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PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

A Holy Kick-Back?

“It shall be yours and your sons...” (18:9)

One of Judaism’s great gifts to the world is the concept that the physical is not the sworn enemy of the spiritual. The physical is capable of elevation, and like a donkey that transports its rider, so too does the physical ‘transport’ the spiritual to its ultimate destination.

Indeed, that word in Hebrew for a donkey is *chamor*, which has the root meaning of physicality.

“...It shall be yours and your sons”

The kohanim, the priests, receive part of the holiest offerings in the Temple. There is no contradiction between their physical eating and the elevation that offering brings spiritually.

This is a seemingly difficult concept. The idea that “the kohen eats parts of the sin-offering and the supplicant receives atonement” might look like a ‘kick-back.’ And, it is for this reason that the only offering a Gentile was allowed to bring in the Holy Temple was a *korban olah*, an ‘elevation’ offering. An Olah goes ‘up in smoke,’ meaning that the kohen receives nothing from it. This sits well with the mindset of the general world-view.

Even though we know longer have a Holy Temple, and the kohanim are, at least regarding sacrificial offerings, temporarily out of a job, we still have the holy Shabbat. It is a day of physical pleasure which, nevertheless, brings holiness into time itself..

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Q & A

Questions –

1. Why did Datan and Aviram join Korach?
2. Why is Yaakov's name not mentioned in Korach's genealogy?
3. What motivated Korach to rebel?
4. What did Korach and company do when Moshe said that a *techelet* garment needs *tzizit*?
5. What warning did Moshe give the rebels regarding the offering of the incense?
6. Did Moshe want to be the *kohen gadol*?
7. What event did Korach not foresee?
8. What does the phrase *rav lachem* mean in this week's Parsha? (Give two answers.)
9. What lands are described in this week's Parsha as "flowing with milk and honey"?
10. When did Moshe have the right to take a donkey from the Jewish community?
11. What did Korach do the night before the final confrontation?
12. What sin did Datan and Aviram have in common specifically with Goliath?
13. Before what age is a person not punished by the Heavenly Court for his sins?
14. What happens to one who rebels against the institution of *kehuna*? Who suffered such a fate?
15. Why *specifically* was incense used to stop the plague?
16. Why was Aharon's staff placed in the middle of the other 11 staffs?
17. Aharon's staff was kept as a sign. What did it signify?
18. Why are the 24 gifts for the *kohanim* taught in this week's Parsha?
19. Who may eat the *kodshei kodashim* (most holy sacrifices) and where must they be eaten?
20. Why is G-d's covenant with the *kohanim* called "a covenant of salt"?

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

Answers

1. 16:1 - Because they were his neighbors.
2. 16:1 - Yaakov prayed that his name not be mentioned in connection with Korach's rebellion (*Bereishet* 49:6).
3. 16:1 - Korach was jealous that Elizafan ben Uziel was appointed as leader of the family of Kehat instead of himself.
4. 16:1 - They laughed.
5. 16:6 - Only one person would survive.
6. 16:6 - Yes.
7. 16:7 - That his sons would repent.
8. 16:7,3 - *Rav lachem* appears twice in this week's Parsha. It means "much more than enough greatness have you taken for yourself (16:3)" and "It is a great thing I have said to you (16:17)."
9. 16:12 - Egypt and Canaan.
10. 16:15 - When he traveled from Midian to Egypt.
11. 16:19 - Korach went from tribe to tribe in order to rally support for himself.
12. 16:27 - They all blasphemed.
13. 16:27 - Twenty years old.
14. 17:5 - He is stricken with *tzara'at*, as was King Uziyahu (*Divrei HaYamim* II 26:16-19).
15. 17:13 - Because the people were deprecating the incense offering, saying that it caused the death of two of Aharon's sons and also the death of 250 of Korach's followers. Therefore G-d demonstrated that the incense offering was able to avert death, and it is sin, not incense, which causes death.
16. 17:21 - So people would not say that Aharon's staff bloomed because Moshe placed it closer to the *Shechina*.
17. 17:25 - That only Aharon and his children were selected for the *kehuna*.
18. 18:8 - Since Korach claimed the *kehuna*, the Torah emphasizes Aharon's and his descendants' rights to *kehuna* by recording the gifts given to them.
19. 18:10 - Male *kohanim* may eat them and only in the *azara* (forecourt of the *Beit Hamikdash*).
20. 18:19 - Just as salt never spoils, so this covenant will never be rescinded.

TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Bava Metzia 117 – Bava Batra 3

One Floor, Two Floors

Rabbi Yehuda says, “The owner of the attic (the second floor of the building) rebuilds both the first floor and the attic, and lives there until the owner of the first floor pays him for his expenses.”

The *Mishna* teaches about a building with two floors and two owners living there, one owner on each floor. The building falls down and the owner of the attic wants his upper floor dwelling area rebuilt, but the owner of the first floor refuses to rebuild the first floor or agree to pay for its rebuilding. What should the owner of the attic do?

The first opinion in the *mishna* is that he builds one floor, and lives there until the owner of the bottom floor pays his expenses. Rabbi Yehuda, however, argues that this is problematic since the owner of the attic would need to pay rent for living in the bottom floor once the owner of the bottom floor pays his debt. Therefore, Rabbi Yehuda teaches that the owner of the attic should rebuild both floors and live in the building until the owner of the bottom floor pays his debt. (Since, according to Rabbi Yehuda, the attic is ready for living in, the attic owner is not considered as having benefit from living in the building. Therefore, he would not need to pay rent later, and there is no issue of the rent appearing as a *ribit* (interest) payment. If the attic owner had built only the bottom floor and lived there, he would need to pay rent to the owner of the bottom floor later, and this is the *ribit* problem that Rabbi Yehuda avoids with his solution in the *mishna*.)

The Nimukei Yosef asks a seemingly basic question on our *mishna*. Why does the attic owner need to pay for rebuilding the dwelling, instead of Beit Din forcing the bottom floor owner to rebuild his part of the building, or pay for building it? He has an obligation to the attic owner, according to the terms of their arrangement, to provide a first floor of the building in order to allow for the existence of the attic owner’s second floor. This question is also asked in the Talmud Yerushalmi.

The answer given in the Yerushalmi is that the owner of the bottom floor has gone far away and is not present to collect from. And even if he has assets here that Beit Din could take for the rebuilding, they do not do so. This is in accordance with the ruling in the case of a run-away borrower, in which case Beit Din does not collect from his property without his being present. (see Ketuvot 88a) This is also the approach of the Ramban to answer the Nimukei Yosef’s question.

The Rashba, however, states that the halacha is that in the case of a borrower who has gone without paying his loan, the Beit Din may in fact seize his assets without him present, as is the ruling of Rav Nachman in Masechet Ketuvot. This is due to a Rabbinical decree that allows collection for the lender, even in the absence of the borrower, so that people won’t borrow and run away, thinking that their assets are safe. Now, since Beit Din may in fact collect from the bottom floor’s owner’s assets if he is

not present, why don't they do so instead of requiring the attic's owner to rebuild the structure and hope he gets repaid one day by the owner of the bottom floor?

The Rashba answers that the owner of the bottom floor never really had a "personal obligation" (*shibud haguf*) to provide a bottom floor for the attic owner to dwell on. Rather, only his bottom floor structure was "obligated" (*shibud habayit*) to serve the attic owner. But if it fell, its owner has no obligation to replace it. This is why the *mishna* teaches that the attic owner would need to rebuild it himself if he wants to live there. (See Tosefot Yom Tov who discusses the issues in this *mishna* at length, and also offers his own fascinating explanation to resolve why the Ramban says that Beit Din cannot collect from the bottom floor owner's assets in his absence, despite the halacha being that Beit Din can indeed collect from an absent borrower's assets. He suggests that the case of a loan is different from the case in our *mishna*. For a *loan*, by allowing collection from borrowers' assets even in their absence, lenders will be more assured of being able to collect loans, and will not refrain from fulfilling the mitzvah of lending and helping the needy.)

Bava Metzia 117 a

TAAMEI HAMITZVOS

Reasons behind the Mitzvos

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)

Terumah, Maaser, and Challah

Mitzvos #385, #395, and #507 (*Bamidbar* 15:17-21; 18:24; *Devarim* 18:4)

HOLY TITHES

We are commanded to give a portion of our produce to a Kohen, called *terumah*, a portion to a Levi, called *maaser*, and a portion of every dough mixture to a Kohen, called *challah*. We give these tithes to support the Kohanim and Leviim, Hashem's servants, who engage in the service of the *Beis HaMikdash* and the teaching of His Torah. Supporting them is not so much a matter of charity, but rather a means of enabling them to focus on their service on our behalf. Through the tithes, even the simplest farmer becomes a part of the service in *Beis HaMikdash* and the spreading of the Torah. By the farmer refraining from taking from the produce for himself until it has been tithed, he remembers that he is Hashem's servant and whatever he has been granted is only to enable him to serve Hashem better. Incidentally, the Sages enacted monetary tithes (*maaser kesafim*) in parallel to the tithes of produce. Accordingly, these days when there is no *Beis HaMikdash*, a person should ideally give his *maaser kesafim* for the support of Torah study (*Ahavas Chesed* ch. 18, based on *Tanchuma* §18).

