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PARSHA INSIGHTS

OPENING GIFTS

"...I have given them to you for distinction and to your sons as an eternal portion." (18:8)

In this week's Parsha the Torah lists twenty-four gifts that were given to the *kohanim* after the debacle of Korach. Can it be mere coincidence that there are also twenty-four different types of service required of the *kohanim* in the *Beit Hamikdash*?

Everything is a gift. G-d gives us brains, talent, money, family, food, health, happiness. Every single thing we have is a present.

And the biggest part of the present is that the more we have, the more ways we can know G-d.

The prophet Yirmiyahu said, "Let not the wise man glorify himself with his wisdom, nor the strong man glory in his strength, nor the rich man in his wealth. In this alone may one glory: for contemplating and knowing

Me." (Yirmiyahu 9)

The more I have, the more I can recognize its Source.

Two ideas are basic to a belief in G-d. First, nothing is automatic: Nothing *has* to be — except for G-d. Everything I have as an individual is considered a gift of G-d.

Second, every gift is to be opened up to reveal what's inside — a deeper awareness of the Creator.

Just as when the *kohanim* received twenty-four gifts they also received twenty-four ways to serve G-d, so too should every one of us see every gift as another way to connect to the Eternal.

• Sources: Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe, *Chovot HaLevavot*

INNUENDO

"And Moshe heard and fell on his face..." (15:4)

The Torah does not specify exactly what caused Moshe to fall on his face. The Talmud (Sanhedrin 109) explains that Moshe fell down when he heard that he was suspected of adultery.

It's difficult to see from the words of the Torah exactly where Moshe was accused of such a crime.

Often the most telling indictments are made without mentioning a word of reproof. In an argument between

two people, when one says "I'm not evil," the implication is that "I'm not evil — but you are!"

When Moshe heard Korach say, "All of them (the Jewish People) are holy," the implication was that "they are all holy — but you aren't!" The diametrical opposite of holiness is immorality. When Moshe heard that implicit but inescapable accusation, he fell to the ground.

• Source: *Mishkenot Yaakov HaSefardi in Mayana shel Torah*

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PARSHA OVERVIEW

Korach, Datan and Aviram, and 250 leaders of Israel rebel against the authority of Moshe and Aharon. The rebellion results in their being swallowed by the earth. Many resent their death and blame Moshe. G-d's "anger" is manifest by a plague which besets the nation, and many thousands perish. Moshe intercedes once again for the people: He instructs Aharon to atone for them and the plague stops. Then G-d commands that staffs, each inscribed with the name of one of the tribes, be placed in the Mishkan. In the morning the staff of Levi,

bearing Aharon's name, sprouts, buds, blossoms and yields ripe almonds. This provides Divine confirmation that Levi's tribe is chosen for priesthood and verifies Aharon's position as Kohen Gadol, High Priest. The specific duties of the levi'im and kohanim are stated. The kohanim were not to be landowners, but were to receive their sustenance from the tithes and other mandated gifts brought by the people. Also taught in this week's Parsha are laws of the first fruits, redemption of the firstborn, and other offerings.

ISRAEL Forever

THE CRUMBLING COALITION

“**K**orach and his company” are cited by our Sages in *Pirkei Avot* as an example of “a dispute not properly motivated which cannot endure”.

Korach, whose name serves as the title of the Torah portion that will be read this Shabbat, led a rebellion against the Divinely designated authority of Moshe because of his personal ambition for power. For this purpose he created a broad coalition of supporters including some members of the Tribe of Reuven and 250 important dignitaries. The above-mentioned *mishneh* in *Avot* contrasts the dispute between the Sages Hillel and Shammai, which was motivated by a pure search for the truth in understanding Torah, and the dispute of “Korach and his company”, pointing out that the former endured while the latter ended in tragedy.

The description of the dispute mentioned in our weekly

Torah portion is that instead of calling it a dispute between Korach and Moshe as it refers to the halachic debates of Hillel and Shammai, it calls it a dispute between Korach and his company.

