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PARSHA INSIGHTS

QUESTIONS THAT ARE ANSWERS

“But if you do not listen to Me and will not perform all of these commandments... then I will do the same to you...” (26:15-16)

The late eighteenth century witnessed a lemming-like dive into apostasy of many Jews. Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin once had such a pupil who, because of his great respect for his former teacher, had continued to keep contact with him.

Rabbi Chaim once asked him why he had stopped being observant. The pupil replied that many doubts and questions had begun to plague him about his faith.

Rabbi Chaim asked him when these questions started troubling him, before or after he lapsed observance. The student replied that his questions bothered him only *after* he had dropped out.

“In that case,” said Rabbi Chaim, “your questions are not questions — they are answers. And for answers, I have no answers.”

Nobody wants to feel they’re doing something wrong. We would rather change the rules than face a foul.

Every Jew has, at some point, been confronted by questions about his faith. To every question, there is an answer. Faith, however, is more than having all the answers. Faith is not just the extinction of intellectual doubt; faith is a *midda*, a character trait. And like every other trait, it can be strengthened or weakened.

We can believe that anger is a serious character flaw, but unless we concretize this awareness by constant inculcation we will go to our graves as angry people. Moreover, if we fail to curb our anger, it will grow, with each outburst providing the tinder for a yet greater con-

flagration.

When we do something to damage our spirituality, we can admit the mistake, regret our actions and take advantage of the miraculous process called *teshuva*, which effectively re-writes the past.

Or, if we don’t choose that path, we will have to go into a state of spiritual denial.

And that’s very dangerous.

“But if you do not listen to Me and will not perform all of these commandments... then I will do the same to you...”

Rashi comments that this verse contains seven kinds of spiritual negativity. Each step down leads to the one below.

Ben Azai says in the Ethics of the Fathers (4:2): “Run to do even a small mitzvah and flee from an *aveira* (sin), because a mitzvah leads to another mitzvah and an *aveira* leads to another *aveira*, since the reward for a mitzvah is a mitzvah, and the reward for an *aveira* is an *aveira*.”

When we bring spiritual fall-out into ourselves, that negativity opens up further landscapes of spiritual desolation the likes of which we had no idea existed beforehand.

And on the other hand, when we bring greater spirituality into our lives by curbing our lower selves, the Heavens will open to reveal to us undreamed of vistas of holiness.

• Source: Based on Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe

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PARSHA OVERVIEW

BEHAR

The Torah prohibits normal farming of the Land of Israel every seven years. This “Shabbat” for the land is called “*shemita*”. The year 5768 will be a *shemita* year in Israel. After every seventh *shemita*, the fiftieth year, *yovel* (jubilee) is announced with the sound of the shofar on Yom Kippur. This was also a year for the Land to lie fallow. G-d promises to provide a bumper crop prior to the *shemita* and *yovel* years. During *yovel*, all land is returned to its original division from the time of Joshua, and all Jewish indentured servants are freed, even if they have not completed their six years of work. A Jewish indentured servant may not be given any demeaning, unnecessary or excessively difficult work, and may not be sold in the public market. The price of his labor must be calculated according to the amount of time remaining until he will automatically become free. The price of land is similarly calculated. Should anyone sell his ancestral land, he has the right to redeem it after two years. If a house in a walled city is sold, the right of redemption is limited to

the first year after the sale. The Levites’ cities belong to them forever. The Jewish People are forbidden to take advantage of one another by lending or borrowing with interest. Family members should redeem any relative who was sold as an indentured servant as a result of impoverishment.

BECHUKOTAI

The Torah promises prosperity for the Jewish People if they follow G-d’s commandments. However, if they fail to live up to the responsibility of being the Chosen People, then chilling punishments will result. The Torah details the harsh historical process that will fall upon them when Divine protection is removed. These punishments, whose purpose is to bring the Jewish People to repent, will be in seven stages, each more severe than the last. *Sefer Vayikra*, the book of Leviticus, concludes with the details of *erachin* – the process by which someone vows to give the *Beit Hamikdash* the equivalent monetary value of a person, an animal or property.

ISRAEL Forever

THE LOBBY LEFT IN THE LURCH

A minimal respect for the religious tradition of the Jewish People has certainly been one of the most important elements preserving unity in Israel despite the wide gap between different segments. The leaders of modern secular Zionism such as Ben Gurion and Jabotinsky went on record to stress the need for maintaining some connection with religious tradition in order to keep the Jewish People together.