LIVING WITH HASHEM

A farmer gives *terumah* from all his grain produce while it is still in the granary and gives it to a Kohen, and then, once he makes dough of that produce, he gives a Kohen a second tithe, *challah*. Why does the Torah command him to give two tithes to a Kohen from the same produce? The simplest explanation is that Hashem granted us a multitude of mitzvos that permeate the very fabric of our lives so that we can always think of Him, relate to Him, and live together with Him. He likewise commanded us to tithe in numerous ways to remind us that our bounty comes from Him. We remember him once when we separate *terumah*, and again when we separate *challah*. Every mitzvah and every tithe deepens our relationship with Hashem.

BLESSING IN THE HOME

A second reason we separate *challah* in addition to the produce tithes is to bring blessing into our homes (*Sefer HaChinuch*). Let us first explain how tithing in general brings us blessing. Hashem wishes to bless us without limit, with the ultimate purpose of bringing us to recognize Him, serve Him, and merit eternal blessing. Accordingly, blessing is only fitting and beneficial when the recipient recognizes that it comes from Hashem and feels grateful to Him for it. If the recipient chooses to ignore Hashem and considers all his success the fruits of his labor, that blessing is inappropriate and may even invoke punishment. When we give *terumah* from produce, we bring to heart that the rain falls, the sun shines, and the earth yields its bounty only because of Hashem. When our appreciation of Hashem increases, we become worthy of receiving additional blessing, and Hashem bestows new and increased blessing upon our fields.

Now, someone who recognizes the kindness of successful crops still may not recognize the kindness of every individual receiving sufficient livelihood, which is a different type of kindness that is symbolized by bread. Moreover, most people do not grow produce, but all people eat bread and need a livelihood. Therefore, Hashem commanded us to also separate *challah* from dough. We thereby bring to heart that Hashem watches over every person and gives him bread to eat, and Hashem in turn bestows further blessing upon our homes (*Rav Hirsch*).

RECTIFYING THE SIN OF ADAM AND CHAVAH

A third reason Hashem commanded us to separate *challah* in addition to the produce tithes is that the produce tithes are generally separated in the granary, by men, and Hashem wanted to give even women an opportunity to tithe. In fact, the mitzvah of *Challah* applies especially to women. The Midrash (*Tanchuma, Noach §1*) explains that Chavah played a pivotal role in the sin of the Tree of Knowledge that contaminated Adam, “the *challah* of the world.” Womankind rectify this by giving Hashem *challah* from their dough.

The Midrash means as follows: The common denominator between Adam and *challah* is that they are both the first portion of a completed product of the earth that is dedicated to Hashem. *Challah* is the first portion that is given to Hashem from dough, which is the final stage of the production of bread, before baking. So too, after creating the earth and all it contains, Hashem separated Adam from the soil and dedicated him to Himself on behalf of the earth. If Adam had not sinned and instead dedicated himself to Hashem that entire first day, it would have been considered as if the entire earth had been fully dedicated to Hashem, and the universe would have reached completion. Adam was meant to

complete Creation. Only, he became contaminated and cursed through sin, and the earth that he represented shared his fate.

It would seem that the sin of contaminating the first man who was the earth's *challah* could never be rectified, for no other man would ever be the *challah* of the earth. However, every sin has a means of rectification, and one of the primary means of rectifying this sin is through the mitzvah of *Challah*. This simple mitzvah is very significant to Hashem, as the Sages teach: The world was created in the merit of *Challah* (*Bereishis Rabbah* 1:5). By a woman dedicating to Hashem the first portion of her dough that is the produce of the earth, she has given Hashem a pure *challah* on a minor scale, and this serves to rectify the primordial sin. The most appropriate time to perform it is Erev Shabbos, the day when that sin transpired.

One would think that it is better to separate *challah* once the dough has been baked, in order to give Hashem something that is fully ready. However, the Torah specifies that it should ideally be separated in a dough state. Perhaps this is because the sin of Adam took place before he was a finished product, for he had not yet fulfilled his solitary mitzvah of refraining from the Tree of Knowledge. Corresponding to the contamination of Adam in an unfinished state, *challah* should ideally be separate from dough, in an unfinished state. Every time a woman separates *challah*, she removes some of the curse that struck the world as a result of the primordial sin, and she brings the world closer to the finished state it was meant to reach on that fateful first day of humankind.

