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PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

THE “NEW ISRAEL”

"And he made the breast-plate as a craftsman, like he made the ephod – from gold, turquoise, purple and crimson wool..."
(39:8)

At the beginning of the Scroll of Esther, Achashverosh throws a party to end all parties. The party of the millennium. He was celebrating his unassailable grip on the throne of the Persian Empire. At this party, he brought out the vessels of the Holy Temple, which the Babylonians had plundered and caroused with. More than this: Achashverosh's party attire consisted of the vestments of the High Priest. Why did he do this? Was it some elaborate spoof? Was he poking fun at the Jewish People and their prophecies of the demise of his all-mighty kingdom? Or was there something more sinister behind this charade?

"And the land was formless and empty and darkness on the face of the deep."(Genesis 1:2)

These words form part of the opening words of the Torah. They hint to four mighty empires who will subjugate the Jewish People. The first, Babylon, will snatch the crown of Empire from the Jewish People, and then the Persian, Greece and Roman empires will successively snatch world domination one from the other. Eventually, the last of those empires, Rome and its cultural heirs, will return the kingship to the Jewish People. When that happens, *"The lost ones will come from the land of Ashur..."* (Isaiah 27:13) and the final exile will end. The name Ashur is related to the Hebrew word *"ishur."* An *ishur* is a certification. Each nation who takes the kingship from the Jewish People seeks to "certify" itself as being the true and final recipient of the crown of the world. But they can only do this by proclaiming themselves the true heirs. They claim to be the "New Israel." They claim that the testament of faith of the Jewish People is old; that they have a new one. That, in essence, was what Achashverosh was attempting to do at his millennial party. He was certifying himself as the New Israel. His party was a grotesque replication of the Temple service. The vessels of the Temple were there and being used. He was dressed as the *Kohen Gadol*, the High Priest. He even went so far as to name his ministers after the offerings of the Holy Temple. He was trying to utilize those forces of holiness for his own means, to set his seal on world domination using the higher spiritual forces. This was no charade.

And we all know how his plan backfired and all turned upside-down, with the Jewish People surviving and thriving, as is beautifully recorded in the Scroll of Esther. May we always merit the same help from Heaven, especially in light of the current security situation in Israel and across the globe.

TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Bava Metzia 9-15

Quitting Without Losing

A day laborer may quit his job even in the middle of the day. The worker may do so, according to Jewish law, without suffering any loss in the wages due him for the hours in which he worked. This is the rule unless such a work stoppage causes damage to his employer due to his indispensability in that particular situation.

This freedom to quit is based on the Divine warning that members of the Jewish nation are “My servants” – and not the “servants of servants.” To compel a worker to continue working against his will is akin to bondage.

Nowadays, there is a fascinating application of this concept in an employee’s contractual commitment. This aversion to bondage finds expression in halacha (Shulchan Aruch, Choshen Mishpat 373:3), prohibiting a Jew to enter into an agreement to work for someone for more than three years. At that point, he changes his status from employee to something approaching bondage. (Of course, as with any practical case involving Jewish law, an expert in halacha should be consulted for a ruling for the exact circumstances of the particular situation in question.)

▪ *Bava Metzia 10a*

Helping or Harming?

Rav Nachman and Rav Chisda both said, “When one seizes money from a debtor on behalf of a particular creditor, his collection is not valid since it is detrimental to the other creditors.”

▪ *Bava Metzia 10a*

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halachic authority for ruling.

Q & A

Questions

1. On which day did Moshe assemble the Jewish People?
2. Why is the prohibition against doing work on Shabbat written prior to the instruction for building the Mishkan?
3. Why does the Torah specify the particular prohibition of lighting a fire on Shabbat right after it had already noted the general prohibition of doing work on Shabbat?
4. What function did the "yitdot hamishkan" serve?
5. What function did the "bigdei hasrad" serve?
6. What was unusual about the way the women spun the goat's hair?
7. Why were the *Nesi'im* last to contribute to the building of the Mishkan? How does the Torah show dissatisfaction with their actions?
8. Who does the Torah identify as the primary builders of the Mishkan? From which tribes were they?
9. What time of day did the people bring their daily contributions for the construction of the Mishkan?
10. For what was the woven goat's hair used?
11. What image was woven into the *parochet*?
12. Why does the Torah attribute the building of the *aron* to Bezalel?
13. Where were the sculptured *chenuvim* located?
14. How many lamps did the *menorah* have?
15. Of what materials was the *mizbe'ach haketoret* composed?
16. Of what material was the *mizbe'ach ha'olah* composed?
17. The *kiyor* was made from copper mirrors. What function did these mirrors serve in Egypt?
18. How did the *kiyor* promote peace?
19. The *kiyor* was made from the mirrors of the women who were crowding at the entrance to the *Ohel Mo'ed*. Why were the women crowding there?
20. Of what material were the "yitdot hamishkan" constructed?

