

OHRNET

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PARSHA INSIGHTS

HEADRAISER

“When you ‘raise the head’ of the Children of Yisrael...” (30:12)

Why does the Torah choose the expression ‘raise the head’ to mean that Moshe should take a census of the Jewish People?

G-d explained to Moshe that the Jewish People had placed their lives in jeopardy by worshipping the golden calf. The process of counting them by the coins they were to donate would “raise their heads,” elevate them spiritually from the depths to which they sunk, and earn them atonement from their sin.

Moshe supposed that such atonement would require a coin of a very large denomination indeed. Perhaps it would be a *kikar* of silver, the equivalent of three thousand silver coins. If not three thousand silver coins, it might be that G-d would demand a coin worth a hundred silver pieces for each. This would be based on the penalty of one hundred silver pieces as the penalty the Torah prescribes for a man who wrongly defames his wife’s virtue. Since the Jewish People defamed G-d’s name when they proclaimed “*These are your gods, Yisrael,*” this might be the level of the atonement required.

Alternatively, if not a coin worth a hundred silver coins, Moshe surmised that the coin G-d would stipulate might be the equivalent of fifty silver pieces. For that is the penalty that a seducer must pay, and the Jewish People had made idols in defiance of the commandment

“You shall have no other gods!”

At the very least, Moshe conjectured, G-d would demand a coin to the value of thirty *shekalim*. The owner of a goring ox must pay thirty shekels. By worshipping a calf, the Jewish People had traded G-d’s glory for the image of a calf.

In the event, Moshe’s fears were unfounded. G-d said to him “You need not pay Me coins worth a hundred, or fifty, or even thirty silver pieces. All I ask is that you donate one small coin to the value of a half-shekel.”

G-d then took a half-shekel coin from under His Throne of Glory, showing to Moshe its size and shape.

“This is the type of coin they shall give,” said G-d.

Those half-shekel coins from the census were melted down and used for the silver sockets, the “*adanim*”, that were the foundation for the walls of the Mishkan. In other words, the Mishkan literally stood on the half-*shekalim* that the Jewish People donated. They were the new basis of G-d’s residing amongst them.

Maybe this is one of the reasons that they were called “*adonim*.” *Adon* means “lord.” It is the root of the word that we say to indicate the ineffable four letter name of G-d. In effect the Jewish People, by contributing those half-shekels, were humbling themselves under the supreme Lordship of G-d which was the new basis of their closeness with Him.

It doesn’t take a million dollars to make G-d our “*Adon,*” just a heart that is as broken and humble as a half-shekel.

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Moshe conducts a census by counting each silver half-shekel donated by all men age twenty and over. Moshe is commanded to make a copper laver for the Mishkan. The women donate the necessary metal. The formula of the anointing oil is specified, and G-d instructs Moshe to use this oil only for dedicating the Mishkan, its vessels, Aharon and his sons. G-d selects Betzalel and Oholiav as master craftsmen for the Mishkan and its vessels. The Jewish People are commanded to keep the Sabbath as an eternal sign that G-d made the world. Moshe receives the two Tablets of Testimony on which are written the Ten Commandments. The mixed multitude who left Egypt with the Jewish People panic when Moshe's descent seems delayed, and force Aharon to make a golden calf for them to worship. Aharon stalls, trying to delay them. G-d tells Moshe to return to the people immediately, threatening to destroy

everyone and build a new nation from Moshe. When Moshe sees the camp of idol-worship he smashes the tablets and he destroys the golden calf. The sons of Levi volunteer to punish the transgressors, executing 3,000 men. Moshe ascends the mountain to pray for forgiveness for the people, and G-d accepts his prayer. Moshe sets up the Mishkan and G-d's cloud of glory returns. Moshe asks G-d to show him the rules by which he conducts the world, but is granted only a small portion of this request. G-d tells Moshe to hew new tablets and reveals to him the text of the prayer that will invoke Divine mercy. Idol worship, intermarriage and the combination of milk and meat are prohibited. The laws of Pesach, the first-born, the first-fruits, Shabbat, Shavuot and Succot are taught. When Moshe descends with the second set of tablets, his face is luminous as a result of contact with the Divine.

