

# OHRNET

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## PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

### The Day After Gaza

*“And this is how you will eat it...” (12:11)*

It seems to me that there is no natural solution to this current military clash in Israel’s war of self-defense. One side says they will not settle for a state unless it’s from the river to the sea. And Israel isn’t going to allow itself to be given a set of water wings and happily paddle out into the Med with Tel Aviv fading into the distance.

This is a war of the clash of ideals. From the messianic ideals of the *chalutzim*, the Jewish settlers on the so-called West Bank in Judea and Samaria, to the ideals of the Muslim Brotherhood and its scions, Hamas and Hezbollah, who believe in the coming of the final Caliph and the entire world subject to Sharia law.

As a believing Jew, it’s clear to me that the only solution to this situation will be the coming of the Mashiah, the Messiah, who we daily hope and wait for. And never in the last seventy years has it been easier to expect his imminent arrival.

*“And this is how you will eat it.”*

Hashem instructed the Jewish People to eat the Korban Pesach, the Pesach offering, with their ‘loins girded,’ the belts tightened, and ready to go out on the road to exile.

However, Moshe refused Pharaoh’s pleas for them to leave at night and they didn’t leave till the following morning, so why was it necessary to dress in this manner?

We are taught that the Jewish People were not worthy of a miraculous redemption. They were hovering above the lowest level of spiritual corruption in Egypt, but had they not been redeemed at that moment, they would have been consumed by Egypt’s contamination.

Their imminent demise was brought home to them by the manner in which they were to eat the offering, to remind them that they were only being redeemed by an extraordinary act of Hashem's mercy.

In Nusach Sefard, we say in the Kedusha of Mussaf on Shabbat Morning: "Behold, I have redeemed you at the end as at the beginning to be to you as a G-d."

Right now, do we, the Jewish People, deserve a miraculous rescue from the fury of our enemies? Nobody knows. But we can be sure that just like at the beginning in Egypt, when Hashem redeemed us when we were not worthy, He, in His infinite Mercy, will redeem us again. May it be speedily, in our days!

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## PARSHA OVERVIEW

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G-d tells Moshe that He is hardening Pharaoh's heart so that through miraculous plagues the world will know for all time that He is the one true G-d. Pharaoh is warned about the plague of locusts and is told how severe it will be. Pharaoh agrees to release only the men, but Moshe insists that everyone must go. During the plague, Pharaoh calls for Moshe and Aharon to remove the locusts, and he admits he has sinned.

G-d ends the plague but hardens Pharaoh's heart, and again Pharaoh fails to free the Jews. The country, except for the Jewish People, is then engulfed in a palpable darkness. Pharaoh calls for Moshe and tells him to take all the Jews out of Egypt, but to leave their flocks behind. Moshe tells him that not only will they take their own flocks, but Pharaoh must add his own too.

Moshe tells Pharaoh that G-d's going to bring one more plague, the death of the firstborn, and then the Jews will leave Egypt. G-d again hardens Pharaoh's heart, and Pharaoh warns Moshe that if he sees him again, Moshe will be put to death. G-d tells Moshe that the month of Nissan will be the chief month.

The Jewish People are commanded to take a sheep on the 10th of the month and guard it until the 14th. The sheep is then to be slaughtered as a Pesach offering, its blood put on their doorposts, and its roasted meat eaten. The blood on the doorpost will be a sign that their homes will be passed-over when G-d strikes the firstborn of Egypt. The Jewish People are told to memorialize this day as the Exodus from Egypt by never eating chametz on Pesach.

Moshe relays G-d's commands, and the Jewish People fulfill them flawlessly. G-d sends the final plague, killing the firstborn, and Pharaoh sends the Jews out of Egypt. G-d tells Moshe and Aharon the laws concerning the Pesach sacrifice, *pidyon haben* (redemption of the firstborn son) and *tefillin*.