The explanation given is that there was no real unity within the coalition of Korach. Each faction that joined it had its own agenda, united only by the ambition to challenge a common enemy. Such a coalition cannot endure.

This may be viewed as a valuable historical lesson regarding the coalitions that have been formed over the years to create governments in Israel – how many have been formed only to fade away. Only when governments are formed for Heaven's sake and with a true interest in the welfare of the people will they endure in 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

CHEFTZIBAH- HOME OF THE MAGNIFICENT MOSAIC

One of the most interesting relics of ancient times can be found in Kibbutz Cheftzibah at the foot of Mount Gilboa. It is the magnificent mosaic that decorated the floor of a synagogue built some 1400 years ago on the site where nearby Kibbutz Beit Alpha is located.

It was back in 1928 that the discovery of this mosaic came about while a tractor was digging in the fields of Beit



Alpha. Archeologists who rushed to the scene uncovered the floor of the ancient synagogue with a mosaic showing the sun encircled by the twelve signs of the zodiac (the *mazalot* in Hebrew).

The government has erected a building over the mosaic to protect it at the kibbutz to which it was moved and it is now a popular tourist attraction.

PARSHA Q&A ?

1. Why did Datan and Aviram join Korach?
2. Why is Yaakov's name not mentioned in Korach's genealogy?
3. What motivated Korach to rebel?
4. What did Korach and company do when Moshe said that a *techelet* garment needs *tzizit*?
5. What warning did Moshe give the rebels regarding the offering of the incense?
6. Did Moshe want to be the *kohen gadol*?
7. What event did Korach not foresee?
8. What does the phrase *rav lachem* mean in this week's Parsha? (Give two answers.)
9. What lands are described in this week's Parsha as "flowing with milk and honey"?
10. When did Moshe have the right to take a donkey from the Jewish community?
11. What did Korach do the night before the final confrontation?
12. What sin did Datan and Aviram have in common specifically with Goliath?
13. Before what age is a person not punished by the Heavenly Court for his sins?
14. What happens to one who rebels against the institution of *kehuna*? Who suffered such a fate?
15. Why *specifically* was incense used to stop the plague?
16. Why was Aharon's staff placed in the middle of the other 11 staffs?
17. Aharon's staff was kept as a sign. What did it signify?
18. Why are the 24 gifts for the *kohanim* taught in this week's Parsha?
19. Who may eat the *kodshei kodashim* (most holy sacrifices) and where must they be eaten?
20. Why is G-d's covenant with the *kohanim* called "a covenant of salt"?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

1. 16:1 - Because they were his neighbors.
2. 16:1 - Yaakov prayed that his name not be mentioned in connection with Korach's rebellion (*Bereishet* 49:6).
3. 16:1 - Korach was jealous that Elizafan ben Uziel was appointed as leader of the family of Kehat instead of himself.
4. 16:1 - They laughed.
5. 16:6 - Only one person would survive.
6. 16:6 - Yes.
7. 16:7 - That his sons would repent.
8. 16:7,3 - *Rav lachem* appears twice in this week's Parsha. It means "much more than enough greatness have you taken for yourself (16:3)" and "It is a great thing I have said to you (16:17)."
9. 16:12 - Egypt and Canaan.
10. 16:15 - When he traveled from Midian to Egypt.
11. 16:19 - Korach went from tribe to tribe in order to rally support for himself.
12. 16:27 - They all blasphemed.
13. 16:27 - Twenty years old.
14. 17:5 - He is stricken with *tzara'at*, as was King Uziyahu (*Divrei HaYamim* II 26:16-19).
15. 17:13 - Because the people were deprecating the incense offering, saying that it caused the death of two of Aharon's sons and also the death of 250 of Korach's followers. Therefore G-d demonstrated that the incense offering was able to avert death, and it is sin, not incense, which causes death.
16. 17:21 - So people would not say that Aharon's staff bloomed because Moshe placed it closer to the *Shechina*.
17. 17:25 - That only Aharon and his children were selected for the *kehuna*.
18. 18:8 - Since Korach claimed the *kehuna*, the Torah emphasizes Aharon's and his descendants' rights to *kehuna* by recording the gifts given to them.
19. 18:10 - Male *kohanim* may eat them and only in the *azara* (forecourt of the *Beit Hamikdash*).
20. 18:19 - Just as salt never spoils, so this covenant will never be rescinded.

