

OHRNET

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PARSHA INSIGHTS

WIT AND THE UNWITTING

“The one who brought his offering on the first day was Nachshon the son of Aminadav...” (7:12)

A true story. Late one night there was a knock on the door of Rabbi Isser Zalman Meltzer, one of the great Rabbis of the previous generation. Accustomed as he was that people would come to ask questions throughout the day and evening, someone coming so late at night was unusual.

A young man entered and asked to speak to the Rabbi. Rabbi Isser Zalman arose from studying with his pupil, Rabbi Dovid Finkel, and, with his usual graciousness, ushered the young man into the inner room despite the lateness of the hour.

After some minutes Rabbi Isser Zalman emerged from the room in a state of turmoil; he walked to and fro speaking to himself all the while, *“How can there be something like this? How can I be lenient in such a case?”* Paying no attention whatsoever to his pupil and his wife, he paced up and down, up and down. Then he went into a different room for a long while.

The Rebbetzin began to be concerned for her husband, who was the pillar of the Torah of his generation. Rabbi Isser Zalman could be heard banging the table and saying in a loud voice to himself, *“It must not be! A Jewish girl’s blood cannot be spilled!”*

Rabbi Isser Zalman suddenly emerged from the room and re-entered the inner room to give his answer.

After a few moments, both the Rabbi and the man emerged, *“...Well, if the Rav says so...”*

“Yes! Yes! Without a doubt. Mazal Tov! And, B’ezrat Hashem, this time next year, you’ll invite me to the brit!”

The man left and the room fell silent.

The Rabbi began to explain, *“This fellow is engaged to be married. A medical test just revealed that there is strong possibility that she will not be able to bear children. He came to*

ask me if, under the circumstances, he is permitted to go through with the marriage. I replied that when there is a doubt concerning a Torah law, the rule is to be stringent, and thus he should not marry this girl. However, I asked him if I could think it over. I went into the other room and examined the details over and over again: Should he not go through with the marriage it would cause the girl untold suffering and embarrassment. The Torah considers embarrassing someone tantamount to spilling blood. If he were to cancel their engagement, it is certain she would ‘die’ from embarrassment and pain. That she cannot have children, however, is not certain. Thus we have a certain violation of Torah law compared with a possible violation. I thus decided he should continue the engagement.

At the beginning of this week’s Torah portion the Torah repeats the identical description of the gifts brought for the Tabernacle by the princes of the Tribes of Yisrael. This seemingly superfluous word-by-word repetition is to teach us how careful we must be with the feelings of others. For even though brevity may be the spice of wit, it very often can cause great hurt by the unwitting.

Necessarily when the same action is to be performed sequentially, one person will have to go before the other. From that there is no escape. However, the Torah minimizes any aspect of ‘star billing’ by repeating identically the offerings brought by each and every tribe. In this way, the Torah teaches us to be very careful with the feelings of others. We should never assume that so-and-so won’t mind.

Oh, and by the way, Rabbi Isser Zalman’s words came true; he was the *sandek* at the *brit* of a beautiful baby boy just one year after that late night visit.

• Sources: Ramban; Lekach Tov

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POB 18103, Jerusalem 91180, Israel • Tel: +972-2-581-0315 • Email: info@ohr.edu • www.ohr.edu

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PARSHA OVERVIEW

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 G-d'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 G-d 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.

ISRAEL Forever

CONCERNS OF A LEADER

What does a true leader think of when he serves as a representative of his people? This question finds a subtle answer in this week's Torah portion. With 176 verses this is the longest portion in Torah. It is so lengthy because a good part of it is devoted to recording the gifts made to the dedication of the *Mishkan* Sanctuary by the heads of the twelve tribes. Although each one gave exactly the same items, the Torah records each gift separately.

We are aware that everything in the Torah teaches us volumes, and that a great deal of information is often hidden in a single word or letter. Why then did the Torah allot so much space to the repetition of the contents of each gift?

One resolution of this mystery offered by Ramban based

on a *midrash* is that although each head of a tribe gave the identical gift, the thought that went along with each gift was different. Each tribe in Israel had its own particular mission and the shape and weight of each gift symbolized the nature of that mission as if to invoke Heavenly assistance in carrying it out.

At a time when an entire nation is recoiling from the revelation of corruption in high circles as a result of leaders being concerned about their own interests rather than those of the public they are supposed to serve, the message of this week's portion should serve as a reminder of what sort of leadership is needed 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

YARCHA – TOMB OF A LOYAL HERO

Cushai Ha'Arki is described in the Book of Shmuel as the loyal supporter of King David who played an instrumental role in foiling the rebellion of Avshalom against his father. By countering the wise counsel of Achitophel with strategic advice that appealed to Avshalom as even wiser, he succeeded in convincing him to take a step that led to his



destruction.