• Pesachim 68a

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# Q & A

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## Questions

1. What was Pharaoh's excuse for not releasing the Jewish children?
2. How did the locusts in the time of Moshe differ from those in the days of Yoel?
3. How did the first three days of darkness differ from the last three?
4. When the Jews asked the Egyptians for gold and silver vessels, the Egyptians were unable to deny ownership of such vessels. Why?
5. *Makat bechorot* took place at *exactly* midnight. Why did Moshe say it would take place at *approximately* midnight.
6. Why did the first-born of the animals die?
7. How did Moshe show respect to Pharaoh when he warned him about the aftermath of the plague of the first-born?
8. G-d told Moshe "so that My wonders will be multiplied" (11:9). What three wonders was -G- d referring to?
9. Why did G-d command the mitzvah of Rosh Chodesh to Aharon, and not only to Moshe?
10. Up to what age is an animal fit to be a Pesach offering?
11. Prior to the Exodus from Egypt, what *mitzvot* involving blood did G-d give to the Jewish People?
12. Rashi gives two explanations of the word "*Pasachti* ." What are they?
13. Why were the Jews told to stay indoors during *makat bechorot*?
14. What was Pharaoh screaming as he ran from door to door the night of *makat bechorot* ?
15. Why did Pharaoh ask Moshe to bless him?
16. Why did the Jewish People carry their matzah on their shoulders rather than have their animals carry it?
17. Who comprised the *erev rav* (mixed multitude)?
18. What three historical events occurred on the 15th of Nissan, prior to the event of the Exodus from Egypt?
19. What is the source of the "milk and honey" found in *Eretz Yisrael* ?
20. The only non-kosher animal whose first-born is redeemed is the donkey. What did the donkeys do to "earn" this distinction?

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

## Answers

1. 10:11 - Since children don't bring sacrifices there was no need for them to go.
2. 10:14 - The plague brought by Moshe was composed of one species of locust, whereas the plague in the days of Yoel was composed of many species.
3. 10:22 - During the first three days the Egyptians couldn't see. During the last three days they couldn't move.
4. 10:22 - During the plague of darkness the Jews could see and they searched for and found the Egyptians' vessels.
5. 11:4 - If Moshe said the plague would begin exactly at midnight, the Egyptians might miscalculate and accuse Moshe of being a fake.
6. 11:5 - Because the Egyptians worshiped them as gods, and when G-d punishes a nation He also punishes its gods.
7. 11:8 - Moshe warned that "All these servants of yours will come down to me" when, in fact, it was Pharaoh himself who actually came running to Moshe.
8. 11:9 - The plague of the first-born, the splitting of the sea, the drowning of the Egyptian soldiers.
9. 12:1 - As reward for his efforts in bringing about the plagues.
10. 12:5 - One year.
11. 12:6 - Circumcision and *Korban Pesach*.
12. 12:13 - "I had mercy" and "I skipped."
13. 12:22 - Since it was a night of destruction, it was not safe for anyone to leave the protected premises of his home.
14. 12:31 - "Where does Moshe live? Where does Aharon live?"
15. 12:32 - So he wouldn't die, for he himself was a first-born.
16. 12:34 - Because the commandment of matzah was dear to them.
17. 12:38 - People from other nations who became converts.
18. 12:41 - The angels came to promise that Sarah would have a son, Yitzchak was born, and the exile of the "covenant between the parts" was decreed.
19. 13:5 - Goat milk, date and fig honey.
20. 13:13 - They helped the Jews by carrying silver and gold out of Egypt.

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# WHAT'S IN A WORD?

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## Synonyms in the Hebrew Language

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

### Filling Your Phylacteries

One of the first commandments that the Jews received is the mitzvah of wearing phylacteries, which is a sort of ritual garment meant to symbolize and commemorate the Jews' miraculous exodus from Egypt. Although those phylacteries are commonly known in Hebrew as *tefillin*, the word *tefillin* actually never appears in the Bible. Instead, the Biblical Hebrew word for *tefillin* is *totafot*, which appears three times in the Bible (Ex. 13:16, Deut. 6:8, 11:18) — all in reference to the phylacteries placed on one's head. But the Biblical Hebrew *totafot* is actually rendered by Targum Onkelos and Targum Jonathan as *tefillin*. This essay explores the underlying etymological bases of the words *tefillin* and *totafot* while attempting to gain an understanding of how those two synonyms do not quite connote the exact same thing.

Let's start with the word *totafot*. Even though (as mentioned above) some Targumim equate the word *totafot* with *tefillin*, there is another tradition among early translations of the Bible: Targum Neofiti and Peshitta render the word *totafot* into a Aramaic/Syriac equivalent of the Hebrew word *zikaron* ("remembrance"), which implies that they understood the core meaning of *totafot* to be related to the concept of "remembering" (an approach echoed by Ibn Ezra to Ex. 13:16). With this approach, it is unclear exactly what the etymological root of the word *totafot* might be, or even from what language it comes.