- With how many women is one advised to make *yibum* and when is he encouraged to make *chalitzah*
- Status of the child born from marriage with certain forbidden women such as his divorcee who had an interim marriage
- Status of a child whose mother is Jewish and father is not and that of the mother
- When the father is half slave, half free
- The challenge involved in buying a slave from a non-Jew
- The three rulings of Rabbi Yochanan regarding the sinners of Gavla
- The need for both circumcision, *mikveh* immersion and a rabbinical court in order to achieve proper conversion
- If a person is believed when he claims he had a proper conversion and how this affects his children
- Discouraging the conversion candidate and what he is taught if he persists
- What we learn from the dialogue of Naomi and Ruth
- The immersion process of a convert and of a freed slave
- The *yifat to'ar* woman taken captive for purpose of marriage
- The slave who is not circumcised either because he refuses or because his owner bought him on that condition
- Who is a *mamzer*
- The mysterious record found by the Sage Shimon ben Azai
- The trial and execution of the Prophet Yeshayahu by King Menashe
- When one act of acquiring a *yivamah* or releasing her is followed by another act performed by the same *yavam* or his brother

THE KOHEN AND THE VICTIM OF INTERMARRIAGE

One of the problems facing a *kohen* in this generation of widespread intermarriage is finding a woman whom he is permitted to marry. Even if the young lady was chaste enough to have avoided premarital relations with a non-Jew she may be disqualified for marriage to a *kohen* if her father was not a Jew.

Although there is no doubt about her status as a Jewess because her mother is Jewish there is a serious question as to whether a *kohen* may marry her.

The source of the problem is a *kal vechomer* — a method of halachic interpretation deducing the status of something of a more serious nature not explicitly stated in the Torah from something explicit and of a less serious nature. In this case the less serious subject is the widow

who is forbidden to a *kohen gadol*. This is a prohibition limited to a *kohen gadol* alone, and yet the child of such a union is disqualified from marrying a *kohen*. How much more so must we infer that the daughter of a union between a Jewish woman with a non-Jew, a prohibition common to all Jews, should be disqualified from marrying a *kohen*!

Whether this is actually the conclusion of our *gemara* is a matter of dispute. While Rav Alfasi and Rambam maintain that there is no definitive conclusion and leave the matter in doubt, the Rosh unequivocally rules that a *kohen* may not marry the daughter of a non-Jewish father.

The *Shulchan Aruch* (*Even Ha'ezer* 4:5) rules that such a woman is forbidden to a *kohen*. The commentaries point out, however, that because of the dissenting opinions such a forbidden marriage must not be terminated.

• *Yevamot 45a*

WHAT THE SAGES SAY

“When the Torah states ‘Who is like the Lord our God whenever we call to Him’ (*Devarim* 4:7), it is referring to the repentance and prayer of the many, while the limiting time-frame of the Prophet Yishayahu (54:6) ‘to seek God when He makes Himself available to you’ refers to the individual who has the special opportunity during the ten days between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur.”

• *Rabbi Nachman in the name of the Sage Rabbah bar Avuha - Yevamot 49b*

ARRANGED MARRIAGES

From: David in Calgary

*Dear Rabbi,
I don't understand the Jewish way of setting up marriages. Why in today's day and age should two adults submit themselves to being set up in an arranged marriage? How could they possibly rely on the judgment of a stranger rather than on their own feelings regarding something as important as choosing a life partner?*

Dear David,

If your facts were right, you'd actually be asking a great question! However, your understanding of the Jewish way of finding a marriage partner is inaccurate. Allow me to set the record straight.

