

O H R N E T

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PARSHA INSIGHTS

Devarim

ORDER IN THE COURT!

“And these are the words...” (1:1)

This week’s Torah portion always comes immediately before the fast of Tisha B’Av. Our Sages tell us that the Second Holy Temple was destroyed by baseless hatred. Baseless hatred sounds like a contradiction in terms. If someone wrongs you then the hatred is not baseless, and if he hasn’t wronged you, then why should you hate him?

Sinat Chinam – baseless hatred — is ‘based’ on a fundamental misconception about this world.

G-d places each of us on our own individual ‘rail track’. What is designated for me is mine and no one in the world can touch it. And the same for you. It’s like two express trains on their own tracks. They can come so close to each other, but they are totally separate one from the other.

Baseless hatred results from thinking that what other people have could really be mine if they weren’t around — “You’re driving my car! You’re married to my wife!

You’re breathing MY AIR!”

Baseless hatred begins with seeing the world as a supermarket of my own desires; that I’m here to take.

Something happened to me the other day that brought this idea of taking into sharp focus.

Last week I came into my classroom and sitting there on the table was the equivalent of the ‘apple for the teacher’ — a box, about six inches long, wrapped up in red and gold paper with a little card on the outside: “To Rebbe.”

I’m sure my face lit up with a smile as I saw the gift, and judging from the smile on the face of one of my students, I realized who had placed it there.

“Thank you so much! That’s so nice of you. I really appreciate your appreciation,” I said.

I picked up the box. Not too heavy, not too light. I rattled it around to try and guess what it might be.

And then I put it back down on the table.

The student who had given it to me was a bit disappointed, “Rebbe, aren’t you going to open it?”

“Yes. But not now.”

“But Rebbe,” protested my student, “You’ve GOT to open it!”

“I will” I insisted, “but later.”

I once read a story about Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler, the author of “Strive for Truth,” who received a letter from his wife during the war. Because of the hostilities, they had been separated for a very long time, and this was the first letter he had received from her with pictures of their daughter whom he had last seen as a girl and had now grown to be a young woman. Nevertheless, he placed the letter on the mantle and left it there for a full ten minutes before granting himself the pleasure of looking at the photographs. Rabbi Dessler was exercising the character trait of controlling one’s desires; for once one is controlled by his desires, a person’s negative drive has him in the palm of his hand.

The reason I left the box on the table, however, was not because I was working on my self-control.

But maybe it was something else that I learned from Rabbi Dessler.

Giving is infinitely better than taking.

When you give something, the gift is merely the vehicle for the feeling; the physical object is really just a way of giving a piece of yourself.

Taking is always about the object itself. How many times have you opened up a present and lied through your teeth when you said, “Oh it’s just what I wanted!” Of course it was just what you *didn’t* want. What you really wanted was the new iPad; not this crummy MP4.

I left my student’s gift on the table for a long time so I could enjoy the spiritual message of the gift before the inevitable physical reality of it spoiled my appreciation.

“Go on, Rebbe, open it!”

“Do you mind if I take it home unopened? I want to show it to my wife.”

“Sure, Rebbe.”

My wife had as much pleasure from that unopened present as I had.

In the end I finally opened it.

And what was in it?

A judge’s gavel.

Let’s put it this way: I have a ‘lively’ bunch of pupils and this particular one thought I could do with a little help to keep ‘order in the court.’

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Devarim

This Parsha begins the last of the Five Books of The Torah, *Sefer Devarim*. This Book is also called *Mishneh Torah*, “Repetition of the Torah” (hence the Greek/English title Deuteronomy). *Sefer Devarim* relates what Moshe told *Bnei Yisrael* during the last five weeks of his life, as they prepared to cross the Jordan into *Eretz Yisrael*. Moshe reviews the *mitzvot*, stressing the change of lifestyle they are about to undergo: From the supernatural existence of the desert under Moshe’s guidance to the apparently natural life they will experience under Yehoshua’s leadership in the Land.

The central theme this week is the sin of the spies, the *meraglim*. The Parsha opens with Moshe alluding to the sins of the previous generation who died in the desert. He describes what would have happened if they hadn’t sinned by sending spies into *Eretz Yisrael*. G-d would have given them without a fight all the land from the Mediterranean to the Euphrates, including the lands of Ammon, Moav and Edom. He details the subtle sins that culminate in the sin of the spies, and reviews at length this incident and its results: The entire generation would die in the desert; Moshe would not enter *Eretz Yisrael*. He reminds them that their immediate reaction to G-d’s decree was to want to “go up and fight” to redress the sin; he recounts how they wouldn’t listen when he told them not to go, that they no longer merited vanquishing their enemies miraculously. They ignored him and suffered a massive defeat. They were not allowed to fight with the kingdoms of Esav, Moav or Ammon — these lands were not to be part of the map of *Eretz Yisrael* in the meantime. When the conquest of Canaan will begin with Sichon and Og, it will be via natural warfare.

