

OHR NET

SHABBAT PARSHAT KI TETZE · 13 ELUL 5768 · SEP. 13, 2008 · VOL. 15 NO. 48

PARSHA INSIGHTS

ELUL AND THE TWO LIGHTBULB JOKES

“When you go out to war against your enemies...”

Question: “How many West Coast psychotherapists does it take to change a lightbulb?” Answer: “Only one. But the lightbulb has *really* got to want to change.”

Maybe the biggest challenge of Elul is that we don’t really want to change. We’re quite happy with who we are, and even if we’re not that happy, we’re not unhappy enough to do something about it, and even if we are unhappy enough, we’ve tried to change so many times before and failed, so why should this time be different?

My Rabbi once told us that before the war in Europe, when the approach of Elul was announced in synagogue the week before Rosh Chodesh, the first of the month, women could be heard sobbing behind the *mehitza* (partition) at the terrifying prospect of the Day of Judgment – Rosh Hashana. Today, when Elul is announced in shul, we’re more likely to cry from the prospect of having to get up early for Selichot (penitential prayers) and all the additional praying and intensity of the Days of Awe. Nowadays, we don’t like to be too serious — we want to chill.

So how do you change if you really don’t want to? Well, here’s a little trick. Write a list in your journal called, “THINGS I DON’T WANT TO DO.”

Write in it things like: “Check bank account balances” “Paint the living room.” “Say *asher yatzar* (the blessing after removing waste from the body) with *kavana* (concentration).

The *yetzer hara* has a very short attention span. He doesn’t stop you planning things; he only tries to stop you doing things at that very moment.

Once you get something onto that list it’s not the end, but it’s the beginning of the end; once something gets on to that list, eventually it will get done because you sneaked it under the defenses of the *yetzer hara* and now you can focus on changing it.

So the first lightbulb joke tells us that without a genuine desire and a strategy how to do it we will never get out of the comfortable, but dead, light socket that we’re stuck in.

The second lightbulb joke goes like this:

Question: “How many *ba’alei teshuva* (returnees to Torah)

does it take to change a lightbulb?”

Answer: “...Are we allowed to do that?”

It’s easy to make fun of the seeming obsession of the newly-observant with not doing ‘the wrong thing’ — but those of us who are not FFF (frum-from-Friday) could well take a lesson or two from those who are.

The *Mesillat Yesharim* (in the section entitled *Zehirut/Zeal*) describes a basic stratagem in the service of G-d. It’s called “Think!”

“Think! Right now – is this what G-d wants me to be doing?”

There are many things that stop us from thinking: habit, laziness, the agenda of our own desires, and the pressures of modern living. However, if we would stop and think at various points in the day, “Right now is this what G-d wants me to be doing?” or “Are we allowed to do this?” we would find that our connection to G-d would improve dramatically.

The word *Teshuva* can mean, “return” but it can also mean “answer.” A *ba’al teshuva* is someone who ‘owns an answer’, and only someone who is prepared to ask the question “Is this what Hashem wants me to be doing?” will “own” the answer.

“When you go out to war against your enemies...”

The greatest enemy is a person’s own negative drive, his *yetzer hara*.

The Talmud in Tractate *Kiddushin* says that a person’s negative drives grows more powerful every day, and were it not for G-d’s help, he would succumb. Through natural means alone we can never overcome our *yetzer hara*, and it’s easy to become discouraged from even trying to fight. Therefore the Torah tells us “*When you go out to war against your enemies*”, if only we start to fight, if only we “go out to war”, “*Hashem Your G-d will give them into your hand*”. We will receive Divine assistance to win the battle, as our Sages teach, “Someone who tries to purify himself, gets help from above.”

May Elul be the month in which we manage to light up our lives (and not just with two lightbulbs) with such a victory!

• Source: Based on *Torat Moshe*

PARSHA OVERVIEW

The Torah describes the only permissible way a woman captured in battle may be married. If a man marries two wives, and the less-favored wife bears a firstborn son, this son's right to inherit a double portion is protected against the father's desire to favor the child of the favored wife. The penalty for a rebellious son, who will inevitably degenerate into a monstrous criminal, is stoning. A body must not be left on the gallows overnight, because it had housed a holy soul. Lost property must be returned. Men are forbidden from wearing women's clothing and vice versa. A mother bird may not be taken together with her eggs. A fence must be built around the roof of a house. It is forbidden to plant a mixture of seeds, to plow with an ox and a donkey together, or to combine wool and linen in a garment. A four-cornered garment must have twisted threads — *tzitzit* — on its corners. Laws regarding illicit relationships are detailed. When Israel goes to war, the camp must be governed by rules of spiritual purity. An escaped slave must not be returned to his master.

