

O H R N E T

SHABBAT PARSHAT MATOT-MASEI · 26 TAMMUZ 5760 · JULY 29, 2000 · VOL. 7 NO. 43

PARSHA INSIGHTS

VENGEANCE IS WHOSE?

“G-d said to Moshe, saying, ‘Take vengeance for the Children of Israel against the Midianites.’” (31:2)

A well-known Rabbi was standing in line at Customs at an airport. In front of him were two equally religious-looking gentlemen. The customs officer came over to the two and asked them if they had anything to declare. Rather nervously, they both answered in the negative. Whether it was their nervousness or some other reason, the customs officer decided to ask them to open their suitcases.

After a few seconds of careful probing, somewhat reluctantly the cases disgorged two million dollars' worth of diamonds. They lay there on the counter. Both men collapsed in tears. Not just at being caught, but at the terrible desecration of G-d's name that they had perpetrated.

The customs officer turned his attention to the next in line, the Rabbi, and asked him: “Anything to declare, sir?” He replied “No, officer.” “Sir, would you mind opening your case, please.” “Officer, I will happily open my case, but I think I should tell you that you are wasting your time.” “Oh yes, sir. And why is that?” replied the officer, a cynical smile playing around the corner of his lips. The Rabbi continued. “Officer. I am an Orthodox Jew and the Torah strictly prohibits smuggling.” “I see sir,” said the customs officer, sarcastically. “Do you see those two religious Jewish gentlemen over there, sir? And what are those two gentlemen, sir? Martians?” Replied the Rabbi, “Which two religious gentlemen are you referring to, officer? I'm afraid I don't see religious Jews — I see only diamond smugglers.”

When an Orthodox Jew behaves in a despicable fashion, the damage is felt on the other side of the cosmos. Someone who wears a *kippa* is an ambassador for the Jewish People to the whole world. However, the world will judge not only *Judaism* based on the actions of this person. They will also judge its Author.

“The world judges not only Judaism based on a Jew's actions; they also judge Judaism's Author.”

Everything in this world was created for the Honor of its Creator. When a person brings credit to the Jewish People, he also brings Honor to the One who chose us from all the peoples — he fulfills his purpose and the purpose of Creation itself. If he does the reverse, G-d forbid, he both writes himself out of reality and damages the whole cosmos. He blemishes Creation more than all the world's crude-oil spills and atomic melt-downs.

But there's another side to *chilul Hashem* (desecrating G-d's Name). When a Jew sees or hears someone doing an unspeakable act, he thinks to himself: “How could he have *done* that?! I would never do such a thing in a million years. You know something — I'm not such a bad person after all. I'm really a *tzadik*. My small transgressions are nothing compared with this guy's. You know something — I'm really a *big tzadik!*”

It takes a lifetime's work to correct the flaws in our character, both big and small. The only way we have a hope of improving ourselves is to sensitize ourselves to our shortcomings and realize that we have a long way to go. When someone behaves immorally, it makes us think that we are really okay because we would never sink to that level — and thus we give up trying to be better. As a result, not only do we suffer, but the whole world becomes a darker place because we have given up on the light.

In this week's Torah portion, there is an interesting anomaly. In one verse, G-d says, “Take vengeance for the *Children of Israel* against the Midianites.” And in the next verse, Moshe directs the Jewish People “to inflict *Hashem's* vengeance against Midian.” Which is it? Is it G-d's vengeance or is it ours?

The answer is that at the deepest level, the Jewish People and G-d are one. When we blemish the good name of the Jewish People, we cause a diminution of G-d's light in the world. And when we do something that brings credit to the Jews, we bring the whole of mankind closer to G-d.

