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PARSHA INSIGHTS

INTERFACE

It's an almost universal Jewish custom to welcome Shabbat with the beautiful liturgical poem *Lecha Dodi*. In the chorus of *Lecha Dodi* it says, "Let us welcome the face of Shabbat."

How can Shabbat have 'a face'?

Nothing is merely poetic in Judaism. We can be sure that Rabbi Shlomo Alkabetz, the great Kabbalist who composed *Lecha Dodi*, hid many mystical layers behind the surface beauty of that idea.

What is the face of Shabbat?

Every face is unique.

From the first face that ever gazed at this world until the last one that turns out the lights, no two faces have ever been, or will ever be, identical.

And yet, if you think about it, the face contains too few variables to support this astounding diversity. Two eyes, two ears, a nose, a mouth, some hair; how is it possible that billions and billions of faces containing essentially the same few components be unique?

Another thing. The face is the only part of the body where you can recognize someone. You cannot positively identify a person by the hand or the foot; there's little difference between one hand and another. Differences of gender age and race may contribute a few distinguishing factors, but a person's identity — the personality — is expressed only in the face.

Why is the face the sole residence of our uniqueness and individuality?

A human being is a combination of a body and a soul; the place where you can see that connection, the place where the body and the soul meet, is the human face.

The radiance of the human face is quite literally the 'interface' between the flesh and the spirit.

The Talmud tells us that G-d told Moshe that He had a special gift in his treasury that He wanted to give to the Jewish People — Shabbat. What is so special about Shabbat? What makes it more of a gift than any of the many other ways G-d gave us to connect to Him?

One of the songs we sing on Shabbat calls Shabbat an experience that is *m'ayn olam haba*, "like the World-to-Come." In fact the proportion of the Shabbat experience to the experience of the next world is 1:59. That proportion is the threshold of taste. At 1:60 one can no longer discern the taste of the one part in the mixture. Shabbat is such a special gift because some of its reward can be experienced here even while we are on this plane of existence. Usually, the reward for a mitzvah cannot be experienced in this world. This world is too small, its scope too limited to be able to give value for the currency of the next world. Shabbat is different. Even while we are still here in this world, restricted by our bodies and living a physical existence, Shabbat allows us to experience something beyond this world.

Our mystical sources say that G-d blessed the Seventh Day with the radiance of the face of man. How can we understand this comparison? What does Shabbat have to do with the radiance of the human face?

Just as the human face is the place where one can see the connection between the physical and the spiritual, so too Shabbat reveals the connection between the physical and the spiritual worlds.

The phrase in *Lecha Dodi*, "Let us welcome the 'face' of Shabbat", hints to this interface between this world and the world beyond.

Shabbat is where you can see the connection between the body of the world and its spirit.

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PARSHA OVERVIEW

Hearing of the miracles G-d performed for *Bnei Yisrael*, Moshe's father-in-law Yitro arrives with Moshe's wife and sons, reuniting the family in the wilderness. Yitro is so impressed by Moshe's detailing of the Exodus from Egypt that he converts to Judaism. Seeing that the only judicial authority for the entire Jewish nation is Moshe himself, Yitro suggests that subsidiary judges be appointed to adjudicate smaller matters, leaving Moshe free to attend to larger issues. Moshe accepts his advice. *Bnei Yisrael* arrive at Mt. Sinai where G-d offers them the Torah. After they accept, G-d charges Moshe to instruct the people not to approach the mountain and to prepare for three days. On the third day, amidst thunder and lightning, G-d's voice emanates from the smoke-enshrouded

mountain and He speaks to the Jewish People, giving them the Ten Commandments: 1. Believe in G-d, 2. Don't worship other "gods", 3. Don't use G-d's name in vain, 4. Observe Shabbat, 5. Honor your parents, 6. Don't murder, 7. Don't commit adultery, 8. Don't kidnap, 9. Don't testify falsely, 10. Don't covet.

After receiving the first two commandments, the Jewish People, overwhelmed by this experience of the Divine, request that Moshe relay G-d's word to them. G-d instructs Moshe to caution the Jewish People regarding their responsibility to be faithful to the One who spoke to them.