An attempt to deviate from this pattern was recently made by Knesset Member Yossi Beilin who boldly announced the creation of a Knesset lobby “for the advancement of secularism” and invited his fellow MKs to join.

Beilin’s initiative was a major flop as only four MKs

showed up at his founding meeting. The big surprise was that not all the members of his own anti-religious leftist party bothered to come.

The danger to our people arising from abandonment of religion is spelled out in the Torah portion of this week that concludes *Chumash Vayikra*.

It is encouraging to see that despite the lack of religious observance amongst the overwhelming majority of the members of Israel’s parliament there is still a reluctance to publicly lobby for total secularism. This may be the spark for an even greater identification with the religious tradition that alone can guarantee the security of Israel forever.

Special Contest! “What are the Top Ten Reasons to be Jewish?”

Ohrnet thanks the many readers who wrote witty, thoughtful and inspiring Top Ten lists last week for this contest. We continue the contest another week — your chance to express your connection to Judaism with sincerity and humor.

Please send your replies to ohr@ohr.edu and your answers just might be accepted for publication, prizes, and furthering a worthy cause!

BEHAR

1. If one possesses *shemita* food after it is no longer available in the field, what must he do with it?
2. From where does the *yovel* year get its name?
3. What prohibitions are derived from the verse “*v'lo tonu ish et amito* — a person shall not afflict his fellow”?
4. If a home in a walled city is sold, when can it be redeemed?
5. What does the word “days” mean in this week’s Parsha?
6. What is considered a walled city?
7. To what is one who leaves *Eretz Yisrael* compared?
8. Why does Rashi mention the plague of the firstborn in this week’s Parsha?
9. List three prohibitions which demonstrate the dignity with which one must treat a Jewish indentured servant.
10. Where is it permitted to prostrate oneself on a stone floor?

BECHUKOTAI

1. To what do the words “*bechukotai telechu*” refer?
2. When is rain “in its season”?
3. What is meant by “you shall eat your bread to satisfaction”?
4. What is meant by “and a sword will not pass through your land”?
5. Which progression of seven transgressions are taught in Chapter 26, and why in that particular order?
6. What is one benefit which the Jewish People derive from the Land of Israel’s state of ruin?
7. What positive element is implied by the words “and I will bring them into the land of their enemies”?
8. In verse 26:42, why is the word “remember” not used in connection with the name of Yitzchak?
9. What happens when a poor person dedicates the value of a person to the Beit Hamikdash and doesn’t have sufficient funds to fulfill his vow?
10. Where must “*ma’aser sheini*” be eaten?

Answers to this Week’s Questions!

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

BEHAR

1. 25:7 - Remove it from his property and declare it ownerless.
2. 25:10 - From the sounding of the shofar. A ram’s horn is called a *yovel*.
3. 25:17 - One may not intentionally hurt people’s feelings, nor give bad advice while secretly intending to reap benefit.
4. 25:29 - Only within the first year after the sale.
5. 25:29 - The days of an entire year.
6. 25:29 - A city surrounded by a wall since the time of Yehoshua.
7. 25:38 - To one who worships idols.
8. 25:38 - The prohibition against taking interest is accompanied by the phrase “I am the L-rd your G-d who took you out of Egypt.” Rashi explains that just as G-d discerned in Egypt between those who were first-born and those who were not, so too will G-d discern and punish those who lend with interest, pretending they are acting on behalf of others.
9. 25:39-43 - a) Do not make him perform humiliating tasks; b) Do not sell him publicly; c) Do not make him perform unnecessary jobs.
10. 26:1 - In the Mikdash.

BECHUKOTAI

1. 26:3 - Laboring in the study of Torah.

2. 26:4 - At times when people are not outside (e.g., Shabbat nights).
3. 26:5 - You will only require a little bread to be completely satisfied.
4. 26:6 - No foreign army will travel through your land even on their way to a different country.
5. 26:14,15 - Not studying Torah, not observing mitzvot, rejecting those who observe mitzvot, hating Sages, preventing others from observing mitzvot, denying that G-d gave the mitzvot, denying the existence of G-d. They are listed in this order because each transgression leads to the next.
6. 26:32 - No enemy nation will be able to settle in the Land of Israel.
7. 26:41 - G-d Himself, so to speak, will bring them into their enemies’ land. This means that even when the Jews are in exile, G-d will supply them with leaders who inspire them to keep the Torah. This guards the Jews from assimilating into the host culture.
8. 26:42 - Because the image of Yitzchak’s ashes (Yitzchak was prepared to be brought as an offering) upon the altar is always before G-d.
9. 27:8 - The person whose value was donated goes before the *kohen*, who sets the obligation according to the poor person’s ability to pay.
10. 27:30 - In Jerusalem.

