

OHRNET

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PARSHA INSIGHTS

SIGN OF THE TIMES

“You have distinguished Hashem today to be a G-d, and to walk in His ways...” (26:17)

Once there was a man who had to journey many hundreds of miles. Having never ventured so far from home he was concerned that he might stray from the trail, become lost and fall prey to bandits or wild animals. He sought the advice of an experienced traveler. Maybe he should take maps and a compass? The traveler told him not to worry; all he needed to do was to make sure he memorized the name of his destination. And along the trail that he sought to follow he would find signposts clearly indicating his destination. The traveler set out with confidence. And sure enough, before long he came to a fork in the road. He looked up and saw his destination clearly indicated. Smiling to himself he took the road that was signposted.

And thus it continued, day after day, whenever the traveler would come to a crossroads, he would look up at the signpost and take the road that led to his destination. He had been traveling for about a week when one day he came to a crossroads of five different trails. This one, however, was without a signpost. He was gripped with panic — which way to go? He had planned his rations carefully and he knew that he only had enough water to get him to his next destination; there wasn't sufficient to allow him to return. As fear started to gnaw at his stomach, suddenly he saw that

he had been wrong. There was a signpost at this crossroads after all. It had been uprooted and was lying on its side. He rushed over to the signpost and started to replace it in its hole. His elation was short-lived however; for he realized abruptly that he had no way of knowing which way the signpost was supposed to point.

He sank to the ground dejected and despondent. Then, it struck him. He jumped up, took the signpost and oriented the name of the place from where he had come to the direction from which he had been walking. Now he knew precisely which road to take.

The Jewish People are embarked on a world historical journey. In times such as ours where nothing seems certain, it's easy to become despondent. Where is G-d? Where is sanity? Where are we going?

If you know where you've come from, you know where you're going.

The Jewish People have been given the best travel guide known to man. It's called the Torah. G-d wrote the Torah in such a way that it contains all the instructions that the Jewish People will ever need to reach their destination. The word Torah itself comes from the word meaning “instructions.” The *mitzvot* of the Torah are our signposts in a bewildering world. If when we come to life's crossroads we pick our direction at random, we have little chance of success. However, if we orient ourselves on our past, our future is assured.

If you know where you've come from, you know where you're going.

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PARSHA OVERVIEW

When *Bnei Yisrael* dwell in the Land of Israel, the first fruits are to be taken to the Temple and given to the *kohen* in a ceremony expressing recognition that it is G-d who guides Jewish history throughout all ages. (This passage forms one of the central parts of the Haggadah that we read at the Passover Seder.) On the last day of Pesach of the fourth and seventh years of the seven-year *shemita* cycle, a person must recite a disclosure stating that he has indeed distributed the tithes to the appropriate people in the prescribed manner. With this *mitzvah*, Moshe concludes the commandments that G-d has told him to give to the Jewish People. Moshe exhorts them to walk in G-d's ways because they are set aside as a treasured people to G-d. When *Bnei Yisrael*

cross the Jordan River they are to make a new commitment to the Torah. Huge stones are to be erected and the Torah is to be written on them in the world's seventy primary languages, and they are to be covered with a thin layer of plaster. Half the tribes will stand on Mount Gerizim and half on Mount Eval, and the *levi'im* will stand in a valley between the two mountains. There the *levi'im* will recite 12 commandments and all the people will say "amen" to the blessings and the curses. Moshe then details the blessings that will be bestowed upon *Bnei Yisrael*. These blessings are both physical and spiritual. But if the Jewish People do not keep the Torah, Moshe details a chilling picture of destruction, resulting in exile and wandering among the nations.

ISRAEL Forever

ENOUGH TO BE THANKFUL FOR

As Year 5765 draws to a close we look back not only on the year gone by but on three and a half thousands of years of the history of our People. In this week's Torah portion we learn of the *mitzvah* of bringing *bikkurim* (first produce) to the *Beit Hamikdash* and offering thanks to G-d by reciting an encapsulated history of how we got to Eretz Yisrael.

This capsule history, which forms the outline of our Pesach Haggadah account of the Exodus, is striking not only in what it contains but also in what it leaves out. The suffering of our ancestors in Egyptian bondage is graphically described and so is our miraculous liberation. This is immediately followed by mention of our arrival in the "Land flowing with milk and honey". Forty years of wandering in the desert, the record of which fills a substantial part of our Torah, are not mentioned at all.