ISRAEL Forever

ANCIENT ADVICE FOR CURRENT CORRUPTION

When Yitro, for whom this week's Torah portion is named, gave some advice to his son-in-law Moshe, he urged him to be careful in selecting men to help him in judging the People of Israel.

It was not sufficient that they be "able, G-d fearing, men of truth". They also had to be people who "hated unjust gain".

Without this last quality of being averse to gaining wealth in any manner tainted with injustice, it was unreasonable to expect one in authority to be perfectly objective.

This advice seems so relevant to the current situation in Israel. People in the highest levels of government are being investigated and even indicted for exploiting their power for personal or political party benefit. This atmosphere of corruption poses a serious threat to the moral survival of the country.

It is hoped that Yitro's caution will penetrate the hearts and minds of those who elect and appoint the people responsible for judging and leading who will be fit to secure Israel forever.

LOVE OF THE LAND - THE PLACES

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael

KEFAR HAROEH – TRIBUTE TO A VISIONARY

Rabbi Avraham HaKohen Kook was the first Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi in Eretz Yisrael, years before the establishment of the State of Israel. His memory is honored by a settlement near Hadera name Kefar Haroeh. The Hebrew letters making up this name correspond to R(abbi) A(vraham) H(aKohen), which are the initials



of this great Torah scholar, and also form the Hebrew word *roeh* (visionary), a tribute to Rabbi Kook's vision of a Jewish State which has inspired the National Religious Movement.

Kefar Haroeh is also the home of the first Bnei Akiva yeshiva and a favorite site for summer camps of religious institutions.

PARSHA Q&A ?

1. Yitro had 7 names. Why was one of his names *Yeter*?
2. News of which two events motivated Yitro to come join the Jewish People?
3. What name of Yitro indicates his love for Torah?
4. Why was Tzipora with her father, Yitro, and not with Moshe when *Bnei Yisrael* left Egypt?
5. Why does verse 18:5 say that Yitro came to the desert — don't we already know that the *Bnei Yisrael* were in the desert?
6. Why did Moshe tell Yitro all that G-d had done for the Jewish People?
7. According to the *Midrash* quoted by Rashi, how did Yitro respond when he was told about the destruction of Egypt?
8. Who is considered as if he enjoys the splendor of the *Shechina*?
9. On what day did Moshe sit to judge the Jewish People?
10. Who is considered a co-partner in Creation?
11. "Moshe sat to judge the people, and the people stood before Moshe...." What bothered Yitro about this arrangement?
12. Why did Yitro return to his own land?
13. How did the encampment at Sinai differ from the other encampments?
14. To whom does the Torah refer when it uses the term "*Beit Yaakov*"?
15. How is G-d's protection of the Jewish People similar to an eagle's protection of its young?
16. What was G-d's original plan for *Matan Torah*? What was the response of the Jewish People?
17. How many times greater is the "measure of reward" than the "measure of punishment"?
18. How is it derived that "Don't steal" refers to kidnapping?
19. In response to hearing the Torah given at Sinai, how far backwards did the Jewish people retreat in fear?
20. Why does the use of iron tools profane the altar?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

1. 18:1 - Because he caused a parsha to be added to the Torah. *Yeter* means addition.
2. 18:1 - The splitting of the sea and the war against Amalek.
3. 18:1 - Chovav.
4. 18:3 - When Aharon met Moshe with his family on their way down to Egypt, Aharon said to Moshe: "We're pained over the Jews already in Egypt, and you're bringing more Jews to Egypt?" Moshe, hearing this, sent his wife and children back to Midian.
5. 18:5 - To show Yitro's greatness. He was living in a luxurious place; yet he went to the desert in order to study the Torah.
6. 18:8 - To draw Yitro closer to the Torah way of life.
7. 18:9 - He grieved.
8. 18:12 - One who dines with Torah scholars.
9. 18:13 - The day after Yom Kippur.
10. 18:13 - A judge who renders a correct decision.
11. 18:14 - Yitro felt that the people weren't being treated with the proper respect.
12. 18:27 - To convert the members of his family to Judaism.
13. 19:2 - The Jewish People were united.
14. 19:3 - The Jewish women.
15. 19:4 - An eagle carries its young on top of its wings to protect them from human arrows. So too, G-d's cloud of glory separated between the Egyptians and the Jewish camp in order to absorb Egyptian missiles and arrows fired at the Jewish People.
16. 19:9 - G-d offered to appear to Moshe and to give the Torah through him. The Jewish People responded that they wished to hear the Torah directly from G-d.
17. 20:6 - 500 times.
18. 20:13 - Since it is written immediately after "Don't murder" and "Don't commit adultery," it is derived that "Don't steal" refers to a crime carrying the same penalty as the first two, namely, the death penalty.
19. 20:15 - They backed away from the mountain twelve *mil* (one *mil* is 2000 cubits).
20. 20:22 - The altar was created to extend life; iron is sometimes used to make weapons which shorten life.