The Tosafists (*Tosafot* to *Menachot* 34b), on the other hand, look to Rabbinic Hebrew to find cognates of *totafot* and hone in on its exact meaning. In doing so, they offer two ways of understanding the primary meaning of the word: Firstly, they propose that *totafot* refers to a "head-ornament" or "frontlet" that covers the forehead. Indeed, the Mishna (*Shabbat* 6:1) uses the word *totefet* in reference to an article of jewelry worn by women.

Alternatively, the Tosafists relate the word *totafot* to the act of "gazing/seeing," as the head phylacteries are placed on the head near the eyes, as though they were also part of one's "eyes" that look outward. This explanation — which is also adopted by Chizkuni and Rabbi Yosef Bechor Shor (to Ex. 3:16) — alludes to a specific aspect of phylacteries in that they are highly-visible religious artifacts that all can see. To that effect, the Torah promises that "the nations of the world will see what the name of Hashem is called upon you, and they will fear from you" (Deut. 28:10), which the Talmud (*Brachot* 6a) explains as a reference to the gentiles "seeing" the Jews wearing phylacteries. In light of this, it makes sense that very word for phylacteries in the Bible might be related to "seeing."

We now turn to the more common and familiar word for phylacteries — *tefillin*. This word appears multiple times in the Mishna. Technically speaking, the word *tefillin* actually refers to a pair of phylacteries that includes those worn on the head and those worn on the arm. This is why it is in plural form. In the Mishna, the word for a single phylactery is *tefillah*. An inflection of *tefillin* also appears in the Mishna in the second-person possessive form as *tefillav*, meaning “his *tefillin*.”

The same passage from the Tosafists cited above that sought to explain the etymology and meaning of *totafot* also addresses the word *tefillin*. In that passage, the Tosafists explain that the word *tefillin* derives from the root PEH-LAMMED-LAMMED (“argumentation,” “proving”), and refers to the phylacteries’ role as a tangible testament to the Jewish People’s association with Hashem. Similarly, the *Rosh* (*Hilchos Tefillin* §2) and his son the *Tur* (*Orach Chaim* §25) explain that *tefillin* is an expression of *plilah* as it quells any argument about the specialness of the Jewish People because it serves as a physical sign of Hashem resting His presence upon them.

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## TALMUD TIPS

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by Rabbi Moshe Newman

### **Bava Kama 79-85**

#### **Honor Amongst Thieves**

*Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai answered his students: “Because he (the ganav) did not equate the honor of the ‘servant’ (the victim of the theft) to the honor of his Owner (Hashem), whereas the he (the gazlan) equated the honor of the servant to the honor of his Owner.”*

A *ganav* is one who steals in a way that he thinks he will not be caught by his fellow man, such as sneakily at night. A *gazlan* is one who steals openly and brazenly, such as snatching an item in broad daylight. They share the fact they are both thieves, although they steal in a different manner. The students of Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai asked their teacher why the Torah was stricter in regard to the payments the Torah associates with a *ganav*, more so than with a *gazlan*. Why does a *ganav* pay double if he is caught with the theft, and four or five times the value of the theft if he stole or slaughtered an ox or a sheep after stealing it, whereas a *gazlan* is not subject to these fines? Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai answered that the *ganav* is worse since he is more afraid of man than he is of Hashem, while the *gazlan* shows as little fear of man as he does of Hashem (Rashi). A verse cited by Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai elucidates this point: “For they said: ‘Hashem has forsaken the earth, and Hashem does not see.’” (Yechezkel 41:9)

A *ganav* steals in stealth since he is afraid of the punishment a human court might impose on him if he is caught. However, he shows no regard for the fact that Hashem is watching him and knows that he is transgressing by stealing, since he knows it is wrong but does it anyway. This type of person is denying Divine Providence, and is denying the reality of reward and punishment for observing the teachings of the Torah. In this way he is worse than a *gazlan* who steals openly, since the *gazlan* realizes that “Hashem has not forsaken the earth”, and is subject to punishment both by a human court and by a Heavenly court, yet chooses to transgress since he thinks he will benefit in this world from the theft *more* than the consequences he will face in the human and Heavenly courts. He is “bad”, but not as bad a *ganav*, since the way he acts does not indicate that he denies Divine judgment. (Maharsha)

▪ *Bava Kama 79b*

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## COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

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by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

### **BIRKAT HAMAZON (PART 9)**

#### **BLUEPRINT OF JEWISH DESTINY**

*“Anyone who recites Birkat HaMazon is blessed through it.”*  
(Zohar HaKadosh to Parshat Terumah)

The third Blessing reads: “Have mercy, Hashem our G-d, on Israel Your People; on Jerusalem, Your city; on Zion, the resting place of Your Glory; on the monarchy of the House of David, Your anointed; and on the great and holy House upon which Your Name is called. Hashem, our Father, tend us, nourish us, sustain us, support us, relieve us. Hashem, our God, grant us speedy relief from all our troubles. Please make us not needful, Hashem, our G-d, of the gifts of human hands, nor of their loans, but only of Your Hand that is full, open, holy, and generous, that we not feel inner shame nor be humiliated for ever and ever.”

