

O H R N E T

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PARSHA INSIGHTS

SELF-SERVICE

“Because you did not serve the L-rd your G-d, with joy and with a good heart, when you had everything in abundance, you will serve your enemies in hunger and thirst ...lacking everything.” (28:47-48)

On a recent flight in the States I leaned forward and pulled out my in-flight buying guide. I was amazed at what I saw.

I gazed, awe-struck, at products whose ingenuity was worthy of a James Bond movie: a pair of sterling silver monogrammed cuff-links for my pajamas; a tomato ketchup bottle-reamer that extracts the last gram of ketchup from the bottom of the bottle; a nose-tweezer for my pet-poodle...

I've never seen a magazine so full of things I didn't need.

We live in a world where there are solutions to problems that we didn't even know we had. (Of course, no one has problems any more – just “issues”.)

Advertising is symptomatic of the age.

Our society defines itself by its needs.

Our mindset is: “I need, therefore I am.” The fact that I am in need of something, however small, is the clearest indication that I am still here.

What happens when we define ourselves by our needs?

The outcome is that we can never be happy. A person who defines his happiness by the absence of needs is doomed never to be happy, because a person always has unfulfilled and unfulfillable needs. When we define ourselves by our needs we condemn ourselves to a lifetime of frustration. Nobody dies with even half his or her wishes fulfilled.

When we turn on the television, what do we see? “Do you have bad breath? You need PHEW-gard®!”

“Are you tired? Run down? Do you need a break?” “Listen. We're offering you two free weeks in a Russian heavy-plutonium disposal plant to ‘cool off’ and put the

glow back in your life.” etc. etc. etc.

I need, therefore I am.

The Jewish view of the world could not be more different. In fact it's the opposite. Judaism looks at life as a series of moments to give. Life is a constantly unraveling saga of opportunities to give, in big ways and in small ways. We can give a large check to a worthy cause, or we can give a word of encouragement to someone who needs it. It's all the same. We can give a liver to someone who is dying without one or we can say “Thank you!” to the person who washes the floors.

There is no such thing as a small gift.

Because the world was made as a place of giving. That's its purpose. That's its function.

Nowadays, many people find it difficult to believe in G-d. Why is that?

The Torah teaches that Man was made in the “image of G-d.” How can Man be an image of a Being who is indescribably beyond any adjective or comparison, whether physical or spiritual?

When the spiritual masters teach that when the Torah says that Man was made in the image of G-d, it means that just like He is Merciful, so we should be merciful. Just like He is The Giver, we must also be givers. Needless to say our giving can never approach His giving, because His is a giving that is impossible to reciprocate – He already owns everything, and He doesn't need anything. But, as much as we can, G-d has put us into this world to be givers.

Thus, the purpose of this world, its design, is to be a series of opportunities to give.

This is why so many people fail to see G-d in the world, and in their lives. For they conceive of the world as a place of taking, of fulfilling their unending needs. That's

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PARSHA OVERVIEW

When *Bnei Yisrael* dwell in the Land of Israel, the first fruits are to be taken to the Temple and given to the *kohen* in a ceremony expressing recognition that it is G-d who guides Jewish history throughout all ages. (This passage forms one of the central parts of the Haggadah that we read at the Passover Seder.) On the last day of Pesach of the fourth and seventh years of the seven-year *shemita* cycle, a person must recite a disclosure stating that he has indeed distributed the tithes to the appropriate people in the prescribed manner. With this *mitzvah*, Moshe concludes the commandments that G-d has told him to give to the Jewish People. Moshe exhorts them to walk in G-d's ways because they are set aside as a treasured people to G-d. When *Bnei Yisrael* cross the Jordan

River they are to make a new commitment to the Torah. Huge stones are to be erected and the Torah is to be written on them in the world's seventy primary languages, and they are to be covered with a thin layer of plaster. Half the tribes will stand on Mount Gerizim and half on Mount Eval, and the *levi'im* will stand in a valley between the two mountains. There the *levi'im* will recite 12 commandments and all the people will say "amen" to the blessings and the curses. Moshe then details the blessings that will be bestowed upon *Bnei Yisrael*. These blessings are both physical and spiritual. But if the Jewish People do not keep the Torah, Moshe details a chilling picture of destruction, resulting in exile and wandering among the nations.

ISRAEL Forever

FIRST THINGS FIRST

The declaration that a Jew made when he brought *bikurim* – first fruits and crops – to the Beit Hamikdash is familiar to every Jew who ever read the Hagadah at the Pesach Seder. The compact survey of Jewish history leading up to their entry into Eretz Yisrael serves as the outline of the relating of the Exodus story.