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Korach, Datan and Aviram, and 250 leaders of Israel rebel against the authority of Moshe and Aharon. The rebellion results in their being swallowed by the earth. Many resent their death and blame Moshe. G-d's "anger" is manifest by a plague that besets the nation, and many thousands perish. Moshe intercedes once again for the people. He instructs Aharon to atone for them and the plague stops.

Then, G-d commands that staffs, each inscribed with the name of one of the tribes, be placed in the Mishkan. In the morning, the staff of Levi, bearing Aharon's name, sprouts, buds, blossoms and yields ripe almonds. This provides Divine confirmation that Levi's tribe is chosen for priesthood and verifies Aharon's position as *Kohen Gadol*, High Priest. The specific duties of the *levi'im* and *kohanim* are stated. The *kohanim* were not to be landowners, but were to receive their sustenance from the tithes and other mandated gifts brought by the people. Also taught in this week's Torah portion are the laws of the first fruits, redemption of the firstborn and various laws of offerings.

COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

KIDDUSH LEVANAH (PART 4)

UNDER THE LIGHT OF THE SILVERY MOON

“My walk on the moon lasted three days. My walk with G-d will last forever.”

Charles Duke - Lunar Module Pilot, Apollo 16

The blessing for Kiddush Levanah reads: Blessed are You, Hashem, our G-d, King of the universe, Who with His utterance created the heavens, and with the breath of His mouth all their legion. A decree and a schedule did He give them that they not alter their assigned task. They are joyous and glad to perform the Will of their Owner - the Worker of truth Whose work is truth. To the moon He said that it should renew itself as a crown of splendor for those borne [by Him] from the womb, those who are destined to renew themselves like it, and to glorify their Molder for the name of His glorious kingdom. Blessed are You, Hashem, Who renews the months.

In its simple understanding Kiddush Levanah gives us the opportunity to draw closer to Hashem by recognizing Him through His wonderous creations. That is why the Jerusalem Talmud (Tractate Brachot) classifies Kiddush Levanah as being a blessing of praise. Our Sages link it with the other blessings that are recited whenever we are moved by the sight of Hashem's natural wonders.

There are actually two opinions as to what the Brachah is. The first option is very simple and also very short, “Blessed are You, Hashem, our G-d, King of the universe, Who renews the months.” Our Sages, feeling that the concise version of the blessing was not expressive enough, introduced a longer and much more comprehensive blessing. The second version of the blessing is the one that is accepted by all, with some minor emendations depending on each community's custom.

Rabbi Yosef ben Meir Teomim (1727-1792), was the Chief Rabbi of Frankfurt an der Oder. He was one of the most brilliant Halachic authorities in his generation, authoring several different Halachic works the most famous being the *Pri Megadim* on the Shulchan Aruch. In another of his works, *Eishel Avraham* (426:9), Rabbi Yosef Teomim explains that the first part of the blessing is referring, among the other celestial bodies, to the moon. That the moon, like all the other planets and stars, follows exactly Hashem's command and, by doing so it is demonstrating to us Hashem's greatness.

There is a very well-known story told about the acclaimed scientist Sir Isaac Newton. One of the projects that the multi-talented Newton worked on was his Universal Theory of Gravity and how it explained the orbits of the various discovered planets at the time. So dear was this project to Newton that he commissioned an exceptionally gifted craftsman to create for him, at great expense, an orrery that sat in pride of place on his desk. An orrery was a mechanical model of the Solar System that showed the relative positions and movements of the planets and moons with the sun at the center. It was made out of polished brass and ivory and it cost him a small fortune. One day a friend of Newton's came to visit him. His friend was also a scientist but, unlike like Newton who was a devout believer in G-d, his friend was an atheist. On seeing the orrery the friend asked Newton who was the artist who created such a breathtaking model. Newton lackadaisically replied, “No one.” His friend, assuming that Newton hadn't heard him clearly asked him again who had made it. Again, Newton answered, “No one.” And

then he added, “The pieces just fell into place all by themselves.” His friend in exasperation testily retorted, “Isaac, you must take me for a fool! This piece was obviously fashioned by one of the most talented and creative artists alive today! How can you possibly expect me to believe that no one was involved in its creation?!”

