

O H R N E T

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PARSHA INSIGHTS

Chukat

LIKE TALKING TO A ROCK

“...Because you did not believe in Me to sanctify Me in the eyes of the children of Israel...” (20:12)

What does it mean to be Jewish? If you look in the siddur, the book of Jewish prayer, you will find that it defines the Jewish People as: “Yisrael, the sanctifiers of Your Name.” (Shabbat morning – Shmone Esrei prayer)

How do you sanctify G-d’s name?

Sanctifying G-d’s name can mean being willing to give up your life for no other reason than you are Jewish — whether in an oven in Auschwitz or in a number 14 bus in Jerusalem.

It can mean refusing to cheat in business even when that particular form of cheating is considered so normal that anyone who doesn’t cheat is a mug.

It can mean the Tel Aviv taxi driver returning the wallet that you dropped unknowingly in his cab and finding that not only is the entire \$1000 dollars still there, but he refuses to charge you for the extra journey he had to make.

We are Yisrael, the sanctifiers of G-d’s name. That’s our job — *Kiddush Hashem*. That is who we are.

In this week’s Parsha, Moshe is punished for failing to sanctify G-d’s name. According to Nachmanides, when G-d told Moshe to draw water from the rock, instead of speaking to it, as he had been told, he hit it. This was his failure.

Let me ask you a question. Isn’t someone making water come out of a rock a pretty big *Kiddush Hashem*? What’s so shabby about that? Doesn’t such a miracle sanctify G-d’s name in front of the masses?

As much as hitting the rock was a *Kiddush HaShem*, talking to the rock would have been far greater.

Kiddush Hashem is the essence of the Jewish People, thus it’s not measured by what we do; it’s measured by what we could do.

Sources:

• Based on Rabbi Chenoah Lebowitz as heard from Rabbi C. Z. Senter as heard from Rabbi Dovid Orlofsky

Balak

CAN YOU HOLD?

“How goodly are your tents, Yaakov!” (24:5)

A few weeks ago, I was deep in conversation with a friend. Suddenly, the phone rang and he did something very strange. He answered the phone.

Someone was calling from America. My friend whispered a hasty “Excuse me!” and proceeded to spend about five minutes on the phone while I sat there.

Can anyone tell me — what makes the telephone more important than me?

What gives an electronic voice priority over one of flesh and blood? I realize that the person on the phone was more important, infinitely wittier, and better-looking than me — but lacking prophecy, clairvoyance or caller ID, my friend had no way of knowing that before he picked up the handset. And yet, the phone still came first.

Why are we prepared to interrupt flesh and blood intimacy for a disembodied contact over the airwaves? What makes the telephone more important than a real person?

And it seems that my friend is far from being alone in this. With the proliferation (spawning would be a better word) of the mobile phone, at all times and in all places, I see the same oft-repeated scenario. “Oh excuse me! I’ve got a phone call!”

I think that the mindset behind all this is that we are afraid of missing out on something. I’m already here, but who’s on the end of the phone? We don’t want to miss something.

Of course, it’s impossible to miss something. If you missed it — it wasn’t for you. G-d makes sure that everything that happens to us – and doesn’t happen for us – is precisely and exactly what we need. No less and no more.

This, in essence, was Bilaam’s praise of the Jewish People when he said “How goodly are your tents,

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PARSHA OVERVIEW

Chukat

The laws of the *para aduma* — the red heifer — are detailed. These laws are for the ritual purification of one who comes into contact with death. After nearly 40 years in the desert, Miriam dies and is buried at Kadesh. The people complain about the loss of their water supply that until now has been provided miraculously in the merit of Miriam's righteousness. Aharon and Moshe pray for the people's welfare. G-d commands them to gather the nation at Merivah and speak to a designated rock so that water will flow forth. 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 G-d's mastery over the world, which would have resulted had the rock produced water merely at Moshe's word. Therefore, G-d tells Moshe and Aharon that they will not bring the people into the Land. *Bnei Yisrael* resume their travels, but because the King of Edom, a descendant of Esav, denies them passage through his country, they do not travel the most direct route to Eretz Yisrael. When they reach Mount Hor, Aharon dies and his son Elazar is invested with his priestly garments and responsibilities. Aharon was beloved by all, and the entire nation mourns him 30 days. Sichon the Amorite attacks *Bnei Yisrael* when they ask 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.