- The days in Adar when the *megilah* is read and the sources in *Megilat Esther* for this variety
- The cities with walls dating back to Yehoshua or to Achashverosh
- The double letters of the alphabet and the Targum translation
- An unseen source of fear and what to do about it
- Putting aside Temple service and Torah study to hear *megilah* reading
- Qualifications for consideration as a walled city
- Obligation of women and the need to read *megilah* both by night and by day
- Why the villagers can read earlier than those in the cities
- What happens when Adar 14th is on *Erev Shabbat* (Friday) or on Shabbat
- When a *minyán* is needed for *megilah* reading
- Things that are postponed if they clash with Shabbat
- Festival sacrifices of individuals on Shabbat and Yom Tov
- Working on Purim
- Tiberias, Tzipori and Caesarea
- How learning is acquired and how to relate to a sinner enjoying prosperity
- When there are two months of Adar
- Esther's request for the *megilah* to become Scripture
- Proofs that the *megilah* was written with *ruach hakodesh* (Divine inspiration)
- The *mishloach manot* (sending of Purim gifts) and Purim feasts of some Sages
- Comparison of Shabbat and Yom Tov restrictions and Shabbat and Yom Kippur severity
- Comparison of vows, of the two-time *zav* and the three-time *zav*, and of the two-stages of *metzora*

DRINK TO THINK

“A man should drink so much on Purim,” rules the Sage Rava, “that he is no longer aware of the difference between ‘cursed be Haman’ and ‘blessed be Mordechai’.”

It has always been traditional for Jews celebrating the miracle of Purim to sing those words of praise for the hero of the *megilah* and of condemnation for the villain. Is the drinking then intended to blur the difference between appreciation and denunciation?

Perhaps the message here is that anyone who is rescued by Heaven from danger must be thankful not only for the salvation but also for the experience that preceded it. As the beneficiary of Providential grace which

gave him life, he has reached a higher level of recognizing and appreciating Heaven's power and mercy.

“Blessed be Mordechai” is an expression of our joy at being rescued through the emissary of Divine intervention, while “Cursed be Haman” recalls the genocidal threat which aroused an entire nation to repentance.

Joyfully drinking on Purim should therefore lead a Jew to thinking about what we gained — not only from being saved through Mordechai, but also for how we grew spiritually through experiencing the threat of Haman.

The purpose of drink is then to think, and not merely to get drunk.

• *Megilah 7b*

WHAT THE Sages SAY

“If someone tells you he made a strenuous effort but did not succeed, don't believe him; that he succeeded without a strenuous effort, don't believe him; believe him only when he tells you that he made that effort and succeeded. But this is true only in regard to success in learning Torah. In matters of business everything depends on Heavenly help.”

• *Rabbi Yitzchak - Megilah 6b*

THE WRAP ON TZITZIT

From: Ben Cohen

Dear Rabbi,

I saw your response to a recent question on the shins of tefillin. I have a similar question on tzitzit: What is the significance of the strings, knots and windings on the fringes of the tallit?

Dear Ben,

The *tzitzit* are intended to remind us of the commandments and to express our commitment to do them: "Speak to the sons of Israel that they make *tzitzit* on the corners of their garments for all generations and they shall place a [specific] blue thread there...And you shall see it and recall all My commandments and do them...and be holy to your G-d...I am your G-d" (Num. 15). The number of strings, knots and windings, and the way they are tied thus reflect this idea.