Sources: Rabbi Mordechai Perlman and others

Matot

Moshe teaches the rules governing oaths and vows — especially the role of a husband or father in either upholding or annulling a vow. *Bnei Yisrael* war against *Midian*. They kill all the males, the five Midianite kings, and *Bilaam*. Moshe is upset that women were taken captive, because they were catalysts for the immoral behavior of the Jewish People. He rebukes the officers. The spoils of war are counted and apportioned. The commanding officers report to Moshe that there was not one casualty among *Bnei Yisrael*. They bring an offering which is taken by Moshe and Elazar and placed in the *Ohel Mo'ed* (Tent of Meeting). The Tribes of Gad and Reuven, who own large quantities of livestock, petition Moshe to allow them to remain east of the Jordan and not enter the Land of Israel. They explain that the land east of the Jordan is quite suitable grazing land for their livestock. Moshe's initial response is that this request will discourage the rest of *Bnei Yisrael*, and that it is akin to the sin of the spies. They assure Moshe that they will first help conquer Israel, and only then will they go back to their

homes on the eastern side of the Jordan River. Moshe grants their request on condition that they uphold their part of the deal.

Masei

The Torah names all 42 encampments of *Bnei Yisrael* on their 40-year journey from the Exodus to the crossing of the Jordan river into *Eretz Yisrael*. Hashem commands *Bnei Yisrael* to drive out the Canaanites from *Eretz Yisrael* and to demolish every vestige of their idolatry. *Bnei Yisrael* are warned that if they fail to rid the land completely of the Canaanites, those who remain will be "pins in their eyes and thorns in their sides." The boundaries of the Land of Israel are defined, and the tribes are commanded to set aside 48 cities for the *levi'im*, who do not receive a regular portion in the division of the Land. Cities of refuge are to be established: Someone who murders unintentionally may flee there. The daughters of Tzlofchad marry members of their tribe so that their inheritance will stay in their own tribe. Thus ends the Book of *Bamidbar/Numbers*, the fourth of the Books of The Torah.

HAFTARA

“*Shimu Dvar Hashem*” is the second *haftara* in the “Three-of-Affliction” trilogy read

between 17 Tammuz and 9 Av. In it, Yirmiyahu laments the double wrong committed by the Jewish People: They have forsaken the Living G-d, and they have sought after many useless gods.

This week's *haftara* continues last week's in which Yirmiyahu protests his Divine appointment as rebuker of the Jews. Yet, say our Sages, Yirmiyahu, as a descendant of Rachav, was ironically fit for this purpose. Rachav was a less-

YIRMIYAHU 2:4 - 2:28, 3:4

than-reputable “inn-keeper.” Yet, she repented: She harbored Israel's spies, aided them in their conquest of Canaan, and eventually converted to Judaism. “Yirmiyahu is the son of a disreputable woman, yet his deeds are righteous: Let him come and rebuke the Jewish people, who are the children of the righteous Yaakov, and yet their deeds are evil.”

• *Rashi*

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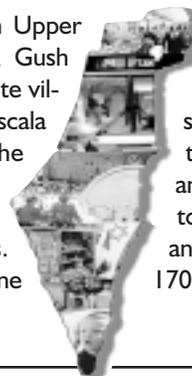
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LOVE OF THE LAND

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

GUSH CHALAV

A major Jewish center in Upper Galilee in older times, Gush Chalav is now a Maronite village. Known in Latin as Giscala and in Arabic as Jish, the Hebrew name (Block of Milk) indicates that it was located in very fertile surroundings. Yochanan Gush Chalav was one



of the leaders of the Jewish revolt against the Romans. In a small domed building on the outskirts of the village are the tombs of two great Talmudic sages, Shemaya and Avtalyon, and in the small valley to the east are the relics of an ancient synagogue dating back some 1700 years.

WHO COMES FIRST?

If one says to his friend, “let us get up early and study this subject together,” it is incumbent on him to be there first. Rabbi Gidal cited this *halacha* in the name of the Sage Rav whose source was the account of an encounter between Hashem and the Prophet Yechezkel (3:22-23): “He said to me, ‘Go out to the valley where I shall speak to you.’ I arose and went out to the valley and, behold, the Glory of Hashem stood there.”