Balak

Balak, king of Moav, is in morbid fear of *Bnei Yisrael*. He summons a renowned sorcerer named Bilaam to curse them. First, G-d speaks to Bilaam and forbids him to go. But, because Bilaam is so insistent, G-d appears to him a second time and permits him to go. While en route, a *malach* (emissary from G-d) blocks Bilaam's donkey's path. Unable to contain his frustration, Bilaam strikes the donkey each time it stops or tries to detour. Miraculously, the donkey speaks, asking Bilaam why he is hitting her. The *malach* instructs Bilaam regarding what he is permitted to say and what he is forbidden to say regarding the Jewish People. When Bilaam arrives, King Balak makes elaborate preparations, hoping that Bilaam will succeed in the curse. Three times Bilaam attempts to curse and three times blessings issue instead. Balak, seeing that Bilaam has failed, sends him home in disgrace.

Bnei Yisrael begin sinning with the Moabite women and worshipping the Moabite idols, and they are punished with a plague. One of the Jewish leaders brazenly brings a Midianite princess into his tent, in full view of Moshe and the people. Pinchas, a grandson of Aharon, grabs a spear and kills both evildoers. This halts the plague, but not before 24,000 have died.

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

THE GUN THAT JAMMED

Miracles still happen! Take the case of the Mori Family. A terrorist recently infiltrated a home in Moshav Maor, east of Hadera but was killed before he could carry out his murderous designs. He managed to enter the home of Roland and Larissa Mori, and even to fire one bullet. At that point, however, his gun jammed, and Roland yelled for his wife to escape while he began throwing dishes and other objects at the terrorist. After Roland also escaped, two neighbors arrived on the scene and made sure that the terrorist did not leave the house.

They later recounted that they saw his gun and heard him attempting to operate it, and even called to him to leave, but

he closed the door of the room and did not come out. Their efforts were critical in ensuring that the incident did not become a community-wide alarm, but was rather restricted to one house. Large army forces then arrived and surrounded the house, and after three hours, when the terrorist approached the front door, they let out a burst of gunfire and killed him. A Kalachnikov rifle, of the kind distributed to the Palestinian police several years ago, was found on his person, together with four full magazines. Police and army officials praised the quick response of the local residents.

Quick response is important but it took a miracle to save the Moris.

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WHAT'S NEW?

“**A**nd Yehoshafat stood in the congregation of Yehuda and Yerushalayim in the house of G-d before the new courtyard.” (*Divrei Hayamim II 20:5*)

What was new, explains Rabbi Yochanan, was not the courtyard of the Beit Hamikdash but rather a decree which this righteous king initiated. Up until his time it was permissible for someone who had become ritually impure to enter the Temple Mount and the Beit Hamikdash courtyard after immersion in a *mikveh* even though the sun had not yet set on the day of his immersion. At the scene described in the above passage it was decreed that only after the sunset following immersion would one be eligible to enter these sacred precincts.

When did this historic enactment take place?

A mighty force consisting of Moabites, Ammonites and Amalekites gathered for an invasion of the Jewish kingdom. Fearing this attack, the king took it upon himself to seek the help of G-d. He proclaimed a fast throughout the kingdom and gathered all the people together to pray for Heavenly salvation. In his prayer to G-d he noted that Jews had built a sanctuary that bore the name of G-d in which they could cry out to Him in their time of affliction.

Against this background we may appreciate the timely significance of the new decree. Since he was placing such stress on the sanctuary as the center of his appeal to Heaven the king felt it necessary to add another dimension of holiness to its status. The prayers of Yehoshafat and his people were indeed answered with a miraculous rout of the invading enemy, and his kingdom was blessed with peace and quiet.

• *Zevachim 32b*

WHEN MORE IS LESS

When the Torah designates which animals may be offered as voluntary *olah* sacrifices it specifies that “of the cattle shall you bring your offering of the herd and of the flock.” (*Vayikra 1:2*)

Had the Torah simply designated cattle we could not have assumed that beasts were excluded. This would have been comparable to a situation in which a master instructs his servant to bring him wheat and the servant brings him both wheat and barley. This is not considered a countermanding of his command but as an additional fulfillment. But once the Torah specifies that the offering must come from the herds and flocks of domesticated animals, the beast is altogether ruled out. Now it is comparable to a master who instructs his servant to bring him *only* wheat. The barley he then brings in addition is no longer acceptable.

