

OHRNET

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PARSHA INSIGHTS

A FISH OUT OF WATER

“And G-d spoke all these words...” (20:1)

Chagall, Rothko, Modigliani, Pollock, Mahler, Kafka, Mendelssohn, Marx, Trotsky, Freud, and Einstein are but a small fraction of the Jewish contribution to creative invention.

Some 15 percent of all Nobel Prize nominees have been Jewish, while the Jewish People barely rise above a half a percent of the world’s population. The Jewish desire to light up the world, and their success in doing so, is very disproportionate to our numbers.

Mark Twain, in his now famous article in Harper’s Bazaar (March 1898), identified the Jew’s “alert and aggressive mind...”

Of all the anti-Semitic slogans lobbed our way throughout history, no one has ever accused the Jews of being stupid. What is referred to in the United States as a Polish joke, and becomes in England an Irish joke, has never transmuted anywhere in the world to a Jewish joke.

The aspiration of someone who delves deeply into the Torah is to author his own *chidushim* (novellae). How is it possible to say anything new after thousands of years and thousands of brilliant minds turning the Torah over and over? And yet, every generation produces its truly gifted Torah thinkers who manage to

innovate and enlighten while nevertheless staying firmly within the parameters that the Torah itself defines.

We are a people of innovation.

The first mitzvah given to the Jewish People was Kiddush HaChodesh, the sanctification of the New Moon. It was the first mitzvah because it expresses the essence of the Jewish People; the new moon is both as old as the solar system and brand-spanking new. And the Jewish People are both as old as history and as new as tomorrow.

When Yaakov Avinu blessed Ephraim and Menashe, his blessing was that they should multiply like fish.

Something very interesting happens when rain falls on a lake. The fish come to the surface to drink the drops of rain. In spite of the fact that they are surrounded by water — they live in it; they drink it — nevertheless, fish always swim up to imbibe the new drops of rainwater.

Thus it is with the Jewish People. If a Jew is not connected to Torah he will still thirst for innovation as history amply demonstrates. And for those for whom Torah is life, though the Torah was given over three thousand years ago, the Jewish mind and soul longs to hear and drink in the words of the greatest Torah minds of the age.

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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

QUENCHING THE THIRST

“There is a thirst for knowledge, especially among our youth, and I expect you to quench that thirst.”

Sounds like someone exhorting an Ohr Lagolah or Ner Le'elef class training to do outreach work that will bring young Jews back to a Torah life.

But the author of this statement was none other than Israel's Minister of Education Yuli Tamir speaking half a year ago at the 18th Biennial Conference of the Reform Movement in Israel.

As Jews this Shabbat listen reverently to the reading of the Ten Commandments they can only wonder what connection

there is between the Education Minister's choice of thirst quenchers and what our ancestors experienced at Sinai.

How right was MK Zevulun Orlev in criticizing Tamir for "misappropriating her powers" by making comments that "are more proof that she is trying to force on our education system the political agenda of Peace Now."

With such a person in charge of education in Israel there is little wonder that Israeli pupils made such a dismal showing in recent international tests.

On the Shabbat that we revisit Sinai it is important to remember that only through the Torah given at Sinai can we fulfill the true mission of 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 KING DAVID'S SECRET AGENT

The rebellion of Avshalom against his father King David ended in failure thanks to the clever action of Chushai Ha'arki, whose tomb is located in the village of Yarcha in western Galilee.

When Avshalom took counsel from Achitofel on how to overcome his father's forces it was Chushai,



who had been secretly planted by David in his son's court, who countered his advice with a plan that eventually led to the crushing of the rebellion.

It is reported that Rabbi Chayim ben Attar, author of the Ohr Hachayim commentary on the Torah, visited Chushai's grave in 1742 together with his disciples. They studied the plots concerning David and all of *Tehillim*.

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.

- Responsibility of partners digging a pit in a public domain
- How transactions of pits, houses or flocks are consummated
- Limits of responsibility for damage caused by a pit
- When an ox or man push something into a pit
- The exceptional animal that falls into a pit
- The laws which affect all animal life, not just an ox
- The word missing from the first holy tablets
- Working or crossbreeding two different species of animal life
- Responsibility of owner for damage caused by the animal which he guarded
- What constitutes sufficient guarding
- Responsibility for four kinds of indirect damage
- When the fence guarding the animal breaks down at night allowing the animal to cause damage
- When a guardian pays a fine like a thief

TRIPLE THREAT

A man gets pushed by another man and an ox into a pit in the public thoroughfare, causing him physical damage.

Since there are three parties responsible for this damage – the man, the owner of the ox and the one who dug the pit – payment for the damage caused must be equally divided among them.

The ruling of the Sage Rava needs clarification in regard to the responsibility of the one who dug the pit. Tosefot compares this situation to one in which a person takes some-

one's garment and puts it into the fire belonging to a third party. Just as it is illogical to blame the owner of the fire for the use which is consciously made by someone else to cause damage, so too it does not make sense to hold the pit's digger responsible for a man using it to cause damage.

