

OHRNET

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חג שבועות שמח

Wishing our readers a happy and meaningful Shavuot

PARSHA INSIGHTS

THE MOST IMPORTANT PERSON IN THE WORLD

“Take a census of the sons of Gershon, as well...” (4:22)

The road to success is crowded with people coming back, runs a popular adage. I think it reveals a lot about the society we live in.

In most people’s eyes, success is some kind of pinnacle. It’s the top of the tree, the top of the mountain, and only the few can make it there. For the rest of us, well, we can dream.

Our success-society has its own myths and literature, its own canon of gods and demigods, whether they sing, dance or manipulate a leather ball with balletic dexterity. We want to know what our favorite celebs have for breakfast, who clothes them, which car they drive, and their views on everything from politics to potholing.

And for the rest of us, well, not everyone can be a winner, can we?

Judaism says, yes, everyone can be a winner. Success is not a rat-race between me and the next guy; it’s between me and myself. There only rat-race in life is between me and the rat inside me: There’s the rat of selfishness; the rat of gluttony; the rat of laziness; the rat of depression. Inside each and every one of us we all have our own little rat-pack gnawing away. Success

in life is beating out the rats — before they beat us out.

This week’s Torah portion starts off with the following sentence *“Take a census of the sons of Gershon, as well...”* The Hebrew word here used to mean *“to take a census”* can be literally translated as *“to raise up the head.”*

What has census-taking got to do with raising people’s heads?

In last week’s portion, the Torah describes in detail the duties of the *Bnei Kehat*. During the travels of the *Mishkan* (Tabernacle) through desert, the *Bnei Kehat* carried its most sacred parts. The *Bnei Gershon* carried parts of lesser sanctity. In order that they should not consider themselves less important in any way than the *Bnei Kehat*, the Torah instructs Moshe to *“raise up their heads, as well,”* to elevate the *Bnei Gershon*. By using the phrase *“as well”*, the Torah is teaching us that both tasks were necessary for the *Mishkan* and both should be done with equal joy.

G-d gives each of us a separate job in this world. I can’t do your job and you can’t do mine. Sometimes it may seem to us that someone else’s job is more important than our own, or it carries greater prestige, or it’s more glamorous. However, no one is more important than anyone else.

G-d created each of us in His image — and that’s what makes each of us the most important person in the world.

The Torah assigns the exact *Mishkan*-related tasks to be performed by the families of Gershon, Kehat, and Merari, the sons of Levi. A census reveals that over 8,000 men are ready for such service. All those ritually impure are to be sent out of the encampments. If a person, after having sworn in court to the contrary, confesses that he wrongfully retained his neighbor's property, he has to pay an additional fifth of the base-price of the object and bring a guilt offering as atonement. If the claimant has already passed away without heirs, the payments are made to a *kohen*. In certain circumstances, a husband who suspects that his wife had been unfaithful brings her to the Temple. A *kohen* prepares a drink of water mixed with dust from the Temple floor and a spe-

cial ink that was used for inscribing Hashem's Name on a piece of parchment. If she is innocent, the potion does not harm her; rather it brings a blessing of children. If she is guilty, she suffers a supernatural death. A *nazir* is one who vows to dedicate himself to Hashem for a specific period of time. He must abstain from all grape products, grow his hair and avoid contact with corpses. At the end of this period he shaves his head and brings special offerings. The *kohanim* are commanded to bless the people. The *Mishkan* is completed and dedicated on the first day of *Nisan* in the second year after the Exodus. The prince of each tribe makes a communal gift to help transport the *Mishkan*, as well as donating identical individual gifts of gold, silver, animal and meal offerings.

TEN COMMANDMENTS – THEN AND NOW

Something is happening in America which reminds us of what took place at Mount Sinai this week over 3,300 years ago.

Any week now the United States Supreme Court is expected to give a ruling on what place the Ten Commandments have in American life.

The catalyst for this legal debate is a monument outside the Texas Capitol on which appear the Ten Commandments. Opponents of this religious symbol argue that since many of the commandments deal with G-d, it violates the constitutional principle of separation of religion and state. The Bush administration, which last year sided with a California school district to keep "G-d" in the Pledge of Allegiance, is backing the Ten Commandments display.