Tosafot calls attention to another *gemara* (*Ketubot 98b*) where this issue of countermanding versus addition appears in

a different form. The question there is raised as to what the law is when a landowner delegates an agent to sell a half *kur* of his property and the agent sells twice that amount. Do we view the agent's action as a fulfillment of his mandate for the sale of half and the transaction is therefore valid for that half, or do we view it as countermanding his order and thus rendering the entire transaction invalid?

There is yet a third version of this issue found in *Mesechta Terumot* (4:4). If an agent is aware that the landowner who delegated him to tithe his agricultural produce is accustomed to separating one fiftieth to give to the *kohen* as *terumah* and he intentionally tithes a larger percentage, the entire tithing is considered invalid.

An analysis of the different circumstances in each of these cases helps us understand the variances. While the attempt to sell an extra parcel of land may not actually harm the landowner, the extra tithing can create a serious problem of mixing *terumah* with non-*terumah*. Neither of these can truly be compared to sacrifices in which the offering of an unacceptable species does not compromise the value of the acceptable one.

• *Zevachim 34a*

THE BLOODY FLOOR

The blood of the *Korban Pesach* is the subject of two discussions in this week's seven *daf*. Both of them serve as the background for a striking detail of the pre-Pesach sacrificial service performed on such a massive scale in the Beit Hamikdash.

The *mishna* (*Mesechta Pesachim 64a*) relates that on this day the *kohanim* plugged up the drain duct which normally allowed animal blood spilled in the altar area of the Beit Hamikdash courtyard to flow outside. There are two different approaches as to why this was done.

Rabbi Yehuda's approach is based on what our *gemara* (37a) deduces from the passage which instructs Jews to bring their sacrifices to the place chosen by G-d and to “pour the blood of your sacrifices on the altar of Hashem, your L-rd” (*Devarim 12:27*). This is interpreted as a reference to the need to apply the blood of the *Korban Pesach* to the altar, a requirement not specifically mentioned in the Torah command regarding that sacrifice. The speed with which the *kohanim* worked on that day to handle the volume of sacrifices brought by all Jews created a danger of spilling the blood of a sacrifice which they had received in a sacred vessel. By retaining all the blood spilled that day it was possible to eventually scoop up a container of blood and apply it to the altar on the safe assumption that it contained at least a particle of the spilled blood which had not yet reached its destination.

The Sages who disagreed with both the need and the effectiveness of such a scooping and application were challenged by

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PARSHA Q&A ?

Chukat

1. "Take a perfect *para aduma* (red heifer)." What does the word "perfect" — *temima* — mean in this context?
2. How many non-red hairs disqualify a cow as a *para aduma*?
3. A man dies in a tent. What happens to the sealed metal and earthenware utensils in the tent?
4. What happens to the one who: a) sprinkles the water mixed with the ashes of the *para aduma*; b) touches the water; c) carries the water?
5. Why was the *mitzvah* of the *para aduma* entrusted to Elazar rather than to Aharon?
6. Why does the Torah stress that *all* of the congregation came to *Midbar Tzin*?
7. Why is Miriam's death taught after the law of *para aduma*?
8. During their journey in the *midbar*, in whose merit did the Jewish People receive water?
9. Why did Moshe need to strike the rock a second time?
10. 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?
11. The cloud that led the Jewish People leveled all mountains in their path except three. Which three and why?
12. Why did the *entire* congregation mourn Aharon's death?
13. What disappeared when Aharon died?
14. Which "inhabitant of the South" (21:1) attacked the Jews?
15. For what two reasons did G-d punish the people with snakes specifically?
16. Why did the Jewish People camp in Arnon, rather than pass through Moav to enter *Eretz Canaan*?
17. What miracle took place at the valley of Arnon?
18. What was the "strength" of Amon that prevented the Jewish People from entering into their land?
19. Why was Moshe afraid of Og?
20. Who killed Og?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to Chukat's Questions!