Newton looked up and told him, “My friend, this orrery is nothing more than a simple model of the planets and, yet, you accept that it could not have come into being by itself. That it had to have been formed by one of the most talented people alive today. What, then, do say about the original that this orrery is modeled on? Do you really believe that it just appeared out of nowhere? Is it really conceivable that it wasn’t designed and created by the greatest Artisan of them all?”

Not only do the planets and the stars continuously do the bidding of Hashem, never veering away from His command, but, as the blessing describes, “they are joyous and glad to perform the Will of their Owner.”

Because there is no greater joy in this world than doing Hashem’s Will.

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

Synonyms in the Hebrew Language

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

Of Heretics and Apostates

The Hebrew language has no shortage of colorful insults and epithets that can be hurled at Jewish heretics and other disbelievers. In this essay, we explore some of those words used in reference to such people – like *min*, *apikores*, *kofer*, *meshumad*, and *mumar* – attempting to clarify their exact definitions and how they may differ from one another. In colloquial speech, many of these terms are used interchangeably or have overlapping definitions, but in more scholarly discourse (especially in Maimonidean codification) each carries a specific meaning, on which we will hone in. In this essay, we will also explore some of the possible etymological bases of these words.

Let’s start with the word *apikores*. While this word never appears in the Bible, it does appear twice in the Mishnah – once when relating that an *apikores* has no share in the World to Come (Sanhedrin 10:1) and once when stating that a Torah Scholar should know how to do respond to an *apikores* (Avot 2:14). Conventional wisdom ties this Rabbinic Hebrew term to the Greek philosopher Epicurus (341–270 BCE), who touted the hedonistic pursuit of physical pleasure as a way of life. As mentioned above, HaBachur also sees the term *apikores* as deriving from the name of a person, but adds that because the eponymous term refers to one who insults Torah Scholars, it makes sense to presume that the term’s antecedent in the historical Epicurus also engaging in insulting those who study Torah. Maimonides in his commentary to the Mishnah (Sanhedrin there) actually explains the word *apikores* as related to the word *hefker* (“ownerless”), which we discussed in an earlier essay “[Defining Freedom](#)” (Mar. 2028).

The term *kofer* derives from the triliteral root KAF-PEH-REISH, which in Mishnaic Hebrew begets verbs related to the act of “denying” (for example, Shevuot 4:1, 4:3-4, 5:1-2, 6:3 in the context of a legal deposition in which a litigant denies the claims of the plaintiff). In the sense of a “heretic” or “denier,” the Hebrew *kofer* parallels the usage of its Arabic cognate *kafir*. In Biblical Hebrew, a whole slew of

words derives from the selfsame trilateral root as kofer, including words for “redemption,” “atonement,” “covering,” “pitch,” “village,” “lion.” The ways that these various words connect to each other lie beyond the scope of this essay, but it is easy to see how when one “denies” something, one might “cover up” the facts by insisting on the veracity of something other than the truth. This seems to be the basis for the “denial” meaning of this root, and ultimately the term kofer in the context of one who denies certain theological or dogmatic truths.

Next up, we discuss the term meshumad. In the blessing that prays for the dissolution of heretics, we refer to those heretics as malshinim (“informers”). However, some argue that this is really just a censored version, while the original liturgy called those heretics meshumadim (and some have the custom to pray with the original version).

The simplest way of understanding the etymology of meshumad is seeing it was an inflection of the trilateral Hebrew root SHIN-MEM-DALET, which that refers to acts of “destroying.” According to Even Shoshan’s Biblical concordance, this root occurs ninety times in the Hebrew parts of the Bible and one time in the Aramaic parts of the Bible (Dan. 7:26). Interestingly, it also seems to appear in the personal name Shemed borne by a man from the Tribe of Benjamin (I Chron 8:12).

The word shmad is a noun form of this term which appears in the Talmud in the context of “destructive decrees” which the gentile authorities have imposed on the Jewish People from time to time (for example, see the uncensored version of Rosh Hashanah 19a). As Rabbi Eliyahu HaBachur explains it in Sefer Tishbi, a meshumad refers to a Jew who converted to a different religion because most cases of that happening occur during times of shmad.

Rabbi Yair Chaim Bachrach (Mekor Chaim to Orach Chaim §118) offers a different way of connecting meshumad back to the three-letter root in question by explaining that meshumad refers to the fact that the apostate has been “cut off” and “destroyed” by detaching himself from the rest of the Jewish Nation.

For more about these different words and what exactly they mean, the reader is urged to visit us online at: https://ohr.edu/this_week/whats_in_a_word/ and access the full version of this essay for free.

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