Two important lessons are communicated in this statement of Rav. If one makes a verbal commitment to study Torah or to do any other *mitzvah*, even though he did not make a formal vow, he is obligated to fulfill that commitment just as one who makes a verbal commitment to give a sum to charity is obligated to do so (*Rosh Hashana 6a*). Secondly, if he undertook to do that studying with a partner he must be the first to appear at their designated rendezvous, because it was he who took the initiative in suggesting that project. This we learn from the fact that Hashem, having initiated the encounter with the prophet, appeared at the designated meeting before the prophet.

In his footnotes on the Talmud, Rabbi Akiva Eiger calls our attention to a passage in Chumash and Rashi’s commentary on it. The Torah tells us (*Shemot 19:16*) that on the morning designated for the Jews to receive the Torah at Sinai, the Presence of Hashem preceded the people to this historic rendezvous. Although in human relations it is customary for the disciple to wait for the master, Rashi comments, here Hashem waited for the people. He then parallels this to the aforementioned encounter with Yechezkel where once again Hashem waited for His disciple.

The perspective of Hashem’s coming first, based on the Midrash quoted by the Iyun Yaakov, that it was intended as an expression of the humbleness with which Hashem conducts Himself in relation to His creation, seems to run counter to the approach of Rav which draws from the incident in Yechezkel a halachic norm.

We may suggest that the two approaches are complementary rather than contradictory. As Iyun Yaakov points out, Rav’s rule applies only to two friends of equal status. Only then must the initiator appear first. Should the master initiate such a meeting with the disciples, however, it is still the disciple who must wait for the master out of deference to his honor. Hashem, in His extraordinary humbleness, waived the honor due Him and related to Yechezkel as one would with a colleague. But why did Hashem insist on appearing first? This obviously came to teach us that the colleague who is the initiator of the project must be there first.

But why did Rav have to draw upon the Yechezkel incident if the same lesson could have been derived from Hashem waiting for His people at Sinai? Perhaps out of consideration for an entire nation Hashem, in His humbleness, assumed the

status of disciple rather than master or even colleague. This would therefore prove only that a disciple must wait for his master and not that an initiating colleague must wait for his partner, something we are able to learn from the rendezvous with Yechezkel.

• *Nedarim 8a*

SHALOM ALEICHEM — ALEICHEM SHALOM

When one Jew meets another he traditionally greets him with “*Shalom Aleichem*,” and the other returns the greeting with “*Aleichem Shalom*.”

A possible source for this style of exchanging greetings is our *gemara*. When one wishes to dedicate something as a sacrifice to be offered to Heaven he should not say “This shall be to Hashem an *olah*, to Hashem a *mincha*, to Hashem a *todah*, to Hashem a *shelamim*.” He should rather first state the nature of the sacrifice and then mention the Name of Hashem. Rabbi Shimon derives this from the term used by the Torah at the very beginning of the laws of offerings (*Vayikra 1:2*) “an offering to Hashem.” The reason for this caution is that if one begins his declaration with the sacred Name of Hashem, there is a danger that he may not complete his statement and thus be guilty of the serious sin of involuntarily taking Hashem’s Name in vain.

The *gemara* does not mention what danger is involved. The general assumption is that there is a danger that one who first says Hashem’s Name may die suddenly and be unable to complete the statement he intended to make.

Shalom is also considered one of Hashem’s Names (*Mesechta Shabbat 10b*) and caution must be exercised in using it. The one who initiates the greeting need not fear that he will die before completing it and thus be guilty of using that Name in vain, because the merit of initiating a greeting to a fellow Jew will protect him from sudden death in mid-greeting. The one responding, however, is involved only in a courtesy and must therefore take the precaution of saying the “*Aleichem*” before the “*Shalom*,” lest his use of Hashem’s Name be aborted and rendered as improper usage.

The “*shalom*” used in modern Israeli society does not seem to have any relationship with this concept of greeting someone with the Name of Hashem, and it is nothing more than the “peace” greeting used in other societies.

• *Nedarim 10b*

I DIDN'T KNOW THAT!

