

OHRNET

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PARSHA INSIGHTS

OF MICE AND MEN

“Thou shall not murder.” (20:13)

Some ten years ago, high-school student David Merrel conducted an interesting experiment to examine the influence of various kinds of music.

He built a maze and put some mice through it. The time it took for the mice to complete the maze was about ten minutes. He then divided the mice into three groups, and started to play music to two of the three groups for ten hours a day. To one group he played classical music, to the other, hard rock. Then, at the end of three weeks he put all the mice through the maze three times a week for three weeks.

The control group who had heard no music, managed to cut five minutes off their original time. The classical mice reduced their time by eight and a half minutes; and the hard rock mice took twenty minutes longer to find their way through the maze.

Unfortunately the project had to be cut short because, as David said, “all the hard rock mice killed each other. None of the classical mice did that at all.” (Washington Times, July 2, 1997)

We live in a world of increasingly mindless violence. The irritability threshold of the average person has dropped to alarming levels. As early as 1997, therapists in the United States were working to certify road rage as a medical condition. It is already an official mental disorder in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders. According to an article published by the Associated Press in June 2006, the behaviors typically associated with road rage are the result of intermittent explosive disorder. This conclusion was drawn from surveys of some 9,200 adults in the United States between 2001 and 2003, funded by the National Institute of Mental Health.

The cause of intermittent explosive disorder has not been described to date.

Turn on the radio and listen to some of the latest Jewish music. It sounds about as Jewish as Led Zeppelin wearing *tefillin*.

There is an ongoing debate about to what extent Jewish music should be allowed to ape (pun intended) its secular counterpart. In fact, this debate goes back to the *achronim* (later commentators).

At one end of the scale is the *Krach shel Romi*, an Italian commentator, who describes how Roman Jews would stand behind the Cathedral and copy down the latest Catholic liturgical hits to be used during the prayers on High Holidays. At the other end of the scale, there are those who say that even the influence of classical music can contain the negative spiritual genes of its composers. However, it is well known that many of the great Chassidic *nigunim* (tunes) bear more than a passing resemblance to Russian and Polish marching songs.

Rabbi Nachman Bulman, *zatzal*, the great Mashgiach (spiritual counselor) of Ohr Somayach, founder and rabbi of numerous Torah communities and institutions, once told me that in every generation we have had composers who were able to extract the *pri*, the “fruit” from the *klippa*, the “shell” of impurity. However, the last songwriter who managed to do this died in October 1994. I understood him to mean that the Jewish music that followed afterwards was unredeemed secular plagiarism; the *klippa* had devoured the fruit completely.

There is a mystical concept that there are many gates to Heaven. The one that is closest to the *Kissei HaKavod*, the “throne” of G-d, is the gate of music.

Music is one of the holiest channels from above. Why would we want to block it up with the dross of the world? Worse still, why would we want to risk the mice becoming men?

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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 light-

ning, 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

LIKE ONE MAN WITH ONE HEART

As one views the political scene in Israel there is an uncomfortable feeling about the lack of unity. This is a far cry from what we will hear in this Shabbat's Torah reading about the unity of our ancestors who stood at the foot of Mount Sinai "like one man with one heart".

Granted that there are ideological differences between the religious and secular publics or discrimination based on national background. But it is hard to understand why in matters such as national security or territorial rights

that affect every inhabitant of Israel in the same way, there fails to be a consensus.

Perhaps the answer lies in the fact that our ancestors at Sinai were capable of achieving unity because they all submitted to the authority of G-d Who was giving them His Torah.

It is hoped that a submission of all Jews to Torah will bring about the unity that will guarantee the security of Israel forever.

LOVE OF THE LAND - THE WISDOM

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

ZION GATE – THE BIG KEY

When Rabbi Mordechai Weingarten heard a knock at the door of his home in the courtyard of the Ohr HaChaim Synagogue in the Old City of Jerusalem he could hardly have imagined who was seeking entry.

As the last official *muchtar*, district head, of the



Old City, he was the liaison between the British Mandate officials and the Jews. As the British evacuated the Walled City, a British officer had come to present the rabbi with an old, rusty foot-long key to Zion gate as a gift from England to the Jewish people.

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.

- Taking pay for teaching Torah
- When one can receive pay for service done on Shabbat
- Rules on writing, reading and pronouncing given by G-d to Moshe
- The wealth of Moshe, his special gift of Torah knowledge and the qualities which qualified him for prophecy
- The wealth of all the prophets
- Supporting the family or animals of one who he has vowed not to give any benefit or arranging a marriage with him
- Rules for paying a sick visit to such a person
- Torah source for mitzvah of visiting the sick
- Moshe's confrontation with the rebel Korach
- All about visiting the sick
- The Sages who forgot their learning and were reminded by their disciples
- Permitted and forbidden interactions between one who has vowed to forbid benefiting another and the object of his vow
- How one who has made a vow forbidding him to benefit another can nevertheless help him if he is in need

THE LEARNED LAUNDRYMAN

Torah knowledge was not the monopoly of well-known scholars. Even Jews with simple occupations sometimes serve as the source of valuable Torah information for the Talmudic Sages.