SILVER HALF AND GOLDEN CALF

A silver half and a golden calf are the two outstanding features of this week's Torah portion. Our Sages saw an interesting relationship between the two not easily apparent from the order in which they appear.

The silver half-shekel which each male from age twenty and up was required to contribute to the construction of the Sanctuary and which served as the instrument of a national census also served as an atonement for the sin of the golden calf. If Jews who only forty days earlier had heard G-d speak to them were capable of ascribing their exodus from Egypt to a force represented by a golden calf, it was necessary for them to reestablish their direct relation with the Creator and Giver of the Torah by building, as it were, a home for Him on earth.

This was the role of the Mishkan, whose foundation was formed from those silver half coins, for many centuries. This was the function of the Beit Hamikdash in Jerusalem for close to a millennium. And this has been the role of the *mikdash mei'at* (mini-sanctuary) —the synagogue — throughout the close to two millennia of exile.

The struggle for the soul of the Jewish State in our time is between the G-d-given religious lifestyle represented by the silver half and the man-made deities represented by the golden calf. It is to be hoped that just as our ancestors came to their senses and abandoned the golden calf and sought rehabilitation in the silver half, so too will their misguided descendants make a similar move which alone can guarantee Israel forever.

GARBAGE MAN TO THE RESCUE

“Be prepared to deal with a carcass in the street and don't say it is below your dignity.” This was the advice one of our great Talmudic Sages gave to a disciple.

Not only is there nothing undignified about any work done to earn a livelihood and avoid becoming a public charge, but every occupation offers opportunities to do some very dignified things.

Take the case of the driver of a garbage truck in Brooklyn. A beautiful story was told about him in a eulogy for a special Jew who never missed going to his shul for the *shacharit* services. The non-Jewish garbage man saw him one wintry morning desperately trying to hail a cab. Upon learning that he was late for the synagogue, the driver invited the elderly gentleman into his truck and brought him to the shul on time.

PARSHA Q&A ?

1. How many "geira" are in a shekel?
2. What was the minimum age of military service in the Jewish army?
3. What were the three different types of *terumah* donated?
4. The Jews were counted after Yom Kippur and again after Pesach. Both times they numbered the same amount. How can this be? Didn't some 19-year olds turn 20 during that six month period?
5. How many ingredients comprise the incense of the *Mishkan*?
6. According to Rashi, why are sailors called "malachim"?
7. What is the difference between *chochma* (wisdom), *bina* (understanding), and *da'at* (knowledge)?
8. Shabbat is a "sign." What does it signify?
9. When did the Jewish People begin to give contributions for the building of the *Mishkan*?
10. How many books are there in Tanach?
11. From where did the men take the earrings that they donated to make the calf?
12. Why did Aharon build the altar for the golden calf by himself?
13. Why did Moshe break the Tablets?
14. How can two brothers belong to two different tribes?
15. Why did Moshe ask that his name be erased from the Torah?
16. How has the sin of the golden calf affected the Jewish People throughout history?
17. In verse 33:2, G-d says that the inhabitants of *Eretz Canaan* would be driven out of the Land. In that verse, only six of the seven Canaanite nations are mentioned. What happened to the seventh?
18. How did G-d show that He forgave the Jewish People?
19. How did Moshe become wealthy?
20. How do the light rays shining from Moshe's face show us the powerful effect of sin?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