The phrases “*Bnei Gad*” and “*Bnei Reuven*” appear eight times in connection with taking their inheritance before the other tribes. Thus, the tribe of Gad and Reuven were exiled from that inheritance eight years before the other tribes.

• *Ba'al Haturim*

PARSHA Q&A?

Matot

1. Who may annul a vow?
2. When may a father annul his widowed daughter's vows?
3. Why were the Jewish People not commanded to attack Moav, as they were to attack Midian?
4. Those selected to fight Midian went unwillingly. Why?
5. What holy vessels accompanied the Jewish People into battle?
6. Those who killed in the war against Midian were required to remain outside the "machaneh" (camp). Which machaneh?
7. Besides removing traces of forbidden food, what else is needed to make metal vessels obtained from a non-Jew fit for a Jewish owner?
8. "We will build sheep-pens here for our livestock and cities for our little ones." What was improper about this statement?
9. During the conquest of the Land, where did *Bnei Gad* and *Bnei Reuven* position themselves?
10. What promise did *Bnei Gad* and *Bnei Reuven* make beyond that which Moshe required?

Masei

1. Why does the Torah list the places where the Jewish People camped?
2. Why did the King of Arad feel at liberty to attack the Jewish People?
3. What length was the camp in the *midbar*?
4. Why does the Torah need to specify the boundaries that are to be inherited by the Jewish People?
5. What was the *nesi'im*'s role in dividing the Land?
6. When did the three cities east of the Jordan begin to function as refuge cities?
7. There were six refuge cities, three on each side of the Jordan. Yet, on the east side of the Jordan there were only two and a half tribes. Why did they need three cities?
8. To be judged as an intentional murderer, the murderer must use what type of weapon?
9. Why is the *kohen gadol* blamed for accidental deaths?
10. When an ancestral field moves by inheritance from one tribe to another, what happens to it in *yovel*?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

Matot

1. 30:2 - Preferably, an expert in the laws of *nedarim*. Otherwise, three ordinary people.
2. 30:10 - If she is under 12 and 1/2 years old and widowed before she was fully married.
3. 31:2 - Because Moav only acted out of fear against the Jewish People. Also, Ruth was destined to come from Moav.
4. 31:5 - They knew that Moshe's death would follow.
5. 31:6 - The *aron* and the *tzitz*.
6. 31:19 - The *Machaneh Shechina*.
7. 31:23 - Immersion in a *mikveh*.
8. 32:16 - They showed more regard for their property than for their children.
9. 32:17 - At the head of the troops.
10. 32:24 - Moshe required them to remain west of the Jordan during the conquest of the Land. They promised to remain after the conquest until the Land was divided among the tribes.

Masei

1. 33:1 - To show Hashem's love of the Jewish People. Although it was decreed that they wander in the desert, they did not travel continuously. During 38 years, they moved only 20 times.
2. 33:40 - When Aharon died, the clouds of glory protecting the Jewish People departed.
3. 33:49 - Twelve *mil*.
4. 34:2 - Because certain *mitzvot* apply only in the Land.
5. 34:17 - Each *nasi* represented his tribe. He also allocated the inheritance to each family in his tribe.
6. 35:13 - After Yehoshua separated three cities west of the Jordan.
7. 35:14 - Because murders were more common there.
8. 35:16 - One capable of inflicting lethal injury.
9. 35:25 - He should have prayed that such things not occur.
10. 36:4 - It remains with the new tribe.

KASHA! (KASHA MEANS "QUESTION")

F. V. from Holland asked:

Here's a question that has baffled me for years: Why in Parshat Matot is the casualty report given after the counting of the spoils? Moshe counted and apportioned all the spoils of the war against Midian (Bamidbar 31:25-46); afterward the captains reported, "We have taken a head-count of the warriors under our charge, and not one man is missing." (31:48-9) Shouldn't they have counted the soldiers first to see if any died? Aren't people more important than things?

Answer:

Dear F.V.,

The captains' report was not a casualty report. Rather, they were saying that they monitored every soldier during the entire battle, and not one was ever missing from surveillance; and hence, no one sinned with any of the Midianite women.