Taking interest for lending to a Jew is forbidden. *Bnei Yisrael* are

not to make vows. A worker may eat of the fruit he is harvesting. Divorce and marriage are legislated. For the first year of marriage, a husband is exempt from the army and stays home to rejoice with his wife. Tools of labor may not be impounded, as this prevents the debtor from earning a living. The penalty for kidnapping for profit is death. Removal of the signs of the disease *tzara'at* is forbidden. Even for an overdue loan, the creditor must return the collateral daily if the debtor needs it. Workers' pay must not be delayed. The guilty may not be subjugated by punishing an innocent relative. Because of their vulnerability, converts and orphans have special rights of protection. The poor are to have a portion of the harvest. A court may impose lashes. An ox must not be muzzled while threshing. It is a mitzvah for a man to marry his brother's widow if the deceased left no offspring. Weights and measures must be accurate and used honestly. The *parsha* concludes with the mitzvah to erase the name of Amalek, for, in spite of knowing about the Exodus, they ambushed the Jewish People.

ISRAEL Forever

DOUBLE DANGER

The danger that Israel faces from its enemies within its borders and outside them is attributed by political analysts to the unresolved Israel-Arab conflict. While this is the explanation on the surface, this week's Torah portion offers us a more profound perspective.

The Torah warns that if there is immodesty in dress this will cause G-d to "withdraw from you". (*Devarim* 23:15) At the conclusion of the parsha there is the command to remember what the Amalekite nation did to our ancestors on their way out of Egypt. This command is preceded by the prohibition against dishonesty in weights and measures. The connection between the two, Rashi points out, is that if we are dishonest in our business affairs we invite an attack from

our enemy.

The double danger of immodest dress and dishonesty in commerce is the hidden cause of our insecurity. The wars and terrorism are merely the results.

As Israel's leaders and its armed forces prepare themselves for a seemingly inevitable confrontation with our enemies, it would be wise for them to try solving the nation's problems of security by going to the root of the matter and radically changing the standard of modesty prevalent in our society and insisting on absolute honesty on the part of our leaders and our entire nation.

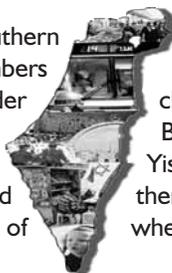
Only by eliminating this double danger will we truly be able, with Heaven's help, to secure Israel forever.

LOVE OF THE LAND - THE PLACES

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

NETIVOT – TOMB OF THE BABA SALI

Rabbi Yisrael Abu Chatzira's tomb in the southern city of Netivot has been attracting large numbers of worshippers since 1984. The spiritual leader of North African Jews who gained a reputation as a miracle worker through his prayers and blessings was descended from Rabbi Shmuel Albaz who lived in Damascus where he studied with the disciples of



the Ari Zal. After a miraculous crossing of the sea from Jaffa to Constantinople on a mat (*chatzira* in Arabic), he changed his name to Abu Chatzira ("father of the mat"). Baba Sali, as he was respectfully called, came to Eretz Yisrael in the early fifties and first settled in Yavneh. From there he moved to Ashkelon and ended up in Netivot where he is buried.

OHRNET magazine is published by OHR SOMAYACH Tanenbaum College

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PARSHA Q&A ?

1. Why must a captured woman mourn her family for a month in her captor's house?
2. What fraction of the inheritance does a first-born receive if he has a) one brother? b) two brothers?
3. What will become of a *ben sorer u'moreh* if his parents don't bring him to court?
4. Why is it a degradation to Hashem to hang a criminal's body on the gallows overnight?
5. What do you do if you find a lost object that costs money to maintain?
6. Why does the Torah forbid wearing the clothing of the opposite gender?
7. Why does the Torah link the mitzvah of sending away the mother-bird with the mitzvah of making a railing on the roof of your house?
8. What mixture of wool and linen is permitted to be worn?
9. What three things happen to a man who falsely slanders his bride?
10. Although the Egyptians enslaved the Jewish People, the Torah allows marriage with their third-generation converts. Why?
11. Why is causing someone to sin worse than killing him?
12. If one charges interest to his fellow Jew, how many commandments has he transgressed?
13. What is the groom's special obligation to his bride during their first year together?
14. When is a groom required to fight in a non-obligatory war?
15. What type of object may one not take as collateral?
16. "Remember what Hashem did to Miriam." To what event does the Torah refer?
17. If a poor person finds money, the one who lost it receives a blessing. From where do we derive this?
18. Who has the primary obligation to perform *yibum*?
19. Which two people in this week's *Parsha* are required to speak in *Lashon Hakodesh*?
20. How does the Torah describe those who cheat in business?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