1. 30:13 - Twenty.
2. 30:14 - Twenty.
3. 30:15 - For the *adanim* (sockets), for the purchase of communal sacrifices, and for the building of the *Mishkan*.
4. 30:16 - Their ages were calculated based on Rosh Hashana, not based on their individual birthdays.
5. 30:34 - Eleven ingredients were used making the incense.
6. 30:35 - Because they stir (*malach*) the water with their oars.
7. 31:3 - *Chochma* is knowledge acquired from others. *Bina* is the deduction of new knowledge from what one has already learned. *Da'at* is holy inspiration.
8. 31:13 - It is a sign between G-d and the Jewish People that He has chosen them and a sign to the nations of the world that He has sanctified the Jewish People.
9. 31:18 - The 11th of Tishrei.
10. 31:18 - 24.
11. 32:2,3 - From their ears.
12. 32:5 - He hoped that by building it by himself it would take longer and in the interim Moshe would return.
13. 32:19 - Moshe reasoned: If the Torah forbids those who have estranged themselves from the Torah to partake in even a single commandment (Pesach sacrifice), surely the entire Torah cannot be given to a whole nation which has estranged itself from G-d!
14. 32:27 - Half-brothers, sharing the same mother.
15. 32:32 - So people shouldn't say "Moshe was unworthy to plead for mercy on behalf of the Jewish people."
16. 32:34 - Whenever G-d punishes the Jewish People, part of that punishment comes as payment for the sin of the golden calf.
17. 33:2 - The seventh nation, the Gergashites, voluntarily emigrated.
18. 33:14 - He agreed to let His *Shechina* dwell among them.
19. 34:1 - Moshe carved the Tablets out of precious stone. G-d commanded Moshe to keep the leftover fragments.
20. 34:35 - Before the sin of the golden calf, the people would not have been afraid to look at the light rays, but after the sin they were afraid.

לע"נ
מרת אסתר רבקה בת ר' בן ציון הלוי ע"ה
ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

FALLEN FRUITS, FALLEN PAGES

A woman in the Babylonian community of Pumpedita was having some serious menstrual problems which interfered with her ability to maintain normal marital relations. She was advised by one of the Sages to let people know about her condition so that they should pray for her recovery. This was based on the passage listing the restrictions which the Torah imposed upon the *metzora* which concludes with the directive for him “to cry: Unclean, unclean” (*Vayikra 13:46*). The purpose of his proclaiming his ritual uncleanness stemming from his physical condition is to encourage passersby to pray for him to become healed. In the same fashion this woman was directed to publicize her problem and the result was that her problem found a solution.

The same idea is applied by our Sages (*Mesechta Shabbat 67a*) to a sickly tree which prematurely sheds its fruits. In addition to prescribing a method for reducing the tree’s energy which causes this premature shedding, they also suggested marking the tree with a red dye. This was to call the attention of the passersby to the sickly condition of the tree and invite their prayers for its recovery.

A unique post-Talmud application of this idea is quoted in the name of today’s foremost halachic authority, Rabbi Yosef Shalom Eliyashiv of Yerushalayim. He calls attention to an unusual statement of one of the great Talmudic commentators in his writings on *Mesechta Kiddushin*. In regard to one particular topic, MaHaRYT states that he had many innovations written on this subject but unfortunately lost his manuscript and can no longer recall them. The point of writing this seemingly unnecessary apology, explains Rabbi Eliyashiv, was to let the students of his works in on his anxiety in the hope that they would pray for him to regain his lost Torah treasure.

• *Niddah 66a*

THE STONE ON THE LIONS’ DEN

What is an *even mesamei*? In its discussion of the unique dimension of ritual impurity which pertains to the *zav*, this *mishna* mentions the fact that if there are vessels beneath a stone upon which a *zav*, alive or dead, reposes, they become contaminated. This stone is called an *even mesamei* and this passage from

Daniel is cited as a source for this term which means “a stone that has been placed”:

“And a stone was brought and placed on the mouth of the den.” (*Daniel 6:18*)

This den is the lions’ den into which the righteous Daniel was cast as the result of a conspiracy against him by some of the ministers of King Darius who were envious of the great power this ruler of the mighty empire of the Persians and Medians had conferred upon this superbly capable Hebrew exile at their expense. They coaxed the king into issuing an irrevocable decree that anyone praying to any force aside from him during the next thirty days would be fed to the lions. When this failed to deter Daniel from maintaining his daily schedule of three prayer services directed to G-d, he was reported to the king who, despite his great affection for Daniel, ordered him confined to the lions’ den. The king even sealed the stone which was placed on the mouth of the den with his signet ring to prevent any attempt to free Daniel, but only after assuring this faithful servant that his G-d would surely save him. After a sleepless night he rushed to the den to see if G-d had indeed saved him and happily heard from Daniel that a Heavenly angel had closed the mouths of the hungry lions. Their appetites were subsequently satisfied, however, when the king ordered that those who had conspired against Daniel be cast into that den.