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

Answers

1. 35:1 - The day after *Yom Kippur*.
2. 35:2 - To emphasize that the building of the Mishkan doesn't supersede the laws of Shabbat.
3. 35:3 - There are two opinions: One opinion is to teach that igniting a fire on Shabbat is punishable by lashes as opposed to other "*melachot*" which are punishable by death. The other opinion is to teach that violation of numerous "*melachot*" at one time requires a separate atonement for each violation.
4. 35:18 - The edges of the curtains were fastened to them. These were inserted in the ground so the curtains would not move in the wind.
5. 35:19 - They covered the *aron*, the *shulchan*, the *menorah*, and the *mizbachot* when they were packed for transport.
6. 35:26 - It was spun directly from off the backs of the goats.
7. 35:27 - The *Nesi'im* reasoned that they would first let the people contribute materials needed for the Mishkan and then they would contribute what was lacking. The Torah shows its dissatisfaction by deleting a letter from their title.
8. 35:30, 35:34 - Bezalel ben Uri from the tribe of Yehuda; Oholiav ben Achisamach from the tribe of Dan.
9. 36:3 - Morning.
10. 36:14 - It was made into curtains to be draped over the Mishkan.
11. 36:35 - *Cherubim*. (See Rashi 26:31)
12. 37:1 - Because he dedicated himself to its building more than anyone else.
13. 37:7 - On the two extremities of the *kaporet* (cover of the *aron*).
14. 37:23 - Seven.
15. 37:25,26 - Wood overlaid with gold.
16. 38:1-2 - Wood overlaid with copper.
17. 38:8 - These mirrors aided in the proliferation of the Jewish People. The Jewish women in Egypt would look in the mirrors so as to awaken the affections of their husbands who were exhausted by their slave labor.
18. 38:8 - Its waters helped a woman accused of adultery to prove her innocence.
19. 38:8 - To donate to the Mishkan.
20. 38:20 - Copper.

COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

BIRKAT HAMAZON (PART 16)

BLUEPRINT OF JEWISH DESTINY

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

The requests continue: “The Compassionate One, may He break the yoke of oppression from our necks and bring us upright to our land.”

What is the “yoke of oppression”? A yoke is very heavy and uncomfortable. It is placed on the neck of an ox and it is the system that controls the ox so that it can prepare the fields for planting. At a later date, the ox is then harnessed again to harvest the crops. Without a doubt, if the ox could speak, it would protest vociferously against the yoke. It is cumbersome and burdensome and not something that an ox would willingly choose to bear. But, one thing is absolutely certain: without a yoke, an ox cannot be productive.

However counterintuitive it may sound, the “yoke of oppression” is actually something that allows us, Hashem’s chosen nation, to remain focused on doing Hashem’s Will. Throughout Jewish history, whenever we lose our focus to serve Hashem sincerely and wholeheartedly, a foreign power arises and “sits on our necks,” serving as a reminder of our obligation to act as Hashem’s ambassadors in this world.

When we ask Hashem to “break the yoke of oppression,” we are recalling that the yoke will be removed only when we are finally doing what Hashem demands from us. Because once the “yoke of oppression” is broken, it will never be replaced. The verse in Vayikra (26:13) states, “I broke the staves of your yoke.” Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Ullmann (1863-1931), the Rabbi of Bistritz, Romania, explains that often at the end of the season, a farmer will break the staves of the yoke. But he will only ever break the yoke itself when there is no longer any need for it.

So too is it regarding Hashem. Due to our own actions, Hashem sends us into exile and then redeems us when we have learned the lesson of the exile. But, as we lose focus again, He then sends us into exile again, and the cycle repeats itself over and over. And here we are, anticipating the final redemption. Anxiously awaiting that precious moment when Hashem will break the “yoke of oppression” once and for all. This does not mean that we will be left “yoke-less”. Rather, it is only by enthusiastically accepting the yoke of the Majesty of Hashem and His Torah that the “yoke of oppression” will be permanently removed.