His tomb, which is located in the village of Yarcha, some four miles northeast of the Achihud Junction, was reportedly visited in 1742 by the great Torah commentator and kabbalist Rabbi Chaim ben Attar who studied Torah and prayed together with his disciples at the site.

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 G-d 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 G-d bless you and guard you"?
19. What is the meaning of the blessing "May G-d 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 G-d 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 G-d 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.

- Status of children born from forbidden mates and intermarriage
- *Yibum* in the case of confusion regarding which of two sisters the deceased had betrothed with *kiddushin*
- Whether a *kiddushin* which is prevented by law from being consummated with *nissuin* has any legal status
- Which brother should perform *yibum* and what does he gain by doing so
- If someone suspected of relations with a woman forbidden to him may marry her when her status changes
- Converts to Judaism out of ulterior motives
- Circumstantial evidence regarding adultery
- Men disqualified from marrying a woman whose freedom from her husband was the result of their testimony or ruling
- What is the *yibum* situation of two of four brothers who married two sisters and died
- The same situation when one of those sisters is forbidden as a marriage partner to one of the *yibum* candidates
- The scenario when it is three brothers with two of them married to two sisters

HATE VERSUS PASSION

A man or woman who brings a *get* (divorce) document from outside of Eretz Yisrael must testify that the *get* was written and signed in his or her presence so that the court in Eretz Yisrael may be assured that it was properly written. Later on in our *mesechta* (117a) we learn that even those women whose testimony regarding the death of a man is not acceptable to allow his wife to marry another are believed to testify that the *get* was properly written.

The explanation given for disqualifying a mother-in-law and a few other women as witnesses of the man's death is the suspicion that they may be lying in order to trap the woman they hate because of various reasons into entering a marriage which will end in divorce when her truly living husband returns. This suspicion is not relevant to testimony regarding divorce because the woman witness is the bearer of a document that supports her testimony.

A problem arises in regard to this explanation from

what the *mishna* states when it declares that a man who brings a *get* from abroad to Eretz Yisrael and testifies to its validity is prohibited from subsequently marrying the woman who has been divorced based on his testimony. The explanation given is that there is a suspicion that he is lying in order to marry this woman. Why do we believe those above-mentioned female haters because they have the support of the document they bear and deny this same credibility to the man backed by the same support?

The answer given by the *Nimukei Yosef* is based on a distinction between hatred and passion. The woman who testifies about the validity of a *get* is motivated only by hatred, which she puts aside out of fear that the husband may come and expose her lie. This consideration combines with the document presented to validate her testimony. The man testifying that the *get* is valid may be motivated by passion for the woman involved and will therefore act irrationally to achieve his goal without consideration for the possibility of being exposed.

• *Yevamot* 25a

WHAT THE Sages SAY

“Why did our Sages say that converts to Judaism were not accepted in the glory days of Kings David and Shlomo nor will they be accepted in the days of the Mashiach? The Prophet Yishayahu (54:15) declares in the Name of G-d: ‘Those who become converts when I appear to not be with you (in these days of trouble - Rashi) shall merit to be with you in the World-to-Come.’ “

• *Rabbi Elazar - Yevamot* 24b

COUNTING YOUR BLESSINGS

From: Mali

*Dear Rabbi,
I'm having trouble with the additional 19th "blessing" of the shemoneh esreh "silent prayer". First, it hardly seems a blessing, but rather a curse against heretics. I'm surprised the rabbis would ask for the destruction of other fellow Jews. Second, how could one rabbi add to a prayer that was instituted much earlier by many rabbis?*

Dear Mali,

To understand this blessing, its inclusion must be put into historical context. It was instituted in Yavneh during the tenure of Rabban Gamliel who was the *Nassi*, or leading rabbi of Israel, sometime after the destruction of the Second Temple. It was a response to the threats and attacks of heretical sects against believing, practicing Jews. These sects were enamored and impressed more with a non-Jewish way of life than with Judaism and they had an agenda to lead other Jews away from the fold.

They executed their program not only through persuasion, but also through mobilizing their full financial and political power to align with the wicked, anti-Semitic Roman government's persecution of the Jews. Their slander against their defenseless brethren, coupled with their advice to the Romans on how to uproot the Jews from Torah (based on their inside knowledge), exacerbated the persecution and led to much suffering and slaughter of their own people.

Regarding what you describe as a curse in disguise, it's important to clarify that our calling the sections of the *shemoneh esreh* "blessings" in English is not entirely accurate. The middle sections of this prayer are actually requests to G-d to fulfill our needs, including guarding and protecting us from those who want to physically or spiritually harm and destroy us for no reason other than our being Jewish. It is in this vein that the blessing against the heretics should be understood. The following story from the Talmud will serve as an instructive example before examining the language of the blessing more closely.