The third blessing in Birkat HaMazon focuses on the rebuilding of Jerusalem. The Talmud relates (Berachot 48b) that King David composed the opening words of the blessing and King Shlomo added the words, “And on the great and holy House upon which Your name is called.” King David could not have made mention of the Holy Temple, as it had not yet been built. It was his son, King Shlomo, who merited to build the First Temple. Hence, it was King Shlomo who included the extra piece mentioning the “great and holy House.”

The Tur writes that with the destruction of the First Temple, parts of the blessing were reworded to reflect the new and dismal Temple-less reality and our yearning for its restoration.

The Maharal explains that the next part of the blessing, beginning with the words, “Hashem, our Father,” has no direct connection to the subject matter. It is included in the blessing because this blessing is the last of the three blessings of Birkat HaMazon mandated by the Torah, and it is an opportunity to beseech Hashem once more that He bless us, not just with all that we need, but with so much more. This explains why we refer to Hashem as “Hashem, our Father,” because, as our father, Hashem has brought us into the world and given us life. And, as Hashem, He is the only One who can possibly give us all that we want. Our blessing is coming to reinforce to us the point that we must never forget who our Benefactor is.

Often, when reciting this part of Birkat HaMazon, I am reminded of an enormously successful property developer I met many years ago. Someone who counted his wealth in many hundreds of millions of dollars. What was inspiring was the way he gave away vast sums of tzedakah with such a sense of excitement because he was able to bring so much joy to His Father in Heaven and to those in need. And, yet, just as inspiring, was that he told me, with absolute sincerity, that he really wasn't such a savvy businessman. Instead, he attributed all of his success to Hashem. In his words, “Hashem just keeps putting me in the right place at the right time.”

Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch, in his epic work called Horeb, writes that it is not how much or how little one has that makes a person great or small, but it is how much or how little they do with what they have. And, like the successful property magnate, the first thing that a person needs to recognize is that their success lies solely in the Hands of Hashem.

Interestingly enough, there are actually several definitions of poverty. Abaye teaches (Tractate Nedarim 41a), “There is no one destitute except for one who lacks understanding.”

The Bnei Yissachar, Rabbi Zvi Elimelech Spira of Dinov (1783-1841), writes that if the greatest poverty is a lack of wisdom, then the greatest form of tzedakah is the sharing of wisdom. In fact, so great is the sharing of one's wisdom with others that Rabbi David Shlomo Eibschitz, in his classic work Arvei Nachal, writes that there are two forms of tzedakah. The first is to give money to the poor. The second is to give wisdom to the ignorant. And, as Rabbi Eibschitz writes, guiding people and teaching them to repent is an even greater level of tzedakah than giving money to the needy.

*To be continued...*

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POB 18103, Jerusalem 91180, Israel · Tel +972-2-581-0315 · Email. [info@ohr.edu](mailto:info@ohr.edu)

Contributing authors, editors and production team: Rabbi Nota Schiller – Rosh HaYeshiva, Rabbi Yitzchak Breitowitz - Rav of Kehillos Ohr Somayach, Avi Kaufman, Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein, Rabbi Reuven Lauffer, Rabbi Yaakov Meyers, Mrs. Rosalie Moriah, Rabbi Moshe Newman, Rabbi Shlomo Simon, Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair, Rabbi Yehuda Spitz, Mrs. Helena Stern.

