnei Yisrael* conquer the lands that *Sichon* had previously seized from the *Amonites* on the east bank of the Jordan River.

## OVERVIEW



# LETTER PERFECT

Sol Harris  
74654.257@compuserve.com> wrote:  
Dear Rabbi,

While looking at the Torah scroll, I have noticed that the top of most every section starts with the letter 'vav.' Is there a specific reason for this? I'm sure that this is not a coincidence. All these years I did not realize this until very recently. Shalom

Dear Sol Harris,

It's no coincidence. Starting each column with the letter 'vav' is a custom some scribes follow when writing a Torah scroll. It is mentioned in the Zohar and the Shulchan Aruch.

To jockey a letter 'vav' to the head of each column, scribes would sometimes ignore proper form and spacing, stretching letters or squashing them together. The result was not pretty, invalid, or both. For this reason, the *Semak* (13th century) and the *Mordechai* (1240-1298) wrote that they would like to abolish this custom.

Today, some scribes use computers to plan the layout of a beautiful, valid Torah scroll with a 'vav' on top of every column.

This custom is reminiscent of the courtyard surrounding the *Mishkan* (Tabernacle) in the desert. Tapestries held in place by little hooks stretched from one upright column to another.

The Hebrew word for a 'little hook' is 'vav'; hence, each 'column' had a 'vav' on top.

As a prefix, the letter 'vav' means 'and' — hence it is the letter of 'connection.' The 'vav' on top of each column hints to the Torah's unity. Torah is our 'connection' to the spiritual.

Sources:

- Yoreh De'ah 273:6, Rema
- Ibid., Shach, Birkei Yosef
- Tikunei Zohar Parshat Terumah

# Ask the Rabbi



HAPPY BIRTHDAY  
TO GERMS

Dr. Robert E. Braitman  
<braitman@massmed.org>

wrote:

In Ask the Rabbi Issue #106, Brian Connack wrote:

"I was at a birthday party recently and the hostess insisted that the birthday boy not blow out the candles, rather she put them out by hand. Is there any basis to this custom (not to blow out a candle)?"

Perhaps the most common reason is that parents don't want their children spreading infection by blowing on the cake. More often than not there is more saliva than air expended in the act of blowing out a candle!

ROBERT E. BRAITMAN, M.D.  
President, NE Region,  
Federation of Jewish Men's Clubs

## יום שבת קדוש הוא "THE SABBATH DAY IS HOLY..."

"Its laws were commanded to us in Marah."

This reference to the statement by our Sages (*Sanhedrin* 56b) that the laws of Shabbos were commanded to Israel when they camped at Marah before reaching Sinai raises the obvious question: Why did Hashem give us Shabbos before giving us the rest of the Torah? In order to be worthy of receiving the Torah, suggests Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzato, Jews had to sanctify their souls. Shabbos has the ability to lift a Jew's soul to the greatest heights and therefore served as an introduction to the receiving of the entire Torah at Sinai.



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We can't include all questions submitted in the column, but we do try to respond to everyone personally.

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## Yiddle Riddle

Raphael N. Levi  
<rnlv1@village.ios.com> wrote:

Here is a Yiddle Riddle for you. Which ONE verse (NOT different verses with the same words) is read publicly from the Torah most frequently?

PS I enjoy your comments (even though I'm FFB).

Dear Raphael N. Levi,

Thanks for the riddle. By the term FFB, you mean 'Frum (Torah observant) From Birth.' That reminds me of a story:

Once, a young man studying in Ohr

Somayach — a yeshiva where many students are newly observant — went to see the famous Chassidic Rebbe of Gur.

"In which yeshiva do you study?" the Rebbe asked.

"Ohr Somayach," he answered. "But I'm not a Ba'al Teshuva (newly observant)," the young man hastened to add.

"You're not a Ba'al Teshuva?" asked the Rebbe in surprise. "Why aren't you?"