• Ramban

Do you have a KASHA? Write to kasha@ohr.org.il with your questions on any Parsha!

YAHOO!

From: Mr. and Mrs. Fuentes in Miami FL
<Shomeremet1@cs.com>

Dear Rabbi,
What does the word "Yahoo" mean in Hebrew? It is used commonly as part of a name.

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Fuentes,

The Hebrew word *Yahoo* (or *Yahu*) is a name of G-d. It is commonly found at the end of people's names. It represents a Divine attribute added to the name. For example, Yeshayahu (Isaiah) means "G-d's redemption," Yirmiyahu (Jeremiah) means "Fear of G-d."

I sometimes wonder if the internet company Yahoo! became such a major success simply because G-d likes the name they chose!

THE REST OF SHABBAT

From: Matt in Teaneck, New Jersey
<Blaster27@aol.com>

Dear Rabbi,
I live in a Jewish town and go to a Jewish school where we study Torah daily. However, I'm still not sure as to the laws of Shabbat relating to my daily life. My friend said that if you have good intentions and stay home and rest but still use electricity that is still observing the Shabbat but I have trouble accepting this because it would contradict too many other laws that I observe. I do want to keep the Shabbat but I'm not sure how.

Dear Matt,

The Torah tells us not to do "*melacha*" on Shabbat. *Melacha* is sometimes defined as "work," but that's not a good definition. What is *melacha*?

Melacha means "creative act." By refraining from creative acts, we recognize G-d as the Ultimate Creator.

Melacha is any act which represents the uniquely human ability to put our intellect to work and shape the environment. Thus, switching on a light is a *melacha*. Among other things, it can be considered "building" a circuit.

Specifically, a *melacha* is anything that fits into one of 39 categories of activities listed in Tractate Shabbat page 73a. This list includes activities such as seeding, uprooting, building, writing and burning.

I recommend the following books to start: *The Shabbat* by Dayan Isadore Grunfield, and *Shabbos: Day of Eternity* by Aryeh Kaplan.

WEDDING TIME

From: Mrs. G.
<pgelerinter@netscape.net>

Dear Rabbi,
Isn't 20 the recommended age for a young man to wed? It is not necessarily the best age, but I believe that is the age many orthodox Jews consider.

Dear Mrs. G.,

The Mishna says "*Ben shemona esrei l'chupa*" — an eighteen year old to the marriage canopy. The Talmud says that if the young man isn't married by 18 "G-d waits for him until he's twenty, and if he's not married by 20, then G-d says 'blast his bones.'" (free translation)

But there's a joke making the rounds these days: "What's the difference between men and 30 year bonds? Bonds mature."

There's truth in jest. In our day, many people — women as well as men — seem too immature to wed at 18.

But in the ideal world, an 18 year old would be mature enough to marry. By then, both boy and girl should have learned that life is about giving, which is the secret for a successful marriage. Indeed, in lots of orthodox circles 20 is the age when many marry, and even before, and these "youngsters" create dynamic, successful links in the chain of Judaism.

PUBLIC DOMAIN

Comments, quibbles and reactions concerning previous "Ohrnet" features

Re: Machines and Mashiach:

In the Parshas Korach issue, you responded to a reader that in messianic times you hope that the internet will be used for good things. I strongly take issue. You are implying that today, in pre-messianic times, the internet is not used for good things. That is patently false. You should be informed that there are many excellent sites on the web today, and if you don't believe me you have obviously never heard of a web site called "Ohrnet." Indignantly,

• Peretz Moncharsh <moncharsh@barak-online.net>

Ohrnet Responds: Thanks for the criticism...er...I mean the compliment!

Re: Hava Nagilah (Ohrnet Korach Pinchas)

You wrote: "*Hava Nagilah* was composed by Klausenberg Chassidim."

This isn't accurate. It was a Radomsker version of *Yismichu B'malchuscha*, a Shabbat song. It was composed by an unknown Radomsker Chassid between 100 and 150 years ago.