After mentioning the oppression of our ancestors in Egypt and the miraculous exodus from bondage, the Jew offering the *bikurim* joyously declares, "He then brought us to this place (the *Beit Hamikdash*) and gave us this Land, a Land

flowing with milk and honey."

It is interesting to note the order of things in this declaration. First comes the mention of the *Beit Hamikdash* and then the Land. The *Beit Hamikdash* represents the spiritual dimension of the Land, while milk and honey symbolize its material dimension.

As Jews hear this declaration read in this week's Torah portion it is hoped that they will internalize the message that it is only an appreciation of its spiritual dimension that will 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

YERUSHALAYIM – THE BIKURIM PARADE

This week we read in the Torah about the mitzvah of bringing the *bikurim* – first crops and fruits of the seven species for which Eretz Yisrael is praised – to the *Beit Hamikdash* in Yerushalayim.

Our Talmudic Sages offer us this colorful description of the procession that took place in the bringing of *bikurim*.

"The ox bearing the produce walked before them, its horns covered with gold and a crown of olive branch-



es on its head. With the music of a flute accompanying them they recited the psalm (122) in which King David exclaims, "I rejoiced when they said to me let us go to the House of G-d." As they neared Yerushalayim they sent a messenger to inform its residents of their arrival and decorated their *bikurim*. Important officials went out to welcome them and all the craftsmen in the city stood up in their honor and greeted them. Music continued to accompany them until they reached the *Beit Hamikdash*."

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PARSHA Q&A ?

1. When historically did the obligation to bring *bikkurim* begin?
2. *Bikkurim* are from which crops?
3. How does one designate *bikkurim*?
4. Who shakes the basket containing the *bikkurim*?
5. What does “*v’anita v’amarta*” mean?
6. Which Arami “tried to destroy my father?”
7. When during the year may *bikkurim* be brought? Until when are the special verses recited?
8. Someone declaring that he separated *terumah* and *ma’aser* says: “And I didn’t forget.” What didn’t he forget?
9. What were the Jewish People to do with the 12 stones on Mt. Eval?
10. Six tribes stood on Mt. Eval and six on Mt. Gerizim. Who and what were in the middle?
11. Who “causes the blind to go astray?”
12. How does one “strike another secretly?”
13. Eleven curses were spoken on Mt. Eval. What is the significance of this number?
14. Why are sheep called “*ashterot*”?
15. How is the manner of expressing the curses in *Parshat Bechukotai* more severe than in this week’s *parsha*?
16. What is meant by “the Jewish People will become a proverb?”
17. Why did all the curses expressed in 48:16-44 befall the Jewish People?
18. “In the morning you shall say, ‘If only it were (last evening)’ and in the evening you will say, ‘If only it were (this) morning.’” Why?
19. To which tribe did Moshe give the Torah first?
20. How long does it take to understand the depth of one’s teacher’s wisdom?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week’s Questions!

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

1. 26:1 - After the Land was conquered and divided.
2. 26:2 - The seven species for which *Eretz Yisrael* is praised: Wheat, barley, grapes, olives, figs, dates, and pomegranates.
3. 26:2 - When he sees the first fruit ripen on a tree, he binds a piece of straw around it to mark it as *bikkurim*.
4. 26:4 - The *kohen* places his hands under the hands of the one bringing it, and they wave the basket together.
5. 26:5 - Speak loudly.
6. 26:5 - Lavan.
7. 26:11 - *Bikkurim* are brought from Shavuot until Chanukah. The verses are recited only until Succot.
8. 26:13 - To bless G-d.
9. 10. 27:2 - Build an altar.
10. 27:12 - *Kohanim*, *levi'im* and the Holy Ark.
11. 27:18 - Any person who intentionally gives bad advice.
12. 27:24 - By slandering him.
13. 27:24 - Each curse corresponds to one of the tribes, except for the tribe of Shimon. Since Moshe didn’t intend to bless the tribe of Shimon before his death, he did not want to curse them either.
14. 28:4 - Because they “enrich” (*m’ashiro*) their owners.
15. 28:23 - In *Bechukotai* the Torah speaks in the plural, whereas in this week’s Parsha the curses are mentioned in the singular.
16. 28:37 - Whenever someone wants to express the idea of extraordinary suffering, they will use the Jewish People as an example.
17. 28:47 - Because they did not serve G-d with gladness when everything was abundant.
18. 28:67 - Because the curse of each hour will be greater than that of the previous hour.
19. 29:3 - To the Tribe of Levi.
20. 29:8 - 40 years.