According to Judaism, people cannot be married against their will. There is no such thing as arranged marriages. Rather, the way "getting set up" works is that people who are interested and ready to get married approach experienced match-makers who, after interviewing candidates about their interests, goals, intended lifestyle and preferences regarding a prospective spouse, suggest what they consider to be compatible people.

If, after hearing about the other person, both people are interested, a meeting is arranged between the two to give them an opportunity to see if they like each other. When the date is over, each contact the matchmaker about whether they want to continue or not. If one or both does not want to continue, it's over between them and a new suggestion will be offered to each. If they're both interested in continuing, they do so only as long as they're both still interested, or until it results in marriage.

Considering the divorce rate of 50-60 percent among the secular population in the U.S., it's worth examining some of the many advantages of the Jewish approach to finding a life partner.

Trying to find Mr. or Mrs. Right in a bar, a club, a concert a museum or any other event, makes the odds very slim: you

might not meet anyone at all; and even if you do, you might not be interested in her; and even if you are, she might not be interested in you; and even if she is, she might not be interested in marriage; and even if she is, she might not be Jewish.

According to the Jewish approach, however, two people who are both interested in marriage and deemed compatible from the outset meet in a quiet, relaxing setting with no distractions and with no head-games for the explicit purpose of determining whether they are compatible as life-partners. These conditions greatly ease the process and increase the odds of finding "the right one".

Also, the nearly endless search for that needle in a haystack is physically, emotionally and mentally exhausting. This has several drawbacks: the over-exertion expended in finding a mate necessarily distracts one from learning, growing and following self-enriching pursuits; it also causes desperation which may result in settling for unhealthy, incompatible relationships for lack of other options or loneliness, and may even result in giving up on finding "the right one" altogether. Marriages that result from such relationships are virtually doomed to failure.

The Jewish approach, however, liberates one from the laborious and fatiguing process of unsuccessfully sifting the social haystack. This thereby enables prospective candidates for marriage to continue to develop their interests, abilities, characters and maturity level, which only further prepares them for marriage when they are introduced to the right one. In the meantime, they are spared the pain, frustration and disillusionment that results from the trial and error of meaningless relationships based on convenience, loneliness and despair.

Since the matchmakers are by and large sensitive, insightful people who are usually experienced in their trade, they can generally be relied upon to sift through all the available and interested people they know to make fairly accurate suggestions about compatibility in looks, tastes, interests, lifestyles and life-goals. But these are only suggestions. The individuals themselves decide from the outset whether they want to meet or not, and it's totally up to them whether to continue or not, and whether to get married.

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE CHAMETZ?

Just before Pesach Jews are accustomed to selling their *chametz* to a non-Jew in order to avoid violating the Torah prohibition against owning any product on Pesach which may have leavened dough in its contents.

This past Pesach a family in Israel spent the holiday away

from home after dutifully selling their *chametz* through their local rabbi. When they returned home their four-year old son took a look at all the food products in the reopened closets and exclaimed in his youthful innocence:

"But the non-Jew didn't eat any of our *chametz*!"

SPEECH AND SILENCE

Question: As a public speaker in my community I am often called upon to deliver lectures in synagogues and schools for the purpose of improving religious observance. It is very frustrating to see how little effect these talks have, and I often consider retiring from such activity. What is the right thing to do?

Answer: The Chafetz Chaim was once approached with a similar question by a Jew who spoke for a long time to a packed synagogue but failed to see how even one Jew had improved as a result. This is what the sage answered: "One never knows when his words will have an impact. The Torah commands us to 'place these things on

your heart' in the hope that in time they will eventually be absorbed *into* your heart."

He then added another benefit of speaking to an unresponsive audience for a very long time:

"I'm surprised at you," replied the Chafetz Chaim. "Don't you know what the Vilna Gaon writes from a Midrashic source about silence? He says that for every second which a person holds his silence he merits the Hidden Light which is beyond the comprehension of even the angels. All this for just one second of silence! Now imagine how great is the reward for an entire audience being silent for two whole hours! What more do you want?"

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