(The Rebbe meant to say that everyone needs to make a personal commitment to the Torah, to become 'newly observant' every day.)

answer to riddle next week

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## EXAMINATION AND DETERMINATION

The animal offered as the daily *korban tamid* had to be checked for four days before its offering in order to determine that it was free of any disqualifying blemishes. This rule is derived by the Sage Ben Bag Bag from the parallel which the Torah indicates between this sacrifice and the *korban pesach* which was set aside on the tenth of Nissan and offered only on the fourteenth.

This four-day requirement of examination for blemishes does not apply to the additional sacrifices - *korban mussaf* offered on Shabbos and holidays. It does apply, however, not only to the *korban pesach* in Egypt where it was first commanded, but also to every *korban pesach* in the generations to come.

The mishnah in *Mesechta Pesachim* (96a), however, declares that only the *korban pesach* in Egypt had to be set aside on the tenth and not that of future generations. How do we reconcile this with the aforementioned rule that every *korban pesach* requires four days of examination?

Rashi explains that in regard to the *korban pesach* in Egypt the animal which would be used for the sacrifice had to actually be designated on the tenth. In future generations this designation was not required. One could set aside a few animals which he would examine for four days and save the actual determination of which to offer for the fourteenth.

• *Menachos 49b*



## SENSE IN INCENSE

Ketores, the incense offered each morning and evening on the golden inner altar of the *Beis*

incense brought by the heads of each of the tribes at the time of the inauguration of the *Mishkan*, as we recently read in Parshas Naso. This was a heavenly dictated exception limited to the special circumstances of the occasion and the donors.

A problem, however, arises. In *Mesechta M'eilah* (9b) one of the Sages states that one who involuntarily eats from the flesh of a *kodshai kodshim* sacrifice before its blood has been applied to the altar must atone for his sin by using the money he is required to repay the Sanctuary (the monetary value of what he consumed, plus a *chomesh*, in addition to a *korban asham* sacrifice) to purchase incense which will be completely consumed on the altar. This would seem to indicate that an individual can offer incense, not only the community.

Tosefos explains that the rule restricting incense offerings to the community remains intact, for the individual sinner purchasing the incense must turn it over to the ownership of the communal Sanctuary before it can be offered. Allowing him to do so is merely a way of helping him in achieving atonement for his sin by playing an auxiliary role in placing something on the altar which will be consumed in its entirety for the sake of Hashem.

• *Menachos 50a*

Insights, explanations and comments for the seven pages of Talmud studied in the course of the worldwide Daf Yomi cycle.

*Hamikdash*, could only be offered by the community. No individual could donate incense to the Sanctuary to offer in his behalf. In similar fashion the community could not offer incense on the outer altar reserved for sacrifices.

The only exception to both rules was the

- How many non-red hairs disqualify a cow from being a *Parah Adumah* (red heifer)?
- Where is the sprinkling of the waters of the *Parah Adumah* performed?
- Some of the ashes of the *Parah Adumah* were kept on *Har Hamishchah*. For what were they used?
- A man dies in a tent. What happens to the people and the utensils that are in the tent?
- What happens to the one who: a) sprinkles the water concocted from the ashes of the *Parah Adumah*; b) touches the "water"; c) carries the "water"?
- Why was the *mitzvah* of the *Parah Adumah* entrusted to Elazar rather than to Aaron?
- Why does the Torah stress that all of the congregation came to *Midbar Tzin*?
- Why is Miriam's death taught after the section of the *Parah Adumah*?
- During their journey in the *midbar*, through who's merit did the Jewish People receive water?
- Why did Moshe need to strike the rock a second time?
- When Moshe told the King of Edom that the Jewish People would not drink from the well-water, to which well did he refer? What do we learn from this?
- The cloud that led the Jewish People in the *midbar* leveled all the mountains that were in their path except for three. Which three and why?
- Why did the *entire* congregation mourn the death of Aaron?
- What disappeared when Aaron died?
- Who was "the inhabitant of the South" (21:1) that attacked the Jewish People?
- Why did the Jewish People encamp in Arnon, rather than pass through Moav to enter *Eretz Canaan*?
- What miracle took place at the valley of Arnon?
- What was the "strength" of Amon that prevented the Jewish People from entering into their land?
- Why was Moshe afraid of Og?
- Who killed Og?