לע"נ

הרה"ח ר' אהרון בן ר' עמרם יצחק ז"ל

ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

- Status of a get given on condition of a man dying
- The position of Rabbi Yehuda Nessiah and Rabbi Yossi regarding the impact of writing the date of the get
- The power of the Sages to annul a marriage
- Divorces or transactions made conditionally which run into unforeseeable circumstances
- The interim status of the wife receiving a get conditioned on the man dying from his current illness
- When there is suspicion that the man in such a case who consorted with her initiated a new marriage
- A divorce or marriage on condition of one of the parties receiving something from the other
- If waiving fulfillment of a condition is considered fulfillment
- The enactment of Hillel allowing one to repurchase against the will of the buyer a home in a walled city
- The different requirements for condition in a get to limit its effectiveness
- Condition in a get made for the wife to provide a service for the man's father or child
- Condition in a get made for man being away for a period of time
- Which weekdays are considered as after Shabbat and which before
- A get thrown into a property owned by the wife
- The get of a dying man being delivered to his wife on Shabbat
- The need for the divorcer to inform his wife that the document he gave her is a get
- Throwing a get to the wife in a public domain

THE TWO PRINCES

“**T**he Beit Din that permitted the use of the oil of non-Jews.” This was the name given to a body of Talmudic Sages headed by Rabbi Yehuda Nessiah whose ruling regarding a divorce with a condition is mentioned in our *gemara*.

Who was this Sage whose name is so similar to that of Rabbi Yehuda Hanassi who is reverently referred to as Rebbie or Rabbeinu Hakadosh?

Rashi supplies us with the answer. Rabbi Yehuda Nessiah was the grandson of Rabbi Yehuda Hanassi and lived in the

era of the *amoraim*, as distinguished from his grandfather who was among the last of the *tanaim*. Although both of them had the title of *nassi* – head of the Sanhedrin – the title affixed to their similar name was changed in order to indicate that they were two different people.

Although his above-mentioned ruling regarding oil was accepted, Rabbi Yehuda Nessiah did not fare so well in regard to his ruling regarding the divorce. Rabbi Yochanan reported that his position – that the date written in a get indicates that the divorce is intended to take retroactive effect on that day once the condition mentioned is fulfilled – was not accepted by his colleagues.

• *Gittin 76b*

What the SAGES Say

“The first, second and third days of the week are called *after* Shabbat in regard to a get given on condition of the man returning after Shabbat (and applied to how long one can make *havdalah*) while the fourth, fifth and sixth are considered as being *before* the next Shabbat.”

• *Rabbi Zeira or Rabbi Assi - Gittin 77a*

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KIRUV QUERY

From: Susan in Newport, RI

Dear Rabbi,

Is there a mitzvah do to kiruv and bring Jews back to Judaism? Isn't it each person's personal business how to live his own life as he or she chooses?

Dear Susan,

Every person has a "right" to live his or her life as one chooses. This is a central tenet of Judaism, namely that every person is given free will to make whatever decision one wants. However, just as this does not mean one is not responsible for the outcome of his decisions, it also doesn't mean that G-d doesn't care about what we choose. More specifically, G-d gives us the ability to choose, but still wants us to make the right choices, which are about both refraining from distancing ourselves from G-d and proactively choosing to come close to Him.

It is for this reason that many of the commentators compare kiruv to the obligation of returning a lost object to its owner. The Torah mentions several times in different contexts the mitzvah to recover a lost object and tend to it with the intention of returning it to its owner in an acceptable condition. If one is obligated to return an inanimate object or an animal to its human owner, they argue, all the more so one must endeavor to return a person who has become distanced from G-d back to his Master. This also entails seeing to the person's needs before and during the return in order to return the "lost" object in an acceptable condition.

Another idea discussed in the commentaries regards the connection between kiruv and charity or helping one's fellow Jew in need. The Torah obligates us to be aware of and sensitive to other's material needs such that they should not be lacking at least the bare necessities. If this is so regarding

one's material status, which is viewed as having only secondary importance, all the more so it applies to one's spiritual state which is one's primary reason for living. This means that we must try to encourage other Jews to perform at least the basic *mitzvot* and discourage them from the major transgressions. This is in order to help meet the person's spiritual needs, even if he or she is not currently aware of what they're lacking.