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# TAAMEI HAMITZVOS

## Reasons behind the Mitzvos

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by Rabbi Shmuel Kraines

*“Study improves the quality of the act and completes it, and a mitzvah is more beautiful when it emerges from someone who understands its significance.” (Meiri, Bava Kama 17a)*

### SANCTIFICATION AND REDEMPTION OF FIRSTBORNS

*(Mitzvos #18, #22, #23, and #392 in Sefer HaChinuch)*

*Sanctify for Me every firstborn that opens the womb, amongst the Jewish people, both that of man and that of animal — it is Mine (Shemos 13:2). Every firstborn donkey you must redeem with a sheep; if you do not redeem it, you must kill it by striking it behind its neck. And when your son asks you tomorrow, “What is this?” you shall tell him, “With a mighty hand, Hashem took us out of Egypt, from the house of slaves. Pharaoh refused to set us free, so Hashem smote all the firstborns in the Land of Egypt, from the firstborns of humans to the firstborns of animals. I therefore sacrifice to Hashem all the male [pure animals] that open the womb, and all the firstborn of my sons I shall redeem” (v. 13-15).*

#### THE MITZVAH

Immediately upon the Jewish people’s departure from Egypt, Hashem commanded them to sanctify both human and animal firstborns. Firstborn sons must be redeemed by giving five (Biblical) *shekalim* to a Kohen. Firstborn kosher domestic animals are offered in the *Beis Hamikdash* and eaten by their owners in sanctity. With regard to impure (non-kosher) animals, this mitzvah applies only to the donkey. A person may not make use of the firstborn donkey as long as it is sanctified. He must either redeem it by giving a sheep to a Kohen in its place, or kill it by striking it behind its neck with a *kofitz* (a type of cleaver), in which case the carcass retains its sanctity and must be buried. Kohanim and Leviim are exempt from this mitzvah.

#### THE SANCTIFICATION OF FIRSTBORNS

The sanctification of firstborns is one of the essential themes of the Exodus. Hashem told Pharaoh that if he refused to allow the Jewish people, whom He called His firstborn, to go free and serve Him, He would take the lives of the Egyptian firstborns instead. Pharaoh refused, and Hashem did as He had promised. At the time that He struck the firstborn humans and animals throughout Egypt, the firstborns of the Jewish people and their animals were in danger of being smitten as well, but Hashem spared them. As a result, the firstborns of the Jewish people became sanctified for Hashem’s service, but that sanctity was lost when the Jewish people sinned with the Golden Calf, and it went instead to the tribe of Levi, who were not involved in that sin



(*Bamidbar* 3:13). We may suggest that firstborns continue to be born with this sanctity, which now belongs to the tribe of Levi, and that is why we must redeem them by giving a Kohen something in exchange.

*Sefer HaChinuch* (#18) explains that Hashem wants us to remember that all that we accomplish

— even after much toil and expense — only reaches fruition because of His assistance and blessings. Therefore, when a person produces his first son, and when his animal produces its first offspring, it is sanctified to Him, and a person takes to heart that everything ultimately belongs to Hashem. In addition, by redeeming our firstborns, we remind ourselves and demonstrate to our children that Hashem freed us from Egypt to serve Him because we are His firstborn.

### **ADDITIONAL REASONS: THE FIRSTBORN SON**

Hashem proclaimed, “You sold Yosef, Rachel’s firstborn, for a profit of five *shekalim*; you must therefore each redeem your firstborns with five *shekalim*” (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 4:10). In addition, when the firstborn of the Jewish people lost their sanctity, its void became occupied with impurity, and the redemption of the firstborn rectifies this (*Avnei Nezer*, cited in *Shem MiShmuel*, *Vayakhel* 5679). [This would explain why the mitzvah does not apply to Kohanim and Leviim, who did not partake in the sin of the Golden Calf.]

### **THE FIRSTBORN DONKEY**

On a simple level of understanding, some suggest that this mitzvah applies only to donkeys and not to other impure animals because at the time of the Exodus, donkeys were the only impure animals in the Jewish people’s possession (*Hagadas Maasei Hashem*). On a deeper level of understanding, the Torah wants to remember how we each emerged from slavery in Egypt with many donkeys laden with jewelry, garments, and other goods (*Rashi*). The Sages expound that we commemorate the Exodus by redeeming the firstborn donkey upon a sheep because the Egyptians are compared to donkeys, and the Jewish people are compared to sheep, [and the Jewish people attained sanctity through the smiting of the Egyptian firstborn] (*Bereishis Rabbah* 96:7). One who fails to remove the sanctity from the donkey must instead strike it behind its neck, on the place called the *oreph*. According to esoteric sources, this is because Pharaoh’s hold over the Jewish people in the spiritual plane is associated with this part of the body. Thus, the word “Pharaoh” is comprised of the same letters as the word *oreph* (*Ohel Moshe*, *Bechoros*, *Bei’urim*, 1:71).