One such Jew was a laundryman who used to listen to the learning of Rebbie (Rabbi Yehuda the Nassi) as he expounded thirteen different angles on a Talmudic subject. Once when Rebbie was teaching his outstanding disciple, Rabbi Chiya, he succeeded in communicating only seven of them because he forgot the other six.

Rabbi Chiya went to the laundryman to learn them and then helped Rebbie remember them.

When Rebbie later saw this learned laundryman he then praised him for making both Rabbi Chiya and himself wiser.

Maharsha suggests that this may be the same laundryman mentioned in *Mesechta Ketubot* (103b) as one who daily visited Rebbie but failed to be present the day of Rebbie's funeral. He nevertheless was granted a painless entry to the World to Come like all those who were there.

• *Nedarim 41a*

What the SAGES Say

"Whoever visits the sick will be spared the afterlife pains of Gehinom."

• *The Sage Rav - Nedarim 40a*

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SUBLIMINAL SEVEN

From: Samara

Dear Rabbi,

I understand that seven is an important number in Judaism. I have heard that there is a lot of spiritual meaning to the number seven. However, since according to Jewish belief, Creation was completed in seven days, I'm wondering if the number seven is viewed by Judaism as having any relevance to the physical world as well.

Dear Samara,

In Jewish thought, it is impossible to divorce the physical from the spiritual. The fact that seven is so central in the spiritual world is mirrored in the physical world. The mystical teachings of Judaism regarding Creation describe seven lower receptacles/refractors of Divine energy that channel and transform that energy into physical creation. The pattern of those seven “sefirot”, then, are projected onto, and infused within, existence.

Without going into the great detail and depth of these teachings regarding the subliminal significance of seven in the spiritual and physical, I'll just mention a few ways in

which seven is projected onto and into the physical.

Spatially. The circle represents unity, perfection and eternity. If you encircle a circle with circles, you'll find there are seven. For example, take seven coins of the same size (CD's will also do). Put one down and place the others around it. Each individual unit of perfection becomes integrated into a unified mosaic of seven.

Audibly. Music represents harmony, emotion and inspiration. The scale of musical notes is comprised of seven tones. Each moving sound is integrated into and permeates the music, which resonates a harmonious and inspirational reverberation of seven.

Visually. Light represents illumination, enlightenment and spirituality. However, light is comprised of the seven colors of the visible spectrum: violet, blue, indigo, green, yellow, orange and red. Each beautiful, stirring shade, which is the basis of color, is integrated into a brilliant illumination of seven.

Interestingly, the part of our body that serves as the main venue through which we integrate and interact with the world around us, our head, contains seven gates of sensual perception: Two eyes, two ears, two nostrils and the mouth. It is through these seven gates that we perceive on a physical, emotional and intellectual/spiritual level the subliminal sevens that permeate Creation.

WHAT'S THE RIGHT THING TO DO?

REAL-LIFE QUESTIONS OF SOCIAL AND BUSINESS ETHICS

No, No, No to SMOKERS

Question: Despite the fact that there are signs prominently displayed in the building where I work prohibiting smoking anywhere besides the area designated for smoking, I sometimes see a co-worker smoking in the prohibited area. What is the right thing to do?

Answer: There are a few reasons for you to confront the violator and urge him to desist from such behavior:

He is harming you and others by exposing you to the fumes that medical experts say are harmful to your health.

He is violating the rules established by the local authorities and the building owners.

His public behavior encourages others to follow his example of polluting the environment.

These are some of the arguments you can present — in a gentle tone — plus the reminder that smoking may be dangerous to his own health. By taking this initiative you will fulfill the Torah command to reprove your fellow Jew and save this fellow from doing harm to himself and others.

WHO READS THE PAPERS?

Who ever said that many Orthodox Jews don't care about what's going on in the world? Well, a recent survey shows that Orthodox Jews in Israel read the newspapers much more than their secular brothers.

In the survey conducted for the Mccan Erickson advertising group by Mutagim and Market Watch it

emerged that Orthodox Jews spend an average of 20 minutes a day reading newspapers while secular Israelis spend only seven minutes.

One explanation for this gap is that secular Israelis rely more on TV and Internet for their news, sources generally shunned by part of the Orthodox public.

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