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

1. 19:2 - Perfectly red.
2. 19:2 - Two.
3. 19:14,15 - The metal utensils are impure for seven days, even if they are sealed. The sealed earthenware vessels are unaffected.
4. 19:21 - a) Remains *tahor*; b) He, but not his clothing, contracts *tumah*; c) He and his clothing contract *tumah*.
5. 19:22 - Because Aharon was involved in the sin of the golden calf.
6. 20:1 - To teach that they were *all* fit to enter the Land; everyone involved in the sin of the spies already died.
7. 20:1 - To teach that just as sacrifices bring atonement, so too does the death of the righteous.
8. 20:2 - Miriam's.
9. 20:11 - After he hit it the first time, only a few drops came out since he was commanded to *speak* to the rock.
10. 20:17 - To the well that traveled with the nation in the *midbar*. This teaches that one who has adequate provisions should nevertheless purchase goods from his host in order to benefit the host.
11. 20:22 - *Har Sinai* for receiving the Torah, *Har Nevo* for Moshe's burial, and *Hor Hahar* for Aharon's burial.
12. 20:29 - Aharon made peace between contending parties and between spouses. Thus, everybody mourned him.
13. 20:29 - The clouds of glory disappeared, since they sheltered the Jews in Aharon's merit.
14. 21:1 - Amalek.
15. 21:6 - The original snake, who was punished for speaking evil, is fitting to punish those who spoke evil about G-d and about Moshe. And the snake, for whom everything tastes like dust, is fitting to punish those who complained about the manna which changed to any desired taste.
16. 21:13 - Moav refused them passage.
17. 21:15 - The Amorites hid in caves in the mountain on the Moabite side of the valley in order to ambush the Jews. When the Jews approached, the mountain on the *Eretz Canaan* side of the valley moved close to the other mountain and the Amorites were crushed.
18. 21:24 - G-d'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.

PARSHA Q&A ?

Balak

1. Why did Moav consult specifically with Midian regarding their strategy against the Jews?
2. What was Balak's status before becoming Moav's king?
3. Why did G-d grant prophecy to the evil Bilaam?
4. Why did Balak think Bilaam's curse would work?
5. When did Bilaam receive his prophecies?
6. G-d asked Bilaam, "Who are these men with you?" What did Bilaam deduce from this question?
7. How do we know Bilaam hated the Jews more than Balak did?
8. What is evidence of Bilaam's arrogance?
9. In what way was the *malach* that opposed Bilaam an angel of mercy?
10. How did Bilaam die?
11. Why did the *malach* kill Bilaam's donkey?
12. Bilaam compared his meeting with an angel to someone else's meeting with an angel. Who was the other person and what was the comparison?
13. Bilaam told Balak to build seven altars. Why specifically seven?
14. Who in Jewish history seemed fit for a curse, but got a blessing instead?
15. Why are the Jewish People compared to lions?
16. On Bilaam's third attempt to curse the Jews, he changed his strategy. What was different?
17. What were Bilaam's three main characteristics?
18. What did Bilaam see that made him decide not to curse the Jews?
19. What phrase in Bilaam's self-description can be translated in two opposite ways, both of which come out meaning the same thing?
20. Bilaam told Balak that the Jews' G-d hates what?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to Balak's Questions!

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

1. 22:4 - Since Moshe grew up in Midian, the Moabites thought the Midianites might know wherein lay Moshe's power.
2. 22:4 - He was a prince of Midian.
3. 22:5 - So the other nations couldn't say, "If we had had prophets, we also would have become righteous."
4. 22:6 - Because Bilaam's curse had helped Sichon defeat Moav.
5. 22:8 - Only at night.
6. 22:9 - He mistakenly reasoned that G-d isn't all-knowing.
7. 22:11 - Balak wanted only to drive the Jews from the land. Bilaam sought to exterminate them completely.
8. 22:13 - He implied that G-d wouldn't let him go with the Moabite princes due to their lesser dignity.
9. 22:22 - It mercifully tried to stop Bilaam from sinning and destroying himself.
10. 22:23 - He was killed with a sword.
11. 22:33 - So that people shouldn't see it and say, "Here's the donkey that silenced Bilaam." G-d is concerned with human dignity.
12. 22:34 - Avraham. Bilaam said, "G-d told me to go but later sent an angel to stop me. The same thing happened to Avraham: G-d told Avraham to sacrifice Yitzchak but later canceled the command through an angel."
13. 23:4 - Corresponding to the seven altars built by the Avot. Bilaam said to G-d, "The Jewish People's ancestors built seven altars, but I alone have built altars equal to all of them."
14. 23:8 - Yaakov, when Yitzchak blessed him.
15. 23:24 - They rise each morning and "strengthen" themselves to do *mitzvot*.
16. 24:1 - He began mentioning the Jewish People's sins, hoping thus to be able to curse them.
17. 24:2 - An evil eye, pride, and greed.
18. 24:2 - He saw each Tribe dwelling without intermingling. He saw the tents arranged so no one could see into his neighbor's tent.
19. 24:3 - "*Shatum ha'ayin*." It means either "the poked-out eye," implying blindness in one eye; or, it means the "the open eye," which means vision but implies blindness in the other eye.
20. 24:14 - Promiscuity.