Our Sages teach us that when the Ten Commandments were spoken at Sinai, they were heard from one end of the world to the other. The display of these commandments on monuments in so many town squares and courthouses and on other government-owned land throughout the U.S. is a proud expression of the American motto "In G-d we trust" and proof that there were indeed some nations upon whom the sound of those Commandments at Sinai made a lasting impression.

It is certainly comforting to know that even the anti-religious secularists in Israel have not yet descended to the depths of their American counterparts. It is our hope that they will gain a new respect for these and all the G-dly commandments in order to preserve Israel forever.

MADE FOR EACH OTHER

As we approach Shavuot, the Festival of the Giving of the Torah to our people, we recall how the Midrash explains the Divine "measuring of the earth" described by the Prophet Chavakuk (3:6).

"G-d measured all the nations," states Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai, "and found only Israel worthy of receiving the Torah; all the



generations and found only the one which left Egypt worthy of receiving the Torah; all the mountains and found only Sinai worthy as the site for giving the Torah; all the cities and found only Jerusalem worthy of housing the *Beit Hamikdash*."

"And He measured all the lands and found only Eretz Yisrael worthy of being the Homeland of the People of Israel."

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PARSHA Q&A ?

1. What is the significance of the number 8,580 in this week's *Parsha*?
2. Besides transporting the *Mishkan*, what other service performed by the *levi'im* is referred to in this *Parsha*?
3. On which day did Moshe teach the command to send those who are *teme'im* (ritually impure) out of the camp?
4. Name the three camps in the desert.
5. Who was sent out of each of the camps?
6. A person stole from another and swore that he was innocent. If he later confesses his guilt, what are his obligations?
7. Who determines which *kohen* receives the gifts that must be given to the *kohanim*?
8. What does the Torah promise a person who gives *matnot kehuna*?
9. Why are the verses about *matnot kehuna* followed by the verses about the *sotah*?
10. Why is the *sotah* given water from the holy basin?
11. What does the *kohen* do to the hair of a *sotah*?
12. When a *sotah* who is guilty of adultery drinks the water, she dies in a very specific fashion. What happens to the adulterer?
13. Before the name of Hashem is erased, the *sotah* has the option either to admit guilt or to drink the water. Does she have a third option?
14. What are *chartzanim*? What are *zagim*?
15. What sin does a *nazir* commit against himself?
16. Where was the cut hair of a *nazir* placed?
17. A *kohen* should bless the people "with a full heart." What word in the *Parsha* conveys this idea of "a full heart?"
18. What is the meaning of the blessing "May Hashem bless you and guard you?"
19. What is the meaning of the blessing "May Hashem lift up His countenance upon you?"
20. The tribe of Yissachar was the second tribe to offer their gifts. Why did they merit this position?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

1. 4:47-48 - It is the number of *levi'im* between ages thirty and fifty.
2. 4:47 - Singing and playing cymbals and harps to accompany the sacrifices.
3. 5:2 - The day the *Mishkan* was erected.
4. 5:2 - The camp of the *Shechina* was in the center, surrounded by the camp of Levi which was surrounded by the camp of *Yisrael*.
5. 5:2 - A *metzora* was sent out of all three camps. A *zav* was permitted in the camp of *Yisrael* but excluded from the two inner camps. A person who was *tamei* from contact with the dead had to leave only the camp of the *Shechina*.
6. 5:6-8 - He pays the principle plus a fifth to the victim, and brings a *korban asham*.
7. 5:10 - The giver.
8. 5:10 - Great wealth.
9. 5:12 - To teach that someone who withholds the gifts due the *kohanim* is deserving of eventually bringing his wife to the *kohanim* to be tried as a *sotah*.
10. 5:17 - The holy basin was made from the mirrors of the righteous women who left Egypt; the *sotah* strayed from the example set by these women.
11. 5:18 - He uncovers it.
12. 5:22 - He dies a similar death.
13. 5:27 - Yes, she can refuse both: She can refuse to admit guilt and also refuse to drink the water. (After the Name of Hashem is erased, she loses this option.)
14. 6:4 - *Chartzanim* are seeds. *Zagim* are peels.
15. 6:11 - He abstains from enjoying wine.
16. 6:18 - It was placed on the fire under the pot in which the *nazir's shelamim* offering was cooked.
17. 6:23 - "Amor."
18. 6:24 - "May Hashem bless you" that your property may increase, "and guard you" from robbery.
19. 6:26 - "May He suppress His anger."
20. 7:18 - The Tribe of Yissachar was well versed in Torah. Also, they proposed the idea that the *nesi'im* should offer gifts.