Rabbi Shalom Noach Berezovsky (1911-2000), the Rebbe of Slonim (more commonly referred to as the Netivot Shalom, the name of the series of brilliant Torah thoughts), once asked some of his Chassidim, “At which moment does Kabbalat HaTorah [the Receiving of the Torah] take place for us in our generation?” One Chassid replied, “On Shavuot morning, as the dawn breaks.” Another Chassid suggested that it occurs when the Ten Commandments are read during Torah reading. A third Chassid proposed yet a different moment. And the Rebbe replied, “Kabbalat HaTorah happens when a person accepts the yoke of Torah!”

Tellingly, we do not just ask for the “yoke of oppression” to be broken. We also ask for Hashem to bring us “upright to our land.” This requires explanation, because our Sages teach (Kiddushin 31a) that it is forbidden for a person to walk “bekomah zekufah - with an upright posture,” as it displays arrogance. However, as the final redemption unfolds - may it be very, very soon - we will be brought to the holy Land of Israel by Hashem’s emissaries in a state of exaltation and purity. We will be ready to do His Will and to serve Him with all our might. At that time, walking with an upright posture will not be a sign of arrogance. Rather, it will be an expression of the dignity and the reverence that we feel, knowing that we have been chosen by Hashem to serve Him.

To be continued...

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Moshe Rabbeinu exhorts the *Bnei Yisrael* to keep Shabbat, and requests donations for the materials for making the Mishkan. He collects gold, silver, precious stones, skins and yarn, as well as incense and olive oil for the Menorah and for anointing. The princes of each tribe bring the precious stones for the *Kohen Gadol's* breastplate and *ephod*. G-d appoints Betzalel and Oholiav as the master craftsmen. *Bnei Yisrael* contribute so many resources, such that Moshe begins to refuse donations. Special curtains with two different covers were designed for the Mishkan's roof and door. Gold-covered boards in silver bases were connected, forming the Mishkan's walls. Betzalel made the Holy Ark (which contained the Tablets) from wood covered with gold. On the Ark's cover there were two figures facing each other. The Menorah and the table with the showbreads were also of gold. Two Altars were made: a small incense Altar of wood, overlaid with gold, and a larger Altar for sacrifices, made of wood covered with copper.

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

Synonyms in the Hebrew Language

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

Vayakhel: Myrrh & Myrtle (Part 2/2)

Part I of this essay already discussed the name Mordechai and the other names by which the historical Mordechai was called, so this installment focuses on the names Esther and Hadassah.

After Achashverosh gets rid of his wife Vashti and begins the search for a new queen, the Scroll of Esther introduces the heroine of the Purim Story by stating that that a Jewish man named Mordechai lived in Shushan, and "he raised Hadassah – she is Esther, his cousin – because she did not have a father or mother" (Est. 2:7). This verse contains the only reference to the name *Hadassah*, as throughout the rest of the story, the heroine is always called *Esther*. Ralbag (to Est. 2:7) clearly states that the heroine of the story had two names *Esther* and *Hadassah*, but does not expand on the relationship between these two names and what they mean.

The Talmud (*Megillah* 13a) was already bothered by her dual names, and presented several different opinions as to how to understand the interplay between them. The first approach is that of the Tannaitic sage Rabbi Meir, who maintained that her actual name was Esther, but that she was called Hadassah because righteous people are likened to a *hadas* ("myrtle"). Rabbi Meir adduces this notion from a passage in which the prophet Zecharia describes Hashem's *Shechinah* ("Holy Presence") being exiled to Babylon alongside righteous men from Jerusalem by saying "...and He stands amongst the myrtles [*hadasim*]" (Zech. 1:8). The *Chachmei Tzarfat* commentary (to Est. 2:7) also seems to follow this approach, commenting on the word Hadassah "that was what they called her," and commenting on the word Esther "that was her name."

Interestingly, the Talmud (*Megillah* 10b) also relates that the Amoraic sage Rabbi Shmuel bar Nachamani began his exegetical excursions into the Scroll of Esther by citing the verse "instead of the thornbush will arise a myrtle-tree" (Isa. 55:13) as an allusion to Esther (the myrtle) replacing the position once held by Vashti (the thornbush). *Targum Sheini* (to Est. 2:7) also explains that her "Hebrew name" was Hadassah because just as a myrtle contributes a good fragrance to the world, so did Esther's good deeds contribute to the world, and because righteous people are compared to a myrtle.