Va’etchanan

Although Moshe is content that Yehoshua will lead the nation, Moshe nevertheless prays to enter the Land of Israel in order to fulfill its special *mitzvot*. G-d refuses. Moshe

reminds *Bnei Yisrael* of the gathering at Sinai when they received the Torah — that they saw no visual representation of the Divine, but only the sound of words. Moshe impresses on *Bnei Yisrael* that the Sinai revelation took place before an entire nation, not to a select elite, and that only the Jews will ever claim that G-d spoke to their entire nation. Moshe specifically enjoins *Bnei Yisrael* to “pass over” the Sinai event to their children throughout all generations.

Moshe predicts, accurately, that when *Bnei Yisrael* dwell in *Eretz Yisrael* they will sin and be scattered among all the peoples. They will stay few in number but will eventually return to G-d.

Moshe designates three “refuge cities” to which an inadvertent killer may flee. Moshe repeats the 10 Commandments and then teaches the *Shema*, the central credo of Judaism, that there is only One G-d. Moshe warns the people not to succumb to materialism and thus forget their purpose as a spiritual nation. The *parsha* ends with Moshe exhorting *Bnei Yisrael* not to intermarry when they enter *Eretz Yisrael*, as they cannot be a treasured and holy nation if they intermarry, and they will become indistinguishable from the other nations.

Ekev

If *Bnei Yisrael* carefully observe even those “minor” *mitzvot* that are usually “trampled” underfoot, Moshe promises them that they will be the most blessed of the nations of earth. Moshe tells *Bnei Yisrael* that they will conquer *Eretz Canaan* little by little, so that the land will not be overrun by wild animals in the hiatus before *Bnei Yisrael* are able to organize and settle the whole land. After again warning *Bnei Yisrael* to burn all carved idols of Canaanite gods, Moshe stresses that the Torah is indivisible and not open to partial observance. Moshe describes the Land of Israel as a land of wheat, barley, grapes, figs, and pomegranates, a land of oil-yielding olives and date-honey. Moshe cautions *Bnei Yisrael* not to become haughty and think that their success in *Eretz Yisrael* is a result of their own powers or vigor; rather, it was

G-d who gave them wealth and success. Nor did G-d drive out the Canaanites because of *Bnei Yisrael*’s righteousness, but rather because of the sins of the Canaanites; for the road from Sinai had been a catalogue of large and small sins and rebellions against G-d and Moshe. Moshe details the events after G-d spoke the 10 Commandments at Sinai, culminating in his bringing down the second set of Tablets on Yom Kippur. Aharon’s passing is recorded as is the elevation of the *levi’im* to G-d’s ministers. Moshe points out that the 70 souls who went down to Egypt have now become like the stars of the heaven in abundance. After specifying the great virtues of the Land of Israel, Moshe speaks the second paragraph of the *Shema*, conceptualizing the blessings that accompany keeping *mitzvot* and the curse that results from non-observance.

Re’eh

Moshe presents to the nation the blessing of a spiritually oriented life, and the curse of becoming disconnected from G-d. When the nation enters *Eretz Yisrael* they must burn down any trees that had been used for idol-worship, and destroy all idolatrous statues. G-d will choose only one place where the Divine Presence will dwell. Offerings may be brought only there; not to a private altar. Moshe repeatedly warns against eating animal blood. In the desert, all meat was slaughtered in the Mishkan, but in *Eretz Yisrael* meat may be slaughtered anywhere. Moshe lists the categories of food that may only be eaten in Jerusalem. He warns the nation against copying ways of the other nations. Since the Torah is complete and perfect, nothing may be added or subtracted from it. If a “prophet” tells the people to permanently abandon a Torah law or indulge in idol worship, he is to be put to death. One who entices others to worship idols is to be put to death. A city of idolatry must be razed. It is prohibited to show excessive signs of mourning, such as marking the skin or making a bald spot. Moshe reiterates the classifications of kosher and non-kosher food and the prohibition of cooking meat and milk.