- For which unintentional sins are sacrifices required as atonement
- Which cases of problematic *yibum* are not discussed in the *Mishna*
- Status of the *yivamah* who received *chalitzah* from one of the brothers in regard to relations with him or his brothers
- Status of the *tzarah* of the *yivamah* in regard to relations with the brothers of the *yavum* after his making *yibum*
- Status of the *tzarah* of a *yivamah* disqualified from *yibum* because of marital infidelity
- How the concept of “don’t pour out the water needed by others” affects the choice of which *yivamah* to give *yibum* or *chalitzah*
- Status of the *tzarah* of other women ineligible for *yibum*
- Which women are permitted to use contraception
- Giving birth as evidence of a girl reaching adulthood
- Status of the *tzarah* if marriage of the ineligible *yivamah* came to an end before the death of the brother
- The great debate as to whether the brother of the deceased may marry the *tzarah* of the disqualified *yivamah*
- The problem of two groups of Jews following different rulings
- Whether Beit Shammai actually practiced their own lenient ruling regarding the *tzarah* of disqualified *yivamah*

ALONE OR AGENT?

When a man dies without children one of his surviving brothers has a mitzvah of *yibum* to perform by marrying the widow. Should he be reluctant to do so he has the option of performing the ritual of *chalitzah*, which frees the widow to marry outside the family.

How do we view his performance of *chalitzah*? Is it a *personal* act which removes from the widow the status of a brother’s wife with whom forbidden relations are punishable by *karet* (extirpation), thus reducing the penalty for marrying her to only lashes, without affecting the continued relationship of his brothers to the *yivamah* with whom marriage will still be punishable by *karet*? Or do we view him as an *agent* for his brothers, and whatever he achieves with

chalitzah in removing the widow’s status as the dead brother’s wife applies to his brothers as well?

The same question arises in regard to the *tzarot* — those other wives of the deceased with whom no *chalitzah* was done. Does the *chalitzah* affect only the widow, removing the penalty of *karet* for relations with the brother who gave her *chalitzah*, but leaves this penalty intact as far as the *tzarot* are concerned, both for him and his brothers? Or do we view the recipient of *chalitzah* as an *agent* for *all* of the wives of the deceased, and therefore reducing the penalty for all of the brothers having relations with them?

These two approaches represent the opinions of Rabbi Yochanan and Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish, with the former taking the more lenient position and the latter the stricter one.

• *Yevamot* 10b

WHAT THE Sages SAY

“One should not pour out water which he has no need for if others have a need for it.”

• *Rabbi Yosef - Yevamot* 11b

LOVE OF THE LAND - THE PLACES

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

KFAR CHANANIAH (ANAN) – TOMB OR TRIBUTE?

In the northern Arab village of Anan, previously known as Kfar Chananiah, is a burial cave which some researchers claim is the tomb of the Talmudic Sage Rabbi Chananiah ben Akashia. Others dismiss this claim and say that the village



was merely named in honor of the Sage whose famous statement about G-d giving Israel Torah and *mitzvot* in order to confer merit upon them is repeated at the end of a learning session before reciting the special *kaddish deraanan*.

A DIP IN THE DEPTHS OF MIKVEH

From: Ashley Sevitz

Dear Rabbi,

A few years ago when I was studying in yeshiva, I adopted the custom of going to the mikveh (spiritually purifying bath) every erev Shabbat (Friday afternoon). This I have kept up all these years. A while ago I heard it mentioned that there are actually certain *kavanot* (holy thoughts) that a person should have each time he immerses himself, seven in total. Is this true? If so, what are they? And if it is true, how is a person allowed to have a religious *kavana* (thought) in the mikveh?

Dear Ashley,

Many people immerse in a mikveh Friday afternoon to honor the Shabbat. Of course, there is a special mitzvah to bathe for cleanliness in honor and preparation for the Shabbat. However, immersion in the mikveh is not for the purposes of becoming physically clean, but rather to become spiritually purified.

Since mikveh is essentially a spiritual experience, the number of “dips” and the intentions one should have are of a spiritual nature that isn’t always readily understood. Therefore I’ll focus on the more “revealed” explanations of the number of dips and their *kavanot*, leaving the able learner to investigate the sources discussing the more esoteric dimension of mikveh on his own.