REINCARNATION

From: Steve in Johannesburg, South Africa

Dear Rabbi,

I recently returned from a trip to India where I found the whole concept of reincarnation to be fascinating. Why doesn't Judaism believe in it?

Dear Steve,

Surprise! Reincarnation is an ancient, mainstream belief in Judaism. The Zohar, written by Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai close to two thousand years ago, speaks frequently and at length about reincarnation. Onkelos, a righteous convert and authoritative commentator of the same period, explained the verse, "Let Reuben live and not die..." (Deuteronomy 33:6) to mean that Reuben should merit the World to Come directly, and not have to die again as result of being reincarnated. The great Torah scholar, commentator and kabbalist, Nachmanides (Ramban 1195-1270), attributed Job's suffering to reincarnation as hinted in Job's saying "G-d does all these things twice or three times with a man, to bring back his soul from the pit to...the light of the living" (Job 33:29,30).

Rabbi Chaim Vital, the disciple of the Arizal (1534-1572), explains in detail the Jewish concept of reincarnation. The soul is placed in a body in order for a person to attain spiritual perfection by refraining from transgression and performing *mitzvot*. If one accrues too much spiritual damage, the soul must return to repair the damage. Similarly, if one didn't take full advantage of the opportunity to perfect the soul, it may be reincarnated to complete its perfection. The way it works is as follows:

The first time a soul enters this world, the person is able to perfect the three lower levels of soul, *nefesh*, *ruach*, and *neshama* (see "Ask the Rabbi-Soul"). If so, the soul goes to "the world of souls" where it awaits resurrection. If not, the different levels of soul can only be perfected in different lifetimes. Each time a level of soul is perfected, the person dies, is reincarnated, and given the chance to perfect the next level of soul. Previously perfected levels of soul are not damaged by sins in the current reincarnation. The soul continues to be perfected in this way until it is perfected at least in *nefesh*, *ruach*, and *neshama*, at which point the soul goes to "the world of souls". The bodies of all the soul's reincarnations will be resurrected, but the first body is the main one.

Another reason souls may be reincarnated is for *zivug* (soul-mates): Either because they missed their *zivug*, and perfection can only be achieved through marrying one's soul-mate; or even if they married but one soul wasn't perfected, the other must return to be with its *zivug*. Sometimes even a perfected soul, such as that of a *tzaddik* (a very righteous person), may be reincarnated in order to help perfect others. While a person is not aware of previous reincarnations, the Arizal explained that those areas of Torah that a person particularly enjoys learning are those that weren't completed in previous lives and should

be concentrated on now. Conversely, the *mitzvot* that one finds particularly difficult are specifically those needing correction.

The majority of kabbalists are of the opinion that in addition to the first life, there are at most three incarnations. They cite the above-mentioned verse from Job "twice or three times with a man...". The Zohar says this on the verse "punishing the iniquity...to the third and fourth generation [reckoning from the first life]" (Exodus 34:7). However, Sefer HaBahir says that a soul can be reincarnated a thousand times. The renowned kabbalist of the 1600's, Rabbi Menashe ben Israel, resolves this contradiction by saying that since the purpose of reincarnation is to perfect the soul, after three times with no progress the soul loses its chance ("three strikes and you're out"). But if the soul is progressing, even in small increments, it can be reincarnated many times. Another resolution is that the soul can be reincarnated as a human only three times, as suggested by the verse "twice or three times with a man". Afterwards the soul may be reincarnated even a thousand times as a lower life form.