Darius then wrote to all the nations in his empire decreeing that all of his subjects tremble and fear before the G-d of Daniel.

• *Niddah 69b*

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KIPPA AT WORK

From: Richard in London

Dear Rabbi,

I've decided to become further committed to Judaism, but I recently started a new job for a non-Jewish firm. I was wearing my yarmulke all the time, but my father requested me not to wear it to work. Although I'd prefer to wear it, do you think it may bring up feelings of prejudice in the office or of clients? And to what degree does respect for my father mean I shouldn't wear it? I've been wearing a baseball cap when eating and when outside, but this isn't really an ideal solution. Any advice would be greatly appreciated.

Dear Richard,

I am glad to hear that you are strengthening your commitment and observance.

The Talmud states, "cover a child's head so that he will have the fear of heaven" (Shabbat 156b). The Talmud also associates a covered head with humility (Kiddushin 31a). In "Guide for the Perplexed," Maimonides writes that a bare head was repellent to the early Sages. Based on these sources and the age-old custom among nearly all Jewish communities, a man is required to cover his head according to halacha in the Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 2:6).

The nature of the covering can and has varied according to time and place but some type of acceptable covering is necessary. If a baseball cap is appropriate, fine. If not, another type of hat may do. What about a turban? A relatively inconspicuous kippa is also good. You know, a really big one with snoop dog or bouquet of flowers printed on it and the like. Alternatively, you might choose a smaller kippa that blandly blends with your hair color. It's up to you.

An exception may be made if one would suffer monetary

loss or physical harm as a result of wearing a kippa. The Talmud states that one doesn't need to forfeit more than a fifth of his wealth in order to fulfill a positive commandment. Therefore, Rabbi Moshe Feinstein writes that if a person cannot find work unless he removes his kippa, when he is at work he is not required to wear it (Igrot Moshe, Orach Chaim, vols. 1 & 4). However, one is not usually subject to significant loss because of wearing a kippa, and even if he occasionally loses a client, who's to say that for every one bigot there aren't two others who are impressed by his ideals and commitment.

While keeping this halacha may incur some anti-Semitic reactions, nearly no one in civilized countries comes to physical harm over such a thing. More often than not, people will respect you. And at worst, people's reactions are an opportunity to explain what Jews and Judaism are really about. (When explaining yourself, however, never get into an argument.) I'm sure you'll be a truly gifted and eloquent representative of G-d and the Torah.

While your parents' opinions are very important, and you should make every effort to accommodate their wishes (after all, you owe them a lot, and I'm sure they are wonderful people), when it comes to halacha that you are both obligated by, you are expected to listen to G-d just as they are (Rashi on Lev. 19:3, Yevamot 5). Therefore, while your parents' objections are well-founded and certainly well-intentioned, in such a case you should try to minimize any conflict by explaining the importance and significance of keeping Jewish Law and custom, while assuaging their fears and concerns.

Ultimately, you are an adult and have the right to make your own decisions. Demonstrate to your parents that your interest in Judaism is not a rejection of what they've taught you, but a natural continuation of everything good they've instilled in you all of these years.

WHAT'S THE RIGHT THING TO DO?

REAL-LIFE QUESTIONS OF SOCIAL AND BUSINESS ETHICS

SAFE ESCORT

Question: I have heard that there is an obligation to provide a guest not only with food, drink and lodging but with safe escort as well. I can see how the first three can be accomplished but find it difficult to leave my home and provide my guest with safe escort until his destination. What is the right thing to do?