The resolution of this problem provided by Tosefot is that the man did not consciously push the victim into the pit. Although he is still held partially responsible, he cannot be held responsible for that part of the damage that resulted from the pit being where it was.

• Bava Kama 53b

What the SAGES Say

“When the owner of the flock is angry with his goats he blinds the leading goat (so that it will stumble and fall into a pit followed by the others – so too when G-d wishes to punish the Jews He appoints improper leaders for them – Rashi.)

• A Galilean to Rabbi Chisda - Bava Kama 52a

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STRANDED?

From: Rabih Sarieddine in Switzerland

Dear Rabbi,

It seems to me that universality is one of the main topics in Judaism. However, in Judaism, conversion is a long process that needs human validation. Now take someone who really wishes to become Jewish. It happens that he takes a voyage on the sea and the boat sinks. He survives but ends up on a deserted island and is condemned to remain there all his life. Does this mean that he can never become a Jew? If this is the case, what is Judaism about? And if it is not true, what is universality about? Thank you.

Dear Rabih,

It is true that Judaism describes G-d as the King of the Universe. His relationship with, and interest in, the world is in fact universal. G-d's message to all mankind is also universal: Believe in Me as the One Creator of everything and live ethical lives. However, the fact that G-d and His message are universal doesn't mean the details are the same for all people and that all people have to be the same. G-d recognizes and celebrates the variety and significance of the individual as well.

This means that the details of what G-d expects and demands of people vary literally from group to group and individual to individual. Within the Jewish people, the teachings and obligations of the Torah apply differently according to factors such as age, gender, physical

constitution, family lineage and more. G-d's recognition of the individual does not detract from His universal message.

Similarly, while generally applicable to all, the Torah applies differently to Jews than to non-Jews. G-d's expectations from, and demands of, Jews are more detailed and rigorous. But that does not mean that He is only the G-d of the Jews. He is everyone's Father in Heaven who shares a unique relationship with all.

The bottom line of all this is that universality does not mean homogeneity but is rather more about the harmonious co-existence and celebration of difference. Other than the basic LCD of ethical monotheism revealed by G-d in the Torah, people are valid as they are, and can earn spiritual reward in the World to Come. Judaism does not believe that everyone has to be Jewish, but rather everyone has to be righteous in their own right according to G-d's will for each individual.

So, to relate these ideas to the scenario you describe, a person may have good intentions in wanting to become Jewish, which is an option for everyone (albeit an unnecessary one). However, G-d rules the world and may decide that despite the person's good will, his potential would be more fully realized or his contribution would ultimately be greater as a non-Jew. Sometimes G-d even has to resort to drastic measures to save a person from himself. But G-d helps, G-d saves and G-d wants us to survive. Sometimes, to prevent us from drowning in the sea of conformity and uniformity, he places us on an isolated island. But this is order to teach us that just as the universal G-d appreciates and celebrates our individuality, so should we.

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WHO GETS THE PRIZE?

Question: The fellow standing in line at a checkout counter in a shopping center was coughing away, spraying the people around him. The man behind him suggested he step aside in order to avoid harming others with his germs. He did indeed leave the line, allowing the one who made the suggestion to take his place. When that one finally reached the cash register he was greeted by the center manager with an envelope containing 10,000 shekels worth of shopping coupons because he was the millionth customer of the shopping center. The fellow who left the line at his suggestion thereupon claimed that this prize belonged to him. What is the right thing to do?

Answer: The ruling of the rabbanim in Bnei Brak was that

the coupons belonged to the man who got them. First of all, the fellow who did the coughing was halachically obligated to leave the line because he presented a danger to others. Aside from this there was no reason for him to assume that he would have won the prize had he remained in line since Heaven had determined that the other fellow should be the winner. One of the rabbanim cited a story told by the Chafetz Chaim about a host who secretly switched his lottery ticket with that of his Torah scholar guest who he felt had a better chance to win. When it turned out that it was his original ticket that won the big prize, he learned the lesson that tickets don't win prizes, people do.

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY _____

WHY HE LOOKED SO SAD

A look of sadness on the face of someone who always exuded happiness greeted the visitor to the home of a Torah scholar in Bnei Brak. When he met him the next morning in the synagogue he could not resist asking him why he looked so depressed the day before.

"My wife was in a very depressed mood that day," he explained, "and all my efforts to cheer her up met with failure. I finally hit on the idea that if she sees me looking

depressed she will certainly try to cheer me up, and in order to do so she will herself have to become cheerful. I therefore put on an act of sadness that I could not drop when you came to the door because my wife was standing next to me and would have seen through my act. My strategy worked and she came out of her bad mood. It was worthwhile embarrassing myself in front of you, with an uncharacteristic show of sadness in order to make my wife happy."

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