A brief story:

Once, a poor man complained to the Ba'al Shem Tov about his suffering. The rabbi sent him to a certain man in a distant town that might be able to help him. When he arrived and asked directions to the man's house, one person after another spat and cursed at the mention of his name. Finally he reached the house only to have the door slammed in his face. After pleading with the owner of the house for an explanation, he was told that the man he wants, a terrible miser hated by all, died long ago. Bewildered, the man returned to the Baal Shem Tov and told him what happened. The rabbi looked him square in the eyes and said "the man you were looking for was you!" The man realized the reason for his poverty, and started giving whatever he had to charity. Eventually he was able to give extensively.

Interestingly, reincarnation as well as other spiritual concepts in eastern religions may be rooted in Judaism. After Sarah's death, Abraham remarried Hagar who was renamed Ketura because her deeds had become pleasant as incense (*ketoret*). Even though Isaac was Abraham's main disciple, Ketura's sons also received spiritual knowledge from Abraham that they spread to the East. According to Rabbi Menashe ben Israel, this is the meaning of the verses, "And Abraham gave all that he had to Isaac. But to the sons of the concubines...Abraham gave gifts...and sent them away...eastward, to the east country" (Genesis 25:5,6). Initially the knowledge spread by these sons was true to the teachings of Abraham, but over time it was tainted and transformed by idol worship.

Welcome home Steve, from India to Judaism.

Sources:

- Zohar 1:94a,1:150, 1:186b, 3:215a; especially Parshat Mishpatim
- Targum Onkelos, Deuteronomy 33:6
- Ramban, Sha'ar HaGemul
- Chaim Vital, Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Introduction 2,5,8
- Sefer Chassidim 41
- Arizal, Sefer HaGilgulim, 84
- Menashe ben Israel, Nismat Chaim, section 4, ch. 14 and 21

SORRY, WRONG NUMBER

Question: I have a telephone number that is apparently very similar to someone who is a “late-night bird”. On a couple of occasions I have rushed out of bed to answer the telephone in expectation of an emergency call from a family member only to hear a lame “Sorry, wrong number” from the other end. What should be my reaction to such infuriating disturbances?

Answer: A friend of mine with a macabre sense of humor had a similar problem and would answer such late-night calls by saying “Good evening, you have reached the insomnia ward of the Bad Samaritan Hospital. Do you need help in falling asleep?”

In a more serious vein, you must view such disturbances as Heaven-sent challenges to your tolerance and temper. Please

remember that the party calling had no intention to reach you and it is an understandable human error to press the wrong button. Perhaps the right thing to do when it emerges that you were not the intended receiver of the call is to gently suggest to the caller that he or she exercise greater care in placing a call, especially late at night. If the disturbance becomes a regular affair it might be a good idea to ask the caller what number he or she is trying to reach, and then to call that number and ask that party to either stress to his callers the need for greater caution or to encourage them to make their calls at a more civilized hour.

Bottom line: Don't get excited, because it will be much harder to fall asleep and you may end up needing the services of my funny friend's insomniac ward.

PUBLIC DOMAIN

Re: Mental Retardation (Ohrnet Beha'alotcha)

A follow-up comment to a recent “Ask the Rabbi” column discussion on mental retardation. First, mental retardation is not a disease; it is a condition, particularly for those who are born with a different chromozonal pattern. This is who they are and this cannot be changed any more than we are diseased if we do not have three hands or vision that allows us to see an arc of 300 degrees at one time. This is the way the Creator made us.

Most retarded people are more like us than they are different. My late son, Daniel H. Eisman lived his 28 years to the fullest, accomplishing more in those few years than some do in twice that number.

• *Prof. Michael M. Eisman*

Re: Mental Retardation (Ohrnet Beha'alotcha)

I just had the opportunity to read this weeks “Ask The Rabbi” supplement. I found it very well answered regarding a retarded child. I know families with children with “Down Syndrome” and they are some of the friendliest people you'll meet. We may only see the outside of them, retarded and having to deal with the situation. However, as you've said, there is something special within them. Call it a “Special Soul” or a special “inner sanctity” which they possess. Either way, I feel you gave the question a truly respectful answer the question deserved.