This is an important lesson in how to deal with histo-

ry. We are commanded by the Torah to constantly remember a number of things which took place during those forty years — the Mount Sinai revelation, the attack of Amalek, the punishment for Miriam's slandering Moshe, and our angering G-d with our misbehavior. But all of those memories are put aside the moment when we say thanks for the privilege of living in our Promised Land and enjoying its fruits. This is the time to focus on one thing alone — the sharp contrast between slavery in a foreign land and freedom in our own and all thanks to G-d who heard the prayers of our ancestors in Egypt and gave us our freedom and our Land.

When we reflect on another year of life in this Land, difficult as it may have been in many ways, we must offer thanks to G-d for sustaining us despite all the hardships, and pray that He will continue to protect Israel forever.

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

OPHRAIM — THE ORIGINAL "COALS TO NEWCASTLE"

Way before there was a Newcastle in England and anyone bringing coal into this coal-rich city, there was a city in Eretz Yisrael where the famous expression originated.

Ophraim's exact location is unknown although some historians place it in the eastern part of lower Galilee. But it is known that it was in the center of an area rich in grain, so that straw was plentiful in Ophraim.



When the Egyptian sorcerers duplicated with their black magic the plague of blood which G-d had brought upon the nation that had refused to free its Hebrew slaves, they assumed that Moshe and Aharon had also used sorcery rather than it being a Divine miracle.

"Are you trying to bring straw into Ophraim which is full of straw," they mockingly said to them, "and are you trying to bring sorcery into Egypt which is full of it?!" (Rashi, *Shmot* 7:22)

PARSHA Q&A ?

1. When historically did the obligation to bring *bikkurim* begin?
2. *Bikkurim* are from which crops?
3. How does one designate *bikkurim*?
4. Who shakes the basket containing the *bikkurim*?
5. What does “*v’anita v’amarta*” mean?
6. Which Arami “tried to destroy my father?”
7. When during the year may *bikkurim* be brought? Until when are the special verses recited?
8. Someone declaring that he separated *terumah* and *ma’aser* says: “And I didn’t forget.” What didn’t he forget?
9. What were the Jewish People to do with the 12 stones on Mt. Eval?
10. Six tribes stood on Mt. Eval and six on Mt. Gerizim. Who and what were in the middle?
11. Who “causes the blind to go astray?”
12. How does one “strike another secretly?”
13. Eleven curses were spoken on Mt. Eval. What is the significance of this number?
14. Why are sheep called “*ashterot*”?
15. How is the manner of expressing the curses in *Parshat Bechukotai* more severe than in this week’s *parsha*?
16. What is meant by “the Jewish People will become a proverb?”
17. Why did all the curses expressed in 48:16-44 befall the Jewish People?
18. “In the morning you shall say, ‘If only it were (last) evening’ and in the evening you will say, ‘If only it were (this) morning.’” Why?
19. To which tribe did Moshe give the Torah first?
20. How long does it take to understand the depth of one’s teacher’s wisdom?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week’s Questions!

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

1. 26:1 - After the Land was conquered and divided.
2. 26:2 - The seven species for which *Eretz Yisrael* is praised: Wheat, barley, grapes, olives, figs, dates, and pomegranates.
3. 26:2 - When he sees the first fruit ripen on a tree, he binds a piece of straw around it to mark it as *bikkurim*.
4. 26:4 - The *kohen* places his hands under the hands of the one bringing it, and they wave the basket together.
5. 26:5 - Speak loudly.
6. 26:5 - Lavan.
7. 26:11 - *Bikkurim* are brought from Shavuot until Chanukah. The verses are recited only until Succot.
8. 26:13 - To bless Hashem.
9. 10. 27:2 - Build an altar.
10. 27:12 - *Kohanim*, *levi'im* and the Holy Ark.
11. 27:18 - Any person who intentionally gives bad advice.
12. 27:24 - By slandering him.
13. 27:24 - Each curse corresponds to one of the tribes, except for the tribe of Shimon. Since Moshe didn’t intend to bless the tribe of Shimon before his death, he did not want to curse them either.
14. 28:4 - Because they “enrich” (*m’ashiro*) their owners.
15. 28:23 - In *Bechukotai* the Torah speaks in the plural, whereas in this week’s *Parsha* the curses are mentioned in the singular.
16. 28:37 - Whenever someone wants to express the idea of extraordinary suffering, they will use the Jewish People as an example.
17. 28:47 - Because they did not serve Hashem with gladness when everything was abundant.
18. 28:67 - Because the curse of each hour will be greater than that of the previous hour.
19. 29:3 - To the Tribe of Levi.
20. 29:8 - 40 years.