• Ron Silver <RS2HS@aol.com>

FINAL EDITION OF "WHO KNOWS...?"

For several weeks, we've asked: "In the song at the end of the Pesach Seder we describe the significance of the numbers from one to 13 as they relate to Jewish life and thought: "Three are the fathers, Four are the Mothers... 12 are the Tribes of Israel..." What about the next 13 numbers? And after those? What significance do they have in Jewish tradition?"

Here is the "final" installment of readers' answers:

13 are the *midot* (attributes) of Hashem. Being that Hashem is omniscient, omnipresent, etc., His *midot* seem to be inclusive of everything beyond what is part of the song. Furthermore, the song begins with Hashem ("One is Hashem") and ends with Hashem (the 13 *midot*) so the whole song seems to be balanced well. As for the number 20 which you asked about, it says in *Pirkei Avot* that 20 is the age at which one begins to pursue (a career).

• Hinda Kaplan, Brooklyn, NY <Hin21@aol.com>

A complete set of Talmud is usually published in 20 volumes. Although a person becomes legally liable at 12 or 13 years of age, he is not really held fully accountable by G-d until age 20. If I remember correctly, Yaakov lived with Lavan for 20 years (7 years for Leah, 7 for Rachel, and 6 to earn his livelihood).

• Haim [Howard] Roman, Jerusalem
<roman@megila.jct.ac.il>

20 planks on both the north and south sides of the *Mishkan*; 20 pieces of silver that Joseph was sold for by the brothers; 20 is the number at which people began to be counted for military service; 20 is the age at which a person suffers heavenly punishment.

• Stephen Friedman <sfriedman@rosenman.com>

20 *amot* is maximum height for Chanuka menorah, *succah*, and *mavoi*.

• Raffi <RaffiAs@shaam.gov.il>

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE STORY THE OTHER SIDE OF THE STORY

Giving People the Benefit of the Doubt

To justify questionable behavior, we need not go hunting on an African Safari. The most exotic excuses are often right in our back yard. Take the following story, which I call...

AN ELEPHANT WITH NASAL CONGESTION

I walked into the staff room at my Yeshiva just as a friend of mine, Michael, was saying to Rabbi Nosson Slifkin: "You smell like an elephant!"

How could I judge Michael favorably here?

The real story is as follows. Rabbi Nosson Slifkin gives Torah tours of the zoo, explaining Torah lessons to be learned from different creatures. (He has a website, www.zootorah.com). He had just come back from giving a tour at the Jerusalem Biblical Zoo, where an elephant sneezed on him! Just before I walked into the room, Rabbi Slifkin told my friend Michael about his spray with pachydermal phlegm, and they were kidding around about it. Thus, I entered the room to the cry of "You smell like an elephant!" But it was all said in good fun.

YIDDLE RIDDLE

After several weeks' break, Ohrnet is proud to bring you, by popular demand **RETURN OF YIDDLE RIDDLE!**

Certain health defects make an animal into a "treifa." A *treifa* is not kosher; it may not be eaten. In what case does an animal's being a *treifa* cause its offspring to be kosher (or, more exactly, prevent its offspring from automatically being non-kosher.)

Answer Next Week...

RECOMMENDED READING LIST

Matot

RAMBAN

30:16 Responsibility
31:2,6 Vengeance
31:23 Cleansing Vessels
31:36 Miracle of the Spoils
31:49 Jewish Victory
32:33 Menashe's Inheritance
32:41 Yair's Ancestry

SFORNO

31:15 The Meaning of Silence

Masei

RAMBAN

33:53 The Land
35:14 Cities of Refuge
35:29 The Sanhedrin

KLI YAKAR

33:49 The Greater Loss

35:6 Temporary Dweller

SEFER HACHINUCH

408 Cities of the *Levi'im*
409 Capital Punishment
410 Exile

SFORNO

33:1 The Merit of the Journeys
36:4 The Inheritance of Daughters
36:12 The Husbands of the Daughters of Tzlofchad