Answer: It is customary to escort a guest for a short distance outside your home. This is based on a statement in the Talmud (*Mesechta Sota 46b*) that one who escorts his guest four cubits in the city ensures that he will meet no

harm.

Maharsha (*ibid. 45b*) explains that this protection is supernatural. King David has taught us that "He fulfills the wishes of those who fear Him" (*Tehillim 145:19*). By escorting a guest even that short distance, you demonstrate a desire for him to be protected and G-d fulfills your desire by finishing the job. He also suggests that the angels which steadily accompany the host finish the job for him by carrying on the escort which he began.

So taking that short walk with your guest is not only a little exercise in physical fitness but a major exercise of faith.

Thank You Ohrnet!

I recently started receiving some of your e-mail letters (for lack of a better word), and really enjoy them as they are short, to the point, and VERY inspirational/informative. Keep up the good work!

• Aviva N.

Re: Kissing in the Synagogue (What's the Right Thing To Do? Ohrnet Mishpatim)

I enjoy receiving your email of Torah. I doven in the Agudas Israel of St. Louis, and our Rav, Rabbi Menechem Greenblatt would kiss another person in our Beis HaMedrash. When asked about this, he responded that his Rosh Yeshiva HaRav Yaakov Ruderman, *zatzal*, explained that the halacha is referring to the time of dovening. If it was not during the time of dovening it would be permitted.

• Chaim Edelstein

Rav Shurkin, *shlita*, writes that Rav Moshe Feinstein, *zatzal*, was of the opinion that the prohibition of kissing in the Beis Knesses only applies at the time of Tefillah. Evidence of the halacha is brought in Hilchos Tefillah rather than in Hilchos Beis Knesses. In accordance with the above ruling Rav Shurkin reports he received a kiss in the Beis Knesses from Rav Moshe on the occasion of his becoming a Chosson.

• Asher Z. Biron

Grandson Beilis

Thanks for including my grandfather's story in your article about the Tsunami. After the trial Shalom Alechem came to his house and told him that the weight of twelve million Jews were on his shoulders for each day he was imprisoned

Sincerely,

• Jay Beilis

Re: Courting Trouble (Israel Forever Ohrnet Mishpatim)

I respectfully wish to strongly differ. The Courts in the U.S. have been greatly overstepping their bounds, as certain liberal judges feel they can "legislate" from the bench. It's a tremendous problem here also. We are "courting trouble" in the U. S. too. Gay marriage, abortion, etc., are some of the most visible issues where some Courts are overruling our lawmakers. Thank you for your wonderful Dvar Torahs.

• Jay Fox

Like Sara – Re: Urim V'Tumim (Ask!)

Someone recently showed me an excerpt from the Vilna Gaon, who writes that the correct reading of the *urim v'tumim* with respect to Chana's prayer was "k'Sarah" (i.e., as Sarah Imeinu), not "k'sheirah" (worthy) as is commonly (mis-)read in material on this subject. (Apparently, no *yud* lit up.)

• A. J.

LOVE OF THE LAND - THE LEGENDS Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael

ANOTHER LOOK AT MASSADA

Many legends surround one of the most popular tourist sites in Eretz Yisrael, the ancient fortress of Massada. Visitors to this site hear from the guides about the courageous stand made by Jewish rebels against the mighty Roman army and how they committed suicide rather than fall into the hands of those heathens.

During a recent visit to the yeshiva, one of Ohr Somayach's former students told an interesting story about a visit he made many years ago to Massada together with his father. Ahead of them was a



group of Italian tourists led by a guide speaking their language. The father of our alumnus spoke fluent Italian and when he heard the guide make a certain point, he burst into uncontrollable laughter.

When he finally recovered, he explained to his son how funny it was, after all they had heard from their own guide about the courage of the Hebrew defenders, to hear the Italian guide say to his compatriots of Roman origin, as he pointed to one section of the fortress, "This is where 'we' came in."