- An atonement sacrifice for mere speech
- How much must be eaten to constitute a violation of an oath to abstain from eating
- Difference between a *shavuah* and a *konem*
- How an oath regarding eating affects drinking
- Is eating forbidden or inedible foods considered a violation of an oath to abstain from eating
- Multiple atonements for one act of eating
- Oaths regarding others and intangible things
- Oaths relating to past and to future
- An oath made in error or only in the mind
- An oath to fulfill a mitzvah or to avoid doing so
- Different atonements for different oaths
- How long can one still have his oath nullified

WHEN LOGIC IS NOT ENOUGH

Is drinking considered eating? This question arises in regard to someone who took an oath to refrain from eating. Is his drinking considered a violation of his oath?

The Sage Shmuel is quoted as ruling that drinking is indeed considered eating and offers two proofs for this position. One is based on logic and the other on a passage in the Torah.

The logical proof is based on the fact that that when one person invites another to join him in eating they sometimes end up drinking together. Since oaths depend on how people usually express themselves, this is considered sufficient proof that drinking is considered eating as far as oaths are concerned.

Tosefot raises the question why the *gemara* finds it necessary to also offer proof from a Torah passage when the logical proof is sufficient. The *gemara* in other places does indeed ask why a Torah passage is necessary if there is logical proof.

Tosefot's resolution is that not every logical explanation is foolproof, so that it becomes necessary to sometimes, such as in this case, offer a proof from the Torah to substantiate the logical explanation.

• *Shavuot 22b*

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PARSHA OVERVIEW

Produce of the second tithe must be eaten in Jerusalem, and if the amount is too large to carry, it may be exchanged for money with which food is bought in Jerusalem. In certain years this tithe is given to the poor. *Bnei Yisrael* are instructed to always be open-hearted, and in the seventh year any loans must be discounted — G-d will bless the person in all ways. A Jewish bondsman is released after six years, and must be sent away with generous provisions. If he refuses to leave, his ear is pierced with an awl at the door post and he remains a bondsman until the Jubilee year. The Parsha ends with a description of the three pilgrimage festivals of Pesach, Shavuot and Succot.

Shoftim

Moshe tells *Bnei Yisrael* to appoint judges and officers in their cities. A bribe of even an insignificant sum is forbidden. Trees are not to be planted near G-d's altar, as was the way

of idolaters. Blemishes in animals designated for offerings and other points of disqualification are listed. The Great Sanhedrin is to make binding decisions on new situations according to Torah criteria to prevent the fragmentation of the Torah. A very learned scholar who refuses to accept the Halachic decisions of the Sanhedrin incurs the death penalty. A Jewish king may only have possessions and symbols of power commensurate with the honor of his office, but not for self-aggrandizement. He is to write for himself two *sifrei Torah*, one to be kept with him wherever he goes, so that he doesn't become haughty. Neither the *kohanim* nor the *levi'im* are to inherit land in the Land of Israel, rather they are to be supported by the community by a system of tithes. All divination is prohibited. G-d promises the Jewish People that He will send them prophets to guide them, and Moshe explains how a genuine prophet may be distinguished from a false one. Cities of refuge are to be provided an

accidental killer to escape the blood-avenger from the deceased's family. However, someone who kills with malice is to be handed over to the blood-avenger. Moshe cautions *Bnei Yisrael* not to move boundary markers to increase their property. Two witnesses who conspire to "frame" a third party are to be punished with the very same punishment that they conspired to bring upon the innocent party. A *kohen* is to be anointed specifically for when Israel goes to war, to instill trust in G-d. Among those disqualified from going to war is anyone who has built a new house but not lived in it yet, or anyone who is fearful or fainthearted. An enemy must be given the chance to make peace, but if they refuse, all the males are to be killed. Fruit trees are to be preserved and not cut down during the siege. If a corpse is found between cities, the elders of the nearest city must take a heifer, slaughter it, and wash their hands over it, saying that they are not guilty of the death.

- What is considered taking an oath in vain
- The oath which Moshe required of his people in regard to allegiance to Heaven
- The oaths which are relevant to all Jews and which one is limited to particular ones
- Who is obligated to stand in court
- Rules for the judge and for his disciple
- Oath of reluctant witness taken out of court
- How oath is administered to reluctant witnesses
- Oath of a single reluctant witness
- How many sacrifices are needed to atone for a false oath regarding multiple testimonies
- Oaths of witnesses in non-financial matters
- The limitations of circumstantial evidence
- When one is considered a proven liar
- Which oaths of witnesses do not require a sacrifice as atonement
- Which names are considered sacred and cannot be erased

AN INGENIOUS SOLUTION

Sitting at the head of a rabbinical court, Rabbi Nachman had a problem. One of the litigants scheduled to appear before the court was the wife of Rabbi Huna. Since she was the wife of a Torah Sage there was an obligation to stand up for her honor when she entered. But if he stood up for her this would appear to be favoring her above the other litigant, something which is forbidden for a judge to do.