A third explanation for the obligation to do kiruv is for the benefit of humankind in general, and for the Jewish People in particular. This idea is based on the premise that the more people who do G-d's will, the more benevolently G-d views mankind and the more blessing and peace He will bestow upon them — ultimately resulting in redemption and the Messianic Era. Since the Torah views all people and all Jews bound together and mutually responsible for each other's actions, a Jew must endeavor to elevate not only his level of observance, but also that of others as well.

I'll conclude this point with an analogy: Once a ship sailed the sea. Mid-ocean, the passengers and crew heard a menacing banging coming from the hull of the ship. They located the noise as coming from behind a locked cabin on the lowest floor. They called out, "What's happening in there?" to which they heard an indignant reply, "It's none of your business!" When they persisted the reply returned, "I'm making a hole in the floor of my cabin!" Alarmed, they broke down the door attempting to stop the man. To this he argued, "Leave me alone and get out of here! This is my cabin and I'll do what I want in it!" Getting hold of him they explained, "It may be the floor of your cabin, but it's also the hull of the ship. If you preserve the integrity of the ship, we'll all arrive safely, but if you bore a whole in your floor, we'll all sink!"

WHAT'S THE RIGHT THING TO DO?

REAL-LIFE QUESTIONS OF SOCIAL AND BUSINESS ETHICS

PREMATURE BAR MITZVAH

Question: A young new immigrant was only twelve years old when a Bar Mitzvah was made for him upon the insistence of his grandmother that he was already thirteen. A few months later the mistake was discovered and the question arose as to whether he should continue putting on tefillin and whether a second Bar Mitzvah should be made when he does reach the age of thirteen. What is the right thing to do?

Answer: This question was dealt with by Rabbi Yitzchak Zilberstein, rav of the Ramat Elchanan community in Bnei Brak, in his first volume of "*Borchi Nafshi*".

His ruling was that the youngster should not stop putting on tefillin once he has started, especially since some have the custom of starting the fulfillment of the mitzvah of tefillin a year before Bar Mitzvah.

As regards a second Bar Mitzvah there definitely should be a party for the youngster when he becomes thirteen. That is the age when it is no longer the responsibility of the father to provide the *chinuch* training for mitzvah fulfillment and the privilege of responsibility becomes that of the Bar Mitzvah boy – a real cause for celebration.

ONE WAY TO STOP A WAR

“**T**his is the prime minister of Georgia, Vladimir Gurgenzidze, speaking. You brought me a letter from a man name Steiman. Is he still alive? I’ve heard that he is a holy man. I want him to pray for us and our state.”

This was what Rabbi Shimon Bruk, chairman of the Israel branch of *Hava’ad L’hatzalat Nidchei Yisrael*, heard on the phone on the morning of August 12th when war between Russia and Georgia was reaching a climax. Bruk had met with the prime minister in March to thank him for his support of

the Jewish educational institutions that his organization had established in Georgia. He also presented him with a letter from the revered rosh yeshiva in which he referred to the Georgian government as a “regime of lovingkindness”. The letter is reportedly hanging on the wall of the prime minister’s office.

Rabbi Bruk met with Rav Steiman around noon and presented Gurgenzidze’s request. Shortly after the rosh yeshiva gave the requested blessing came the announcement of the cease-fire.

PARSHA INSIGHTS

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not what the world looks like. We will fail to see the Hand of the Creator if we look at the world ‘through the wrong end of the telescope.’ This world will look like a place where G-d is playing ‘dirty pool’, because we can never fulfill our desires here. But that’s not the way the world looks ‘from G-d’s point of view’. From His “point of view” the world was made as a facility for giving.

When a person does a mitzvah he can feel happy for one of two reasons. He can feel happy that he ‘chalked up a few more brownie points’. Or, alternatively, he can feel happiness from the mitzvah itself. In learning Torah it often happens that we enjoy the process of the learning as much as the fact that we have learned something.

Our feeling when we do a mitzvah gives us a yardstick to the quality of our mitzvot. Are we suffused with a feeling of joy at doing the will of the Creator, or are we going through the motions without joy and without enthusiasm?

Are our mitzvot an outpouring of the heart, or merely a drudge?

With this in mind, maybe we can understand a difficult aspect of this week’s parsha.

“Because you did not serve the L-rd your G-d, with joy and with a good heart, when you had everything in abundance, you will serve your enemies in hunger and thirst ...lacking everything.” (28:47-48)

What’s so terrible about serving G-d without joy, without a good heart, that it merits such dire consequences? What makes serving G-d without joy seemingly the gravest sin of all?

Service without joy, without heart, is no service at all. It shows that we are needers and not givers. It shows we have totally missed the point of life. It shows that our service is really self-service.

• Sources: Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler and others

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