1. 21:13 - So her captor will find her unattractive.
2. 21:17 - a) 2/3 b) 1/2
3. 21:22 - He will eventually rob and kill to support his physical indulgences.
4. 21:23 - Because humans are made in Hashem's image, and because the Jewish People are Hashem's children.
5. 22:2 - Sell it and save the money for the owner.
6. 22:5 - It leads to immorality.
7. 22:8 - To teach that one mitzvah leads to another, and to prosperity.
8. 22:12 - Wool *tzitzit* on a linen garment.
9. 22:18 - He receives lashes, pays a fine of 100 silver *selah*, and may never divorce her against her will.
10. 23:8 - Because they hosted Yaakov and his family during the famine.
11. 23:9 - Murder takes away life in this world, while causing someone to sin takes away his life in the World to Come.
12. 23:21 - Three; two negative commandments and a positive commandment.
13. 24:5 - To gladden her.
14. 24:5 - When he remarries his ex-wife.
15. 24:6 - Utensils used to prepare food.
16. 24:9 - Hashem punishing Miriam with *tzara'at* for speaking *lashon harah*.
17. 24:19 - From the mitzvah to leave the "forgotten bundle" for the poor.
18. 25:6 - The eldest brother.
19. 25:8 - The *yavam* (brother-in-law) and the *yavamah* (his childless brother's widow).
20. 25:16 - "An abomination (*to'evah*) to Hashem."

לע"נ

הרה"ח ר' אהרון בן ר' עמרם יצחק ז"ל

ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

- The limits on a minor's ability to buy, sell or make vows
- When the husband or wife are able to nullify a *get*
- When the agent is instructed to deliver a *get* in a specific place
- Which sort of instructions are understood to mean the writing and delivery of a *get*
- When more than one agent is appointed to write or deliver a *get*
- Insobriety or speechlessness on the part of one ordering a *get*
- The demon effect of the *kurdaikes* and the antidote
- Rabbi Sheishet and the evil servants of the exilarch
- How King Shlomo got hold of the *shamir*
- Binyahu and Ashmodat, king of the demons
- King Shlomo's rise and fall
- Unusual cures for various illnesses
- Counsel for staying healthy
- If *kurdaikes* is comparable to sleep or to insanity
- When instructions for writing a *get* are given by nodding or writing
- The validity of written testimony
- Marriage and divorce for those who cannot communicate in normal fashion
- Incomplete instructions for writing and delivering a *get*

WINE OR MONEY

“Give Rabbi Avina 400 zuz from the wine I have by the Panya River.” These were the instructions given by Ganeiva as he was being led to his execution.

Although instructions regarding a gift coming from a man about to die constitute a valid transfer of property without the need for a *kinyan*, a doubt to Rabbi Avina's claim was raised by Rabbi Abba.

Ganeiva did not say to *give him wine*, he argued, nor did he say to *give him the monetary value of wine*. All he said was to give him 400 zuz *from his wine*, and since when can money be made from wine?

Rabbi Abba's challenge was thus answered by his colleague. The reason why Ganeiva did not specify wine or money but mentioned both of them together in one phrase was in order to give Rabbi Avina a strong position in making his claim to Ganeiva's heirs. Had he merely specified wine and some of Ganeiva's wine had turned sour, his heirs would have claimed that it was the wine given to him that had spoiled. Had he specified money and some of the wine was sold and the money acquired was lost, they would claim that it was Rabbi Avina's loss. Only by combining wine and money in one phrase did he grant Rabbi Avina the privilege of claiming either wine or money according to the circumstances.

• *Gittin 66a*

What the SAGES Say

“Three things weaken a person – fear (of the future in regard to livelihood or enemies), travel and sin.”

• *Beraita - Gittin 70a*

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TO WED OR NOT TO WED?