His ingenious solution was to instruct the court attendant to set loose a bird in his direction when the woman entered, which would force him to stand up in order to avoid this flying object. He would thus fulfill his obligation to stand up in honor of the woman while the other party would not interpret it as such.

Tosefot raises the question as to whether standing up under such circumstances is considered a fulfillment of showing respect for a Torah scholar since it is not evident that he is indeed showing his wife honor by standing up for her. One of the resolutions Tosefot suggests is that while such standing may not be a positive expression of honor, the fact that he is already standing for any reason frees him of the responsibility of making an effort to actively show her the respect she deserves.

• *Shavuot 30b*

Shavuot 36-42

- Oaths and curses
- Oath of a guardian disclaiming responsibility for loss
- Atonement for taking a false oath in such a case
- When the oath is in regard to multiple claims or multiple claimants
- The oath required by the court when there is a partial admission by the defendant
- The seriousness of lying under oath
- Avoiding deception on the part of the oath-taker
- When an oath is required in regard to real estate
- The rabbinically instituted oath for total denial
- If the borrower before witnesses must repay before witnesses
- When a denial can backfire
- When no oath is taken in financial cases

THE DENIAL BOOMERANG

“Pay me the hundred zuz which I loaned you.” To this demand came the response: “No such thing ever took place. Following this exchange the lender produced witnesses who testified that there was indeed a loan but that it had been repaid.

In contrast to the position of the Sage Abaye that the borrower is exempt from payment, the Sage Rava contends that he is obligated to pay. This is how he explains his position:

“Anyone who claims that he never borrowed is considered as admitting that he never paid.”

The logic of Rava’s position is that a person is believed to obligate himself even if he is contradicted by a hundred witnesses.

Why a person has such absolute credibility in regard to his financial obligations is the subject of discussion among the commentaries. One explanation, that of Mahari Even Leiv, is that anyone has the right to make a gift, and an admission is considered as an expression of gift granting which cannot be challenged by opposing witnesses.

This approach is refuted by the *Ketzot Hachoshen* on the basis of our *gemara*. One who denies that a loan ever took place can hardly be viewed as one who is interested in making a gift! His alternate explanation is that although in all other matters a man cannot testify about himself, the Torah gives him credibility when it comes to assuming responsibility in financial matters.

• *Shavuot 41b*

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Shavuot 43-49

- Limitations on the use of an oath in financial litigation
- Dispute on value of lost item given as security for loan
- The rights of the lender in item given as security
- When it is the claimant and not the defendant who takes an oath
- The employee who claims he wasn't paid
- The suspected thief or assailant
- When the one who is obliged to take an oath is considered to be untruthful
- The storekeeper who claims he wasn't paid for goods ordered from him
- Collecting a debt from orphans
- When an oath can be demanded without a claim
- The four categories of guardians and the oaths they take

SWITCHING ROLES

Although the general rule of Torah law is that it is the defendant in a financial suit who takes an oath to prove his innocence, there are exceptions which the Sages instituted. One of these is the case of an employee who claims that he did not receive the wages due him. He is given the opportunity to take an oath that those wages were not received and can collect them despite the claim of the employer that he did pay.

The reason given for this innovation is that the employer is so preoccupied with his employees that he cannot reasonably be expected to remember whether he paid this employee or not.

The question that arises is whether this applies even to a case where there is only a single employee.

Tosefot points out that even if only a single employee is involved the law is the same because the Sages did not wish to allow for deviations which could undermine the principle. The Talmud Yerushalmi offers a perspective which makes this more understandable. The employer is so preoccupied with his business affairs that he cannot remember paying wages even to a single employee.

• *Shavuot 45a*

Avodah Zarah 2-8

- Doing business with idolaters near their days of worship
- The great trial of the hereafter
- A second chance for those who rejected the Torah
- The laughter and activities of G-d
- Divine justice and mercy

- Another perspective on the sins of David and of the Golden Calf
- Four who are considered like dead
- Waiting period before slaughtering animal
- When does ban on doing business with idolaters begin
- Prohibition against being an accomplice to sin
- Lending, borrowing and repaying before the idol days
- What are the days of worship of the idolaters
- Jews and Romans

THE GREAT TRIAL

“What did you do for the study of Torah?” This is the challenge which G-d will present to all of the nations on judgment day after announcing that all who were involved in Torah study would be rewarded.