I have always enjoyed reading Ohr Somayach's “Ask The Rabbi” for about eight years now. Even before it was part of what is now called the “Ohrnet” magazine. When I get my copy, either from the Internet or in shul, this is usually the section I turn to first. The practical information — I would-

n't say halacha because this, of course, depends on the person's own Rav — and especially the way the questions are dealt with, is not only generally well done, but I'm sure you're aware of the Kiddush Hashem involved in this article.

I don't know how many people write in to “Ask The Rabbi” but I'm sure there are hundreds world-wide and many from non-Jews. I can appreciate the sensitivity it takes to answer some questions, being the only observant Jew in my family. The rest of my generation that is “married” did so by “marrying” out, so I know the fragility, or the intricacies, if you will, of dealing with these subjects.

We're all human, and, like a surgeon, can make mistakes. I've also disagreed with some of your answers and why you'd say what you said. All-in-all, though, I'm very happy with your work on this column and wish you much success. I find Ohrnet to be the best Shabbat weekly in English (and I've seen many).

*Sincerely,
D. F.*

Re: Litter, Recycling and Charity (Ohrnet Bamidbar)

Suggestion to Ohrnet readers living in Israel and in places where “disposable” bottles and cans can be cashed in for their deposits. Now that we have finally come full circle and deposits are being charged again on bottles and cans, there is an easy, painless way of giving charity. Collect the bottles and cans that litter-louts leave around, redeem the deposits, and send the money to your favorite charity. Everyone wins: the environment gets cleaner, your charity gets some much-needed money, and you get the mitzva!

Tizku lemitzvot, you do a wonderful job.

Rabbi Yehuda to explain their need for plugging the exit of the blood. Their response was that it was an honor for the *kohanim* to wade up to their knees in the blood of the sacrifices.

This approach runs into the problem of exactly when they walked in the blood. If they did so while wearing their sacred priestly garments they would have stained those garments and rendered them unfit for the sacrificial service as we earlier learned (18b). If they lifted their robes till over their knees this service would be disqualified since the Torah insisted that the *kohen's* garment must be "to his measurement" (*Vayikra* 6:3), not longer nor shorter.

These Sages solve the problem by limiting the wading of the *kohanim* in blood with raised robes to their carrying of wood to fuel the altar, a function which is not considered a sacred service requiring the precise wearing of priestly garments. When they were involved, however, in functions that did not require such wearing of garments they walked along a ledge raised above the level of the blood-filled floor.

• *Zevachim* 37a

WHO IS THE "BELOVED SERVANT"?

Which is a greater demonstration of affection towards a beloved one who sins and seeks atonement — to elaborate on the details of that atonement or to be less expressive about them?

The focus of this question is a *mashal* parable which the Academy of Rabbi Yishmael offered to explain the mysterious difference between two atonement sacrifices described in the

Torah. In regard to the sacrifice brought by the *Kohen Gadol*, the Torah explicitly commands that the animal's kidneys and the fat upon them be burned on the altar together with the other prescribed fats (*Vayikra* 4:9). This same requirement applies to the sacrifice brought by the community when a majority of its members have sinned because of a mistaken ruling by the Sanhedrin. In regard to this communal sacrifice, however, this requirement is not explicitly mentioned, and is revealed only through an equation that the Torah makes between the two sacrifices.

This may be compared, say these Sages, to a king who becomes upset with a beloved servant and because of his affection for him minimizes his guilt.

Who is the "beloved servant" — the *Kohen Gadol* or the community?

Rashi's position is that the beloved servant is the community, and G-d's affection for His people is expressed in being less explicit about all the requirements for atonement and thus minimizing the shame involved. Maharsha, however, finds this approach somewhat inconsistent with the *mashal* which the same Sages present right afterwards, which seems to make the guilt of the community greater than that of the *Kohen Gadol*. His reading of the above-mentioned *mashal* is that the beloved one is the *Kohen Gadol*, who is referred to (*Bamidbar* 16:5) as "the holy one whom He will bring close to Him". G-d's affection for the *Kohen Gadol* seeking atonement is expressed by showing how beloved his sacrifice is that so much of the animal is accepted upon the altar.