The Talmud (*Megillah* 13a) then cites the Tannaitic sage Rabbi Yehuda as explaining that the opposite is true: her real name was Hadassah, but she was called Esther because she “hid” (*nistar*) her origins from Achashverosh by refusing to reveal from which nation she came (Est. 2:20). Rabbi Avigdor Katz (a late 12th century sage) adds that the name Esther also refers to Mordechai “hiding” (*nistar*) his cousin when Achashverosh was looking for a bride queen.

The connection between the name Esther and “hiding” is also found in another passage in the Talmud (*Chullin* 139b), which famously asks “Where do we find the name Esther in the Torah?” and answers by citing the verse in which Hashem warns “I shall surely hide Myself (*haster astir*)” from the Jewish People should they indulge in sin (Deut. 31:18).

To understand how her two names work together, Rabbi Tanchum HaYerushalmi (13th century Hebrew lexicographer) writes that Esther’s original birthname was Hadassah, which clearly has a Hebrew ring to it. However, when later she became well-known in royal circles, they started calling her Esther. Rabbi Yitzchak Arama (1420–1494) similarly writes that her original name was Hadassah, but when she became the Persian queen, she was given a Persian name and became Esther.

Going in a slightly different direction, Rabbi Shlomo Alkabetz (1500–1576) in *Manot HaLevi* (to Est. 2:7) and Rabbi Eliezer Ashkenazi (1512–1585) in *Yosef Lekach* (to Est. 2:7) wrote that her original name was Hadassah, but later on when Mordechai wanted her to conceal her identity and not reveal that she was Jewish, she assumed the name Esther, as the Hebrew word *hadas* (“myrtle”) in Aramaic is *assa*, which is close enough to Esther (see also Ibn Ezra to Est. 2:7).

*To read the full version of this article which offers more explanations behind the name Hadassah and other tidbits related to Esther, visit us online at: http://ohr.edu/this_week/whats_in_a_word/

TAAMEI HAMITZVOS

Reasons behind the Mitzvos

“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)

THE HALF-SHEKEL (Part 2 of 2)

Mitzvah #105 in Sefer HaChinuch

Numerous reasons have been offered as to why we specifically give half a shekel, and not a full shekel:

1. **A MIDDAY SIN:** The Jewish people assumed that Moshe would come down in the morning, and when the last hour of the morning arrived, they sinned and made an idol to take his place. Since they sinned halfway through the day, they were commanded to give half a shekel, and because they contravened the Ten Commandments [whose primary element is the monotheistic belief in Hashem], they would have to give a coin that weighs ten *gerah* (*Yerushalmi Shekalim* 2:3). On deeper level of understanding, we may explain that had the Jewish people waited until the beginning of the next day, they would have been fully Divine, and since they sinned halfway through the day, they retained only part of that Divinity. The contribution of a part shekel makes up for the deficient part.
2. **REUNITING WITH HASHEM:** At Sinai, we became united with Hashem in a Divine marriage, and that unity was compromised through the idolatrous sin of the Golden Calf. By means of the atonement achieved through the giving of the half-shekel, we restore our union with Hashem. Thus, we specifically give half, to symbolize the rededication of our half of the relationship.

3. **BODY AND SOUL:** A person is comprised of ten physical components given by his parents and ten spiritual components given by Hashem (*Niddah* 31a). Only the spiritual half of a person becomes sullied by sin and requires atonement. We therefore give half a shekel that weights ten *gerah*, corresponding to the spiritual half that is comprised of ten components (*Kli Yakar*). *Shekel* has the same numerical value as *nefesh*, soul (*Chidah*).
4. **HALF OF THE NATION:** The women of the Jewish people refused to participate in the sin of Golden Calf, nor was it in their power to prevent their husbands from participating. Since only the men required atonement, half of a shekel sufficed (*Alshich*).
5. **PART OF A WHOLE:** This mitzvah gives expression to the unity of the Jewish people. The Jewish people are counted as a whole by each individual giving half of a shekel, to symbolize that each Jew is incomplete and needs his fellow Jew to attain completion (*Rav Shlomo Alkabetz*, cited in *Alshich*). In order to give full expression to the idea that all Jews are essentially equal, the Torah specifies that the wealthy man may not give more and the poor man may not give less. This explanation is better understood in light of another view amongst the Sages that half-shekel atones for the sale of Yosef, and that for this reason, the half-shekel is precisely the same as the amount of profit that each brother received from the sale (*Yerushalmi* *ibid.*). Since the disunity amongst the forerunners of our nation resulted in the sale of Yosef, we merit atonement for this sin by uniting through the giving of a half-shekel.