לע"נ
ר' יצחק אייזיק בן ר' אליעזר בער ז"ל
ומרת שרה חנה בת ר' משה לויב ע"ה
ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

- Handling *muktzah* in hand of child or on top of barrel of fruit
- When *muktzah* can be moved by placing child or bread on it
- Removing bones and shells from a table and using a sponge
- Saving wine running out of a broken barrel
- Making juice from fruit and using juice which came out of it
- Squeezing out the liquid from fish, pickled and cooked vegetables
- Soaking and rinsing foods with hot water
- Two ways of viewing the Sages of Babylon
- Two views on when our people shed mankind's primeval impurity
- Breaking open a container to enjoy its contents
- Avoiding something done privately because publicly it arouses suspicion
- When clothes can be considered forbidden to carry
- Drying a wet body and carrying the towel
- Bodily care and dangers of indulgence
- Borrowing food and drink from a neighbor
- Forbidden reading and division of food portions
- The horrors of Nebuchadnetzer

WHEN CLOTHES “MAKE THE MAN”

Why are the Sages of Babylon so particular about their dress? This, among other differences between Eretz Yisrael and Babylon, were being discussed by two Eretz Yisrael Sages, Rabbi Chiya bar Abba and Rabbi Asi. These two disciples of Rabbi Yochanan speculated on these matters while their master was dozing nearby.

The reason they came up with was that the Sages in Babylon were not sufficiently great in their Torah knowledge to merit the respect of the public and therefore relied on the dignified appearance they made.

Rabbi Yochanan overheard their explanation and, upon fully awakening, rebuked them for reaching conclusions in matters in which they lacked clarity of understanding. When asked for his own answer, Rabbi Yochanan took a more generous approach to these foreign Sages who were sometimes viewed as competitors to the Eretz Yisrael Sages.

“Because,” he explained, “they are not in their own country. This is the meaning of the folk saying that ‘in my own city I am respected for my name alone but outside of it I have to rely on my attire.’”

• *Shabbat 146b*

WHAT THE SAGES SAY

“Travel to a place where you can study Torah with others and do not say that the Torah will come to you; for your colleagues will ensure that you hold on to your Torah knowledge and you must not rely only on your own intelligence.”

• *Rabbi Nehorai - Shabbat 147b*

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

THE KIBBUTZ BAKER'S LEGACY

The inscription on the tombstone marking the graves of Yankele Tofor and his wife is hardly what one expects to find on a Jewish monument in Israel. The recording of the dates of birth and death only according to the civil calendar is not too surprising since this couple lived and died in the secular Kibbutz Na'an. What is surprising is the “legacy” of this kibbutz baker which his survivors decided to transmit to future generations.

What did they consider the most fitting legacy of a man who had achieved culinary fame for his pastry?

The recipe for “Yankele's Yeast Cake”!

There it is, with the ingredients and measurements for doing it yourself. Tofor family members say they have received a number of calls from people who said they visited the grave and copied the recipe.

But why, they were asked, were there no instructions as to how to use the recipe? Their answer was that anyone who knows anything about baking needs no instructions.

Perhaps they should be told that anyone who erects such a monument for his father does need instructions as to what sort of legacy he expects to be written on his own tombstone.

WISHY WASHING

From: Susan in Norfolk, VA

Dear Rabbi,

As a newly religious, single person, I am often a guest at different people's houses for Shabbat meals. Regarding the washing after the meal before bentching, I have noticed different customs which I don't quite understand. Some families do it, others don't. Why? And even harder to understand is why in some families the men do it but the women don't. Either do it, or don't – why men yes, women no. Isn't bentching a mitzvah for women too?

Dear Susan,

I am happy that you have become inspired by Judaism and have become observant. May Hashem also provide you with the right person at the right time to build your own home with, in which you can share your inspiration with guests of your own.

Your questions are very insightful and appropriate.

The source for the washing you mention, called "*mayim acharonim*" in Hebrew, is based on the verse, "You shall sanctify yourselves and be sanctified" (Lev. 20). Our Sages (Berachot 53b) understood that this double mention of sanctity refers to washing the hands before and after meals. Two reasons are given for the need to wash after the meal: 1] The hands must be cleaned of food before *bentching*, in deference to the blessing. 2] Salt from Sodom used during the meal must be washed from the hands to guard one from touching the eyes and damaging them (Chullin 105 a,b).

Since we usually eat with utensils and not with our hands, and since searing Sodom salt is hardly found among us, some authorities are of the opinion that "*mayim acharonim*" is no longer required. Others argue that we still often eat with our hands (consider oily French fries or juicy barbecue ribs), and that some Sodom salt might still make it to your corn-on-the-cob. Further, they posit, even if Sodom salt isn't around, regular salt in your eyes may not be the healthiest thing either. Therefore, they

maintain that "*mayim acharonim*" is still required. Both opinions are mentioned in *halacha* (see Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 181) and both have become accepted by different communities. That's why some people do it, and some don't.