SHABBAT 37 - 43

- Keeping food on the stove and returning it there on Shabbat
- Status of something illegally cooked
- Different ovens and different fuels
- Washing with hot water on Shabbat and Yom Tov
- Heating oil for applying to body
- Where hands should not be placed
- Retaining heat of liquids
- Extinguishing burning objects
- Mixing hot and cold liquids
- Adding spices to the pot
- Putting a vessel out of commission
- Laws of *muktzah* – objects which may not be handled
- Removing a corpse on Shabbat

COAL IN THE STREET

If one comes across a burning coal in the public thoroughfare which can present a danger to passersby, what should he do? The Sage Shmuel dealt with this problem and ruled that it depends on whether the coal's source is metal or wood. If it is from metal, the prohibition on extinguishing it by pouring water on it or any other way is not of Torah ori-

gin because this action is not a creative one, only one of elimination. Since this is forbidden only by Rabbinic Law one may take this step for the protection of the public. In the case of a coal made from wood, however, the extinguishing, although done for the purpose of putting out the fire, achieves the positive purpose of creating charcoal and is therefore prohibited by Torah Law and cannot be done even for the public's safety since there is no danger to life.

This distinction is based on Shmuel's adopting the position of Rabbi Yehuda that even if one's purpose in doing something on Shabbat is not for a creative result, it is still forbidden by Torah Law if that is the outcome. Although Rambam (Laws of Shabbat 12:2) upholds this view, the mainstream position, as recorded in *Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 334:27)*, is that even the extinguishing of a wood coal is forbidden only by Rabbinic Law since the intention of such an action was not creating charcoal. One can therefore extinguish such a burning wood coal for the protection of the public.

The halachic commentaries point out that such extinguishing may only be done if there is no other option such as kicking it aside from the path of passersby.

• *Shabbat 42a*

WHAT THE Sages SAY

"One may think about Torah subjects everywhere except in the bathhouse and in the bathroom."

• *Rabbi Yochanan as quoted by the Sage Rabbok bar Rav Chanah*

"In those places one may speak about secular matters even in *lashon kodesh*, but may not speak about sacred matters even in another language."

• *The Sage Abaye*

"It is permissible to even render a halachic ruling in such places if it is necessary to do so in order to prevent someone from doing something forbidden."

• *Rabbi Yitzchak bar Avdimi*

OHR BITS

Witty Advice for Circling Life

"Do it as if your life depended on it."

• *Rabbi Moshe Sherer*

HER & HERS

From: Anonymous

Dear Rabbi,

I understand that the Torah prohibits certain specific physical contact between two men, and that other forms of physical intimacy between men are also forbidden as a result of this. In my mind this is similar to prohibited unions between men and women where a specific act is explicitly forbidden, and other acts, while less severe, are also prohibited. My question is if the Torah forbids such physical contact between two women. I am not aware of any mention of this in the Torah. I apologize for asking such a question, but this is also Torah and I want to learn. Thank you in advance for responding.

Dear Anonymous,

You are right. There is no explicit prohibition written in the Torah regarding relations between women. In fact from Rambam's statement in his Commentary on the Mishna (Sanhedrin, ch. 7) that "women having relations with one another is immoral, but there is no punishment for it from the Torah or the Rabbis", one might think there

is no prohibition at all.

However, "no punishment" doesn't mean no prohibition. Rambam in Mishna Torah (Isurei Biah 21:8) explains that a Torah prohibition is indeed derived from the verse against following in the ways of the ancient Egyptians: "For women to 'intertwine' with each other is prohibited and is included in the acts of the Egyptians of which we are warned, 'Like the practice of the land of Egypt...you shall not do' (Lev. 18:3). Our Sages say, 'What did they do? A man married a man, a woman married a woman.... (Torat Kohanim 8:8)". The term "marriage" was used only because that was the norm — but the act is forbidden even outside the context of marriage (see Tosefot, Yevamot 76a).