## I Didn't Know That!

About the Red Heifer for purification the Torah states that one should take an animal that has "no blemish, and which has never carried a yoke." (19:2) If a person feels that he has no faults, then he has never accepted upon himself the yoke of Heaven.

• Rav Yaakov Yitchak Hurwitz

## Bonus Question ?

Verse 20:23 states that Aaron died on the border of Edom. Rashi says that the Jewish people lost Aaron there because they wanted a closer relationship with the evil Eisav. But verse 20:24 states that Aaron died because of his sin at *Mei Meriva*. Why does Rashi attribute Aaron's death to a different reason?

Answers on back page

## Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

1. 19:2 - Two.
2. 19:4 - East of Jerusalem in a spot where the *Segan* can see the entrance of the *Hechal*.
3. 19:9 - They were used by the *Kohen Gadol* to purify himself in order that he might prepare other *Paros Adumos*.
4. 19:14,15 - The people, the metal utensils, and the unsealed earthenware utensils contract *tumas meis*. The sealed earthenware vessels are unaffected.
5. 19:21 - a) Remains *tahor*; b) he, but not his clothing, contracts *tumah*; c) he and his clothing contract *tumah*.
6. 19:22 (19:3) - Because Aaron was involved in the sin of the golden calf.
7. To teach that they were *all* fit to enter Eretz Yisrael, because anyone who had sinned with the spies had already died.
8. 20:1 - To teach that just as sacrifices bring atonement, so too does the death of the righteous.
9. 20:2 - Miriam's.
10. 20:11 - After he hit it the first time, only a few drops came out since he was commanded to speak to the rock.
11. 20:17 - To the well that traveled with the nation in the *midbar*. This teaches that even if one has adequate provisions, he should pursue chase goods from his host in order to benefit him.
12. 20:22 - The mountains that were spared were *Har Sinai* for the giving of the Torah, *Har Nevo* for Moshe's burial place, and *Hor Hahar* for Aaron's burial place.
13. 20:29 - Aaron made peace between contending parties including man and wife. Thus when he died, both men and women mourned.
14. 20:29 - The *ananei hakavod* (clouds of glory) disappeared, since they sheltered the Jewish People in the merit of Aaron.
15. 21:1 - Amalek.
16. 21:13 - Moav refused to let them pass through their land.
17. 21:15 - The Amorites concealed themselves in caves in the mountain on the Moabite side of the valley in order to ambush the Jewish People. When the Jewish People approached, the mountain on the *Eretz Canaan* side of the valley moved close to the other mountain and the Amorites were crushed between the two mountains.
18. 21:24 - Hashem's command, "Do not harass them (*Devarim* 2:19)."
19. 21:34 - Og had once been of service to Avraham. Moshe was afraid that this merit would assist Og in battle.
20. 21:35 - Moshe.



## Recommended Reading List

### RAMBAN

20:1 The Whole Congregation  
21:9 The Serpent  
21:21 Imperative for Peace  
21:34 Fear of Og

### OHR HACHAIM

20:8 The Sin of Moshe  
**SFORNO**  
19:2 *Parah Adumah*  
20:26 Aaron's Special Shroud

## Bonus Answer!

When Hashem punishes someone, He takes into consideration the ramifications that the punishment will have on the entire world. Aaron died because of his sin at *Mei Meriva*. Rashi, however, teaches that the Jewish People *deserved* to lose Aaron there, because they wished to unite with Edom.

• *Sfas Emes*

## HAFTORAH: Shoftim 11:1-13

### THE HISTORIAN

An essential component of wisdom is the knowledge that man's failure to

comprehend truth does not make it untrue. Just as in the sedra this week, Man is left uncomprehending the law of the *Parah Adumah* — the workings of the spiritual world — so too are the workings of history

mysterious to all except He who writes history. Thus, the Haftorah depicts the 'unhistorical' rise of Yiftah to the position of chief despite his lowly beginning in life.

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