• *Zevachim* 41b

PEACE AND POLARIZATION

The term *chok*, which is the root of the word used as the title of this week's Torah portion, designates a statute which is incomprehensible to human logic. Its particular reference here is to the ritual of the red heifer for purifying a Jew from the spiritual contamination caused by contact with the dead. This ritual is especially difficult to understand because those contaminated ones upon whom the ashes of the red heifer are sprayed become purified while those involved in the spraying become contaminated.

Even King Solomon, the wisest of men, could not fathom how the same thing could have such opposite effects.

Observers of Israeli society see this same sort of polarization in regard to religion. The Holy Land undoubtedly nurtures holiness, as is evident in the quality of religious life in this country. But it also houses a sector which is vigorously opposed to

religion and the religious community.

This polarization was evident in the formation of the current government coalition following the emergence of an outspokenly anti-religious party as the third largest Knesset faction. It became even more pronounced in the legislation passed by the Knesset, and in the administrative decisions made by some ministers of this government.

But it reached its peak during the recent mayoral election in Jerusalem. There was only one issue in this election campaign: Can secular Israel tolerate a Torah-observant Jew as mayor of its capital?

As Israel desperately tries to achieve some form of peace with its Arab neighbors it would do well to first make peace within its own populace. Only then can we achieve true peace for Israel forever.

PARSHA INSIGHTS

Yaakov!" The "goodness of the tents of Yaakov" consisted of the fact their entrances did not face one another. If you're happy with what you've got — you don't need to look elsewhere.

You're not worried that, maybe, you're missing out.

Okay, I'm sorry, you'll have to excuse me, I have to go. My phone is ringing...

Sources:

- Rashi, as explained by Rabbi Matisyahu Solomon as heard from Rabbi C. Z. Senter

THE HEARTH OF HOLINESS

"How goodly are your tents, Yaakov!" (24:5)

A family I know has a housemaid who is a religious Christian. She had been working there a number of months, taking a close and respectful interest in the life-cycle of an Orthodox Jewish household. One day with concern she asked my friend's wife:

"Madam, I am worried about you. How will you ever go to Heaven? You never go to the synagogue!"

In this week's Parsha, Bilaam tried unsuccessfully to curse the Jewish People. After his last attempt, he suggested to Balak that Balak dispatch the Moabite women

to seduce the Jewish men, because the G-d of Israel is angered by immorality. The only time that the Torah speaks of G-d's *af* — "anger" — is in connection with sexual immorality.

The Moabites were so intent on the downfall of the Jewish People that they even sent the daughters of the highest aristocracy to carry out their plan.

Why did Bilaam recommend this specific course of action? There are many other evils that G-d despises, such as idol worship.

A Jew's holy sanctuary is his home. To be sure, the synagogue is an important place, a holy place. But it cannot compete with the centrality in Jewish life of the home. The home contains the holiest elements of Jewish life: The Shabbat table, the sacred closeness of husband and wife, the passing over of timeless values from parent to child, the Seder, the Succa...

Bilaam realized that the only way to destroy the Jewish People was to attack their very heart. Anything else would cause merely superficial damage.

And that heart is the hearth of holiness.

Sources:

- Talmud Bavli; Moreh Hanevuchim 1:36; Rabbi David Orlofsky

LOVE OF THE LAND - THE PEOPLE

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

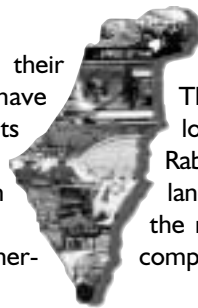
LOVERS OF THE LAND

Throughout the generations Jews realizing their dream of coming to Eretz Yisrael have expressed their love of the land by kissing its earth upon arrival. They have thus dramatically fulfilled the vision of King David who wrote in Tehillim (102:15):

"For your servants hold dear her stones and cher-

ish even her dust."

The Talmudic Sages were exceptional in expressing this love. Rabbi Abba kissed the rocks at the port of Acco. Rabbi Chiya bar Gamda literally rolled in the dust of the land. But Rabbi Chanina went a step further. He repaired the roads in his vicinity so that no one would be able to complain about even that facet of his beloved land.



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