In Rabbi Meir's neighborhood, there was a gang of dangerous hoodlums who persecuted the populace. Over time, the situation became so unbearable that Rabbi Meir

prayed to G-d to take their lives and save the innocent inhabitants from their oppression. When Rabbi Meir's wife Beruria overheard her husband's prayer she gently rebuked him by quoting a verse that says "and sins will be taken away from the Earth". She noted, the verse doesn't say 'sinners' will be removed, but rather 'sins'. Instead of praying that they die, let's pray that they repent. They prayed together and eventually the gang repented.

If you look closely at the language of the blessing, you'll see that the emphasis is not on physically destroying these Jewish enemies of the Jews, but rather on asking G-d to foil their plans ("let them have no hope"), disempower them ("be cut down", "uproot", "smash") and cause them to repent ("cast down", "lower them", "humble them"). Even the words "perish" and "destroy" in the prayer must be understood in this manner; otherwise what's the point of asking that the heretics be humbled.

Accordingly, you see that as opposed to the heretics who aligned with the anti-Semites to physically and spiritually destroy the Jewish people, the rabbis "retaliated" by praying that they repent. Unfortunately, this phenomenon of Jewish anti-Semites is not particular to those times. Recent history is replete with examples of wealthy, influential Jewish "non-Jewish wannabees" aligning with anti-Semites in their agenda to uproot Jews from traditional, authentic Judaism.

Regarding the authority of Rabban Gamliel to add a 19th blessing to what was originally instituted as 18: As I mentioned above, he was the *Nassi* who headed the high court in Yavneh. Those Sages were authoritative enough, and the times were trying enough, that it could be done. Another explanation is based on the number of the middle blessings of which this prayer against the heretics is one. The *shemoneh esreh* is comprised of 3 opening praise-blessings, 3 concluding thank-blessings and what were originally 12 request-blessings that became 13.

We find in Judaism that 12 and 13 are often interrelated as one: There were 12 tribes that became 13 when tribe status was given to Joseph's two sons in his stead. Similarly, there are 12 Jewish months that become 13 when the month of Adar is doubled in a leap year. Interestingly, the Hebrew word for one, 'echad', is comprised of the letters 'chet' with the numerical equivalent of (8) and 'dalet' (4) equaling 12, which together with the 'alef' (1) is 13. In all of these cases, the 12 and 13 are really one. So too, the 12 intermediate blessings became 13 which are one.

HOW TO RELATE TO STORIES

Question: My young son has read so many stories about saintly Jews and has asked me whether all these tales of extreme righteousness are really true. I don't want to damage his faith in these great men but I can't really vouch for the truth of every story. What is the right thing to do?

Answer: A story about the Chafetz Chaim may provide the answer.

"A young man, Ephraim Lebowitz, had come from Germany to study in the Chafetz Chaim's yeshiva in Radin. He became the victim of a Russian detective who framed him as a German spy during the First World War. The Chafetz Chaim made every effort to see that he be freed from the threat of a death sentence and even came to the trial to testify on his student's behalf.

The lawyer introduced the Chafetz Chaim as the saintly

man who once ran after a thief who had robbed him shouting, 'I forgive you, I forgive you!'

'You don't expect me to believe such a story, do you?' said the judge.

'Believe it or not, Your Honor,' replied the lawyer, 'but you must admit that people don't make up such stories about you!'

Despite all of the Chafetz Chaim's efforts the court sentenced Ephraim to ten years in prison. When he heard the verdict the Chafetz Chaim offered thanks to Heaven for sparing his student's life and then angrily denounced the unfair sentence.

'Do those fools think that their corrupt government will last ten years — or ten months — or even ten weeks?'

Two months later the Czarist government was overthrown and Ephraim Lebowitz was freed from jail."

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY _____

HELP FOR THE DISABLED

Concern for the ability of disabled people to use public buildings has led to the widespread installation of ramp entrances and accessible bathrooms.

Such features, however, seem to be sorely lacking in most Israeli synagogues. A recent survey of 80 synagogues revealed that 94% of them lack a ramp or special bathroom and 70% of them lack both.

Ma'agalei Tzedek, the organization which conducted the

study, has joined forces with other social and religious organizations in an effort to raise national sensitivity to the problems faced by the disabled in coming to the synagogue.

In a Jerusalem Post article of February 16, 2007, Ma'agalei Tzedek is described as "an organization established by religious Zionist youth who want more emphasis put on issues of social justice and not just the Greater Israel settlement ideal."

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