Keep in mind that if the surroundings of the mikveh are clean of refuse, and one closes his eyes or doesn’t see unclothed skin, a person is permitted to have in mind the *kavanot*, when the body is covered by the water of the mikveh.

Although there are many different customs regarding the number of dips and the *kavanot* that one should keep in mind, here are seven of the main ones.

Two dips: The first to remove the spiritual “garments” or aura of the weekday, and the second to become enveloped in the spiritual “garments” of Shabbat. If he is ritually impure (for example because of

keri, a certain bodily emission) he needs one more dip before these two. (*Arizal, Pri Etz Chaim, Sha’ar Hakavanot*)

Three dips: To purify the three “lower” aspects or levels of soul. In ascending order, the first for *nefesh* associated with the physical plane, the second for *ruach* operative on the plane of speech, and the third for *neshama* on the plane of thought and intellect. For more detail see our article on “Soul”. (Ben Ish Chai, 2nd year, Lech Lecha, note 16)

Four dips: Corresponding to the four letters of G-d’s name — *yud*, *hey* and *vav*, *hey* — in order to integrate the holiness of the four-letter name of G-d into the fiber and fabric of our physical and spiritual being. (*Yesod Veshoreh Ha’avodah*).

Five dips: To purify all five levels of the soul. *Nefesh*, *ruach* and *neshama*, as mentioned above, plus the two higher levels of soul called *chayah* and *yechidah*. There are five different *kavanot* to have in mind when performing each of these dips: At the first dip, purity from *keri* (emission); the second, spiritual cleansing from anger; the third, to remove the spiritual “garment” of the weekdays; the fourth, to remove “*ruach*” of weekdays; and the fifth to receive *tosefet kedusha* (additional sanctity) of Shabbat. (Ben Ish Chai, 2nd year, Lech Lecha, note 16)

Seven dips: This corresponds to many important “sevens” in Judaism. (*Kaf HaChaim 260:4-6*)

Ten dips: This was the custom of the Chatam Sofer. Similarly, it corresponds to several important “tens” in Judaism such as the commandments, the *sefirot* and more. (Tomer Devorah ch. 4, *Kaf HaChaim 260:4-6*)

Thirteen dips: Thirteen is the *gematria* (numerical value) of the word “*echad*” which means “one” (as in “G-d is One”). It is also the *gematria* of the Hebrew word “*ahava*” which means love (as in “You shall love your G-d”). The result of our declaration of G-d’s unity (13) with love (13) is twenty-six, which is the *gematria* of G-d’s four-letter name. Immersing in this way, with this in mind, thereby fulfills the verse, “The mikveh of Israel is G-d”, on which Rabbi Akiva expounded: Just as a *mikveh* purifies the impure, so G-d purifies the Jewish People. Regarding the more intricate *kavanot*, see source. (*Kaf HaChaim 260:4-6*)

THE CRUCIAL SIGN

Question: I have a childhood friend who has a slight interest in his Jewishness but cannot refrain from pursuing his business affairs on Shabbat. I would so like to see him become observant but lack the ability to convince him that Shabbat observance is crucial to his being a Jew. What is the right thing to do?

Answer: The Chafetz Chaim compared the “sign” between G-d and the Jewish people, which is how the Torah describes Shabbat, the sacred day of rest, to the sign

that a merchant has on his shop. The merchant may have some slow times in his sales but as long as the sign is in front of his shop people know that he is still in business. Once the sign is down it means that his business has collapsed.

In similar fashion a Jew may be derelict in some of his religious responsibilities. But as long as he observes Shabbat he is displaying a sign that he is “still in business” as a Jew. Abandoning the observance of Shabbat is tantamount to removing the sign and “resigning” as a Jew.

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY _____

THE PANORAMA OF *CHESSED*

One of the characteristics of the Jewish People, say our Talmudic Sages, is that they are *gomlei chassadim* — doers of kindness to others.

This is true of all Jews, but especially among Torah-observant Jews who not only generously respond with time and money to the needs of others, but go to great lengths to innovate *gamachim* (an acronym for the abbreviation of the Hebrew words for kindness activity).

Just open up a Jewish telephone directory for a Torah-

observant community and you will find no less than 86 pages of listings of *gamachim* — beginning with meals for Shabbat and ending with medical supplies. In between are organizations that provide second-hand clothing for needy families, help with celebrations and mourning periods, and even help parents locate lost tots.

The dozens of varieties of *gamachim* and the hundreds of organizations involved present a fascinating panorama of *chesSED* of which all Jews can be proud.

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