Is there any reason why men should wash and women not? Aside from the well-known fact that women are neater eaters than men (joke, no offense guys), there may be a *halachic* distinction:

It's true that *bentching* is a mitzvah for women too. After all, it is a positive commandment that is not bound by time. For this reason, many authorities consider the obligation for women to be of Torah origin. However, many others consider it to be only rabbinic, since the obligation to *bentch* mentioned in the Torah is juxtaposed with inheriting the land of Israel, which was done primarily by the male leaders of the Tribes (see Sh. Ar., Or. Ch. 186).

This is another case, as above, where there is not a definitive resolution. One practical difference as to whether the obligation for women to *bentch* is of Torah or rabbinic origin is as follows: If a woman ate a proper meal of bread and is in doubt as to whether she *bentched* or not, if her requirement is from the Torah, she must *bentch* again. But if it is only rabbinic, she should not on account of the doubt risk saying the blessings unnecessarily (*ibid.*).

This line of reasoning may be used to answer your last question as to why the custom developed among some people that men wash "*mayim acharonim*" but women don't. As explained above, it is not clear that there is an obligation for anyone nowadays, men or women, to wash after the meals. However, if the requirement to *bentch* is from the Torah, as with men, there may be more reason to be strict and wash. However, if the requirement is only rabbinic, as with women according to many opinions, there may be more room for leniency, since anyway many hold that "*mayim acharonim*" is no longer applicable.

That being said, it's worth mentioning that great *halachic* authorities have accepted the opinion of the kabbalists that everyone should wash "*mayim acharonim*" for reasons other than those given above. May we sanctify ourselves and be sanctified!

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TELLING THE PATIENT IT WILL PASS

Question: A neighbor of mine recently told me that her doctor diagnosed her as having a particular illness. Because of my own medical background she asked me if I thought the illness would pass. The truth is that I had no real idea whether she would get over it but I wanted to make her feel good. What is the right thing to do in such a case?

Answer: A similar question was put to Rabbi Yitzchak Zilberstein, rav of the Ramat Elchanan community in Bnei Brak. His response was that it is proper in such a case to deviate from the truth and to assure her that, from a medical point of view, the illness will pass. If the

halacha permits a eulogizer to exaggerate somewhat in his *hesped* in order to honor the deceased, it is certainly proper to exaggerate in order to spare a living person from anxiety.

Rabbi Zilberstein added an anecdote about a follower of a Chassidic leader whose son was mortally ill. When the rebbe promised him that his son would live, the other Chassidim wondered how he could thus go out on a limb. His reply was that all he could fear if he was proven wrong was that his followers would lose faith in him and abandon him.

“All of that doesn’t matter,” concluded this *tzaddik*, “if I can bring a little comfort to a sick Jew and his family.”

THE STORMY WIND WHICH DOES HIS BIDDING

by Rabbi Mendel Weinbach

“**W**ake up you slumberers from your deep sleep, examine your behavior, repent your sins and remember your Creator.”

This is the message of the shofar sound, writes Rambam (*Laws of Repentance 3:4*), to “those who forget the truth as a result of being preoccupied with transient, meaningless matters.”

This message of the shofar was written by Rambam about the shofar sounds we make on Rosh Hashanah. The widespread custom, however, is to sound the shofar after the morning service for an entire month before Rosh Hashanah in order to wake us up to the need to properly prepare for the Awesome Days of Judgment which are approaching.

This year there was a mighty shofar blast which preceded the ones we make. It was the shofar of G-d Who sent a mighty hurricane - “the stormy wind which does His bidding” (*Tehillim 148:8*) - to wake up an entire world.

The worldwide response of empathy for the victims of this disaster and the outpouring of assistance, including volunteers and supplies from Israel and from Jewish communities in the U.S., are certainly worthy of praise. But this is not enough!

Hurricanes may be popularly labeled “natural disasters”, but anyone who is willing to take a deeper look can see the Divine energy in the eye of the storm. The message is clear for all of mankind and especially for the Jewish People who have been granted the privilege of return to G-d during the special Days of Atonement and this month of Elul preceding them.

We join the world in prayer for those who can yet be saved and whose lives and homes can be rebuilt. We wish the U.S. president and his administration the greatest success in recovering from this tragedy. But most of all we look forward to the entire world waking up in time to avert another disaster.