From: Anonymous

Dear Rabbi,

I'd like to discuss a Jewish marriage with you. My husband and I were married this year in a traditional wedding ceremony. He is Jewish, I am not. However we would like to remarry in a traditional Jewish ceremony. I've been doing some research and have learned about the ketubah, chuppah, ring, breaking of glass. I am aware of the position of other groups in Judaism on this question, but what I'd like to know is if according to Orthodoxy there is anything special we'll have to do to have a Jewish ceremony & be legally married in the Jewish laws? We also want our children to have bar and bat mitzvas.

Dear Anonymous,

I honor your interest in Judaism and your desire to sanctify your relationship according to Jewish Law.

However, as you are aware that you have addressed your question to Orthodoxy, I must inform you that Jewish law prohibits intermarriage. I don't want to hurt you, but this means that according to Jewish law, not only can you not have a traditional wedding ceremony; you cannot be married to a Jew.

I do not wish to belittle the significance and value of your relationship, but since you seek the opinion of Jewish Law, I must answer accordingly.

To be "legally married in the Jewish laws" as you write, the non-Jewish person must convert through sincere acceptance of all the tenets and obligations of Judaism for Judaism's sake alone and not out of desire for the Jewish partner. Only after a valid, Jewishly-legal (Orthodox) conversion, may the person marry a Jew. (And even then, there

might be restrictions, for example if the Jewish partner is the man and he's a *kohen*.)

Any other "conversion" is not effective according to Jewish law, and a marriage involving such a conversion is not binding according to Jewish law, nor would there be any need for Jewish legal divorce if the couple decides to separate. Any children from such a marriage where the woman is the non-Jewish partner would not be Jewish (not even "half-Jewish" — there's no such principle in Judaism), and therefore it would not be relevant for them to have a bar or bat mitzvah.

It is important to realize that this is not because Judaism has a negative attitude to non-Jews. Judaism loves and respects all good people and recognizes and celebrates their unique individuality, purpose, contribution and worth. But as far as perpetuating and preserving the unique Jewish identity and destiny through marriage and childbirth, G-d permits Jews to marry only Jews (which would include sincere converts according to Jewish law, as above).

I want to reiterate, that I in no way doubt, criticize or invalidate the sincerity of your feelings for each other or the depth of your relationship. And of course, you are free to make your own decision - everyone has free-will. But based on your question, I feel I must make you aware of Jewish law in this instance, the issues involved/at stake and the conscious or even subconscious intentions of those who might condone action against Jewish law in general, and in your case in particular.

Since you are both interested in incorporating Judaism into your lives, whatever you decide, I suggest you consult Orthodoxy as well so that you have a well-balanced view and will know exactly where you stand each step of the way.

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GIVING A LIFT

Question: Is there an obligation when I am driving to give a lift to someone who is going my way?

Answer: Giving a lift is a fulfillment of the mitzvah of *gemilut chassidim*. Some even characterize it as an act of *hachnasat orchim* hospitality.

There may, of course, be situations in which giving a lift cannot be expected of you. If you are in a very great hurry and stopping to pick someone up will seriously delay you, or you are interested in carrying on a private conversation with someone already in your car or on the other end of a phone

(when you can talk without letting go of the steering wheel), you have a right to pass up the potential passenger.

The story is told of the founder of the great Lakewood Yeshiva, Rabbi Aharon Kotler, who once hired a taxi to take him from Jerusalem to Tel Aviv. He made a condition with the driver that he must pick up any passengers going their way.

(The rising price of gas may be used by some drivers as an excuse for not giving a lift in order to save on gas but such a negligible expense should hardly stand in the way of doing a mitzvah.)

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY _____

BACK TO LIFE

After being informed that his infant girl had died, the father made burial arrangements and rushed to the hospital to receive her body.

Doctors who had examined the baby and detected no pulse or heartbeat had pronounced her dead, wrapped her in sheets and placed the body in a refrigerator where corpses are stored. But when the shrouded body was removed from cold storage and delivered to the father he was surprised to see that she was still alive.

The medical staff in this Israeli hospital was amazed by the miracle they had just witnessed. Not only was a child

pronounced dead really alive, but she survived the double danger of freezing in the fridge and of suffocating from the sheets tightly wrapped around her.

"We already had a grave dug for her," said the overjoyed father whose baby had come back to life. His joy was short-lived, however, since she expired soon afterwards.

While the hospital has launched an investigation as to what went wrong, the incident has sparked criticism of the attitude in much of the medical profession towards defining termination of life.

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