As a concluding note, it is very important to stress that it was our intention to address only your specific question regarding what the sources say about intimate physical contact between women. We are in no way insensitive to the suffering of people troubled by these issues and empathize with their turmoil, as the Torah commands one to be caring and compassionate to anyone in pain. Also, although we described these issues as prohibitions of immorality, the certain distinction between the act and the person must be made. As in all transgressions, the fact that a person has an inclination to do, or does prohibited acts, does not undermine his or her inherent value as a person.

PUBLIC DOMAIN

Comments, quibbles and reactions concerning previous Ohrnet features

City of the Book

I live in Kiryat Sefer we have started a program in Modiin learning with Americans, once a week. Please G-d we are starting a Parsha sheet in English, and I wanted to ask if we can take from previous Ohr Somayach divrei Torah.

• Y. L.

Ohrnet replies: Please take what you like but please credit Ohrnet magazine and Ohr Somayach - www.ohr.edu as the source.

A Whopper of a Hangover

Re: What's the Right Thing To Do - The Unwanted Ambulance (Ohrnet Bechukotai)

Your answer to this question prompts me to make another

question. I understand that one has to pay to such "unwanted" services as far as they were called in order to save his life. But what about abusive conduct in these cases? In the case in question, I wonder why a healthy man was hospitalized for "several days" and not released, just because he got drunk. The following day, when he recovered from the hangover, he could have explained the situation and be released immediately, sparing him additional days of hospital fees. Why this was not so is somewhat a mystery.

Carlos Feldman, Argentina

Ohrnet replies: Good question! Apparently he had a whopper of a hangover or some other condition which prompted the medical authorities in that case to extend his stay briefly. We are not privy to all details of the story, but apparently he could not secure his release the next day and therefore the additional hospitalization was for his benefit.

CAN I JOIN THE CELEBRATION?

Question: A friend of mine is about to complete learning an entire *mesechta* (tractate) of the Talmud and has invited me to participate in a *Seudat Siyum* (completion celebration) he is making in honor of this achievement. Is there any point in my celebrating even though I did not achieve this goal myself?

ANSWER: The source for celebrating a *siyum* is the account in the Talmud of what the Sage Abaye did when one of his disciples completed an entire *Mesechta* (*Mesechta Shabbat 118b*). He made a feast for all his disciples.

Based on this precedent the halachic authorities have ruled that the celebration of a completion of a *mesechta* is

a *seudat mitzvah* for all who participate, even if they did not achieve that goal themselves. Abaye took a cue from King Shlomo who made a feast for all of his servants when he was granted superhuman wisdom by the Creator. The achievement of greater wisdom of Torah is a cause for all Jews to celebrate.

The massive celebrations which recently took place with the *Siyum HaShas* in the Daf Yomi cycle was an expression of this idea. Even though only a fraction of those celebrating had actually completed the study of the entire Talmud, it was a joyous occasion for all the men, women and children who honored the addition to the world of Torah wisdom.

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

HEAVEN-SENT SURPRISE

“God has many emissaries and many ways to take care of us.” This is the conclusion reached by a reader of *Ohrnet* magazine from a personal experience she shared with us in a letter she wrote to us. It was in regard to an article in our Parshat Pekudei “What’s the Right Thing to Do?” column about cab drivers who were advised that they could offer to take a passenger with a strongly unpleasant body odor on the condition that he compensate them for the income they would lose while waiting for the smell to fade and be able to take other passengers. After taking issue with this advice and reminding cab drivers that livelihood is determined from Above, she writes this about her own experience:

“In the first years after we got married, my husband and I went through some hard times. For a while neither of us could find a job. The job my husband finally found was as a

salesman. He traveled around the country and called on businesses and other institutions. He was paid on commission.

At a certain point, my husband had to decide whether he was going to work during *Chol Hamoed*. On the one hand, we were barely on our feet financially. On the other hand, we really could not say that there was halachic justification for his working. He decided that he would take *Chol Hamoed* off, and we would somehow manage without the week’s earnings. When my husband came back to work after the end of the holiday, he was amazed to discover that, while he was away, one of his customers (a business owned, in fact, by a religious Jew who was justified in working during *Chol Hamoed* because his business produced basic foodstuffs) had phoned in an order – an order so large that it made up for the week of not working”.

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