Before going into more detail, a word on the blue thread. Our sources require that the blue thread be obtained from a creature referred to as the *chilazon*. We are not certain what this creature was/is, nor how to obtain its special blue dye. However, since the verse initially mandates making *tzitzit* for all generations, and only later mentions the blue thread, the mitzvah of *tzitzit* is not dependent on this blue string. Therefore the use of a blue string has generally fallen out of use and the knots and windings are all with white wool threads.

Each corner of the four-cornered *tzitzit* has a small hole through it. Four strings are threaded through it and

folded over to form eight threads. These eight strings are tied in two half-knots (like the knot tied before the bow when tying shoe laces), and then one of the eight threads is wound around the others a specific number of times. Then two more half-knots are tied, and the string is wound around again. This process is performed five times so that on each corner there are eight strings and five knots with four winded sections between the knots. These winded sections are comprised of 7,8,11 and 13 windings respectively.

As mentioned above, *tzitzit* in general, and the way they are tied in particular, are intended to remind us of the *mitzvot* and to perform them. This is emphasized in the following teaching: The word *tzitzit* is spelled with the Hebrew letters *tzadee, yud, tzadee, yud, taf*. Since each Hebrew letter has a numeric equivalent, *tzitzit* equals $90+10+90+10+400$, or 600. Together with the eight strings and five knots, *tzitzit* have the numeric equivalent of the 613 *mitzvot* they are intended to recall.

If the strings and knots make the connection between *tzitzit* and recalling the *mitzvot*, the 7,8,11 and 13 windings resonate the verse's juxtaposition of *tzitzit* and "I am your G-d". There are a total of 39 windings, which is the numerical equivalent of "Hashem Echad" – G-d is One. The windings of the *tzitzit* thus allude to G-d's Unity that binds everything together. This is particular to the specific windings as well: The 7+8 (= 15) windings correspond to the first two letters of G-d's Name, *yud* (10) and *hey* (5), (= 15), while the 11 windings correspond to the last two letters of the Name, *vav* (6) and *hey* (5), (= 11). The final 13 windings corresponds to the word "*echad*" and denotes the way in which His Unity is expressed in the world through the 13 Divine Attributes of Mercy.

WHAT'S THE RIGHT THING TO DO?

REAL-LIFE QUESTIONS OF SOCIAL AND BUSINESS ETHICS

WHAT BLESSING DO I MAKE?

Question: As a strict observer of *kashrut* I always look for the rabbinical organization seal of approval on any product I purchase. I sometimes, however, find myself in a dilemma when I read the ingredients and realize that I am not clear as to which blessing I should make. What is the right thing to do?

Answer: It is a fact that with very few exceptions products certified as kosher have no indication on their labeling as to which blessing is to be made upon consuming them. A chasidic leader in Israel conducted a campaign some years ago

to compel local companies to include this information on their packaging but did not succeed. There are almost certainly reasons for this, so it will probably be an exercise in futility to pursue the course of customer pressure.

What may be advisable is to contact the heads of the certifying organizations and ask them to provide you with a list of the products under their supervision and the blessing that must be made. If this fails to produce results, you can always consult your local Orthodox rabbi or one of the many books and pamphlets that list a wide variety of foods and the blessings to be made upon them.

PLAYING MUSICAL COATS

“I bought this coat here but it is not exactly what I want and I would like to exchange it for another.”

This was the request made by a woman to the people running the Begged Yad LeYad Used Clothing Center in Jerusalem. Her wish was granted and she walked out with the coat she liked, leaving the old one behind. Soon afterwards another customer entered with a similar request, and she ended up exchanging the coat she was wearing for the one that the previous customer had left behind.

As if this were not enough, a third lady came soon after-

wards and exchanged her coat for the one that her predecessor had discarded. This lady, however, spiced her visit with a humorous accusation that the *Gemach* (the Hebrew term for a service such as this) was causing her trouble!

She went on to explain that when she went to a government office to plead for a reduction in taxes based on her economic plight the clerk remarked that the nice clothes she wore belied her plea of poverty. In response she told the clerk that she purchased her clothes for virtual pennies at the *Gemach* and they did not reflect her real financial situation.

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