In response the Roman representative will boast that his nation created many markets, built many bathhouses and amassed much silver and gold, adding that all of this was done in order to enable Jews to study Torah. The Persian spokesman will describe how his nation had built many bridges, conquered many cities and waged many wars – all in order to enable Jews to study Torah.

These arguments, as well as those of all the other nations, will be quickly dismissed by the Divine Judge who points out that everything they did was for their own benefit and are therefore not deserving of the reward reserved only for those involved in Torah study.

There is a difficulty in understanding this scenario because it is unimaginable that the people coming before G-d should think that they could deceive Him with the pretense that the motivation for all they achieved was the promotion of Torah study by the Jewish People. The explanation offered by Rav Yitzchak Zev Soloveitchik – the Rav of Brisk – is that they were claiming a reward for the fact that Jews did benefit from their marketplace and bridges. Rambam writes in his introduction to the Mishneh that in the Divine plan of things there are people who unconsciously play supporting roles in the survival and development of the “perfect man”. Just as their existence is justified by this role, so too will the nations argue that they deserve a reward for their supporting role.

The Divine rebuttal is that while this is how G-d programs a world in which everyone has a role, the only ones who deserve a reward are those who intentionally learn and support Torah.

• *Avodah Zarah 2b*

WHAT THE Sages SAY

“One who takes an oath to abstain from sleep for three days receives lashes for taking an oath in vain (since it is impossible for one to forgo sleep for so long – Rashi).”

• *Rabbi Yochanan - Shavuot 25a*

“The wife of a Torah scholar must be shown the same respect as the scholar himself.”

• *Rabbi Nachman - Shavuot 30b*

“When the Torah warns that the punishment of the nation for its sins includes ‘they will stumble over one another’ (*Vayikra* 26:37), it also informs us that each will be responsible for the sins of another because all Jews are responsible for each other.”

• *Beraita - Shavuot 39a*

“When the Torah states (in a dispute between the owner and a paid guardian over responsibility for loss of items given for safekeeping) ‘an oath of G-d shall be between them’ (*Shmot* 22:10), it indicates that both parties bear responsibility if a false oath is taken (even the owner making the claim because he should have been more careful in dealing with someone he could trust – Rashi).

• *Rabbi Shimon ben Tarfon - Shavuot 47b*

“Why are people compared to the fish of the sea? To teach you that just as fish perish if they leave the water, so too do people perish if they abandon Torah and mitzvot.”

• *Rabbi Yehuda in the name of the Sage Shmuel - Avodah Zarah 3b*

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THREE WEEKS AND NINE DAYS

The Fast of Tisha B'Av is the climax of a long period of mourning for the destruction of the *Beit Hamikdash* and the resulting exile of the Jewish People.

It is preceded by three weeks of mourning, which begin with the Fast of the 17th of Tammuz and which reach a greater intensity in the last nine days of that period. The connection between the reasons for both of these fast days contains an important message.

Of the five tragedies which took place on the 17th of Tammuz throughout history it is the breaching of the walls of

Jerusalem which stands out, just as the destruction of the *Beit Hamikdash* is foremost amongst the five tragedies that occurred on the Ninth of Av. Jerusalem is a holy city, but the *Beit Hamikdash* has an even higher level of sanctity. The decline of holiness in our nation was a progressive one and so the tragic consequences also came in stages – first the city and then the Sanctuary.

As we mourn we must commit ourselves to halt the decline of holiness in our own time and begin the upward progress which will secure Israel forever.

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

A LIFE WORTH LIVING

When he learned that an elderly widow in his community had suffered a crippling paralysis, Rabbi Yehoshua Leib Diskin, the Rav of Brisk and later Jerusalem, arranged for a woman to come each day to wash her. With the approach of a holiday he fulfilled the special mitzvah of bringing joy to a widow by visiting her to offer best wishes for the Yom Tov.

After profusely thanking him for his kindness she asked the saintly rabbi, who was famed for the effectiveness of his

blessings, to bless her with long life. She saw from the strange look on his face that he was surprised that she did not request a blessing for a recovery from her condition.

“I accept the Heavenly decree regarding my paralysis,” she explained, “and I am content to endure my suffering in this world rather than in the World to Come. But as long as I live and am able to say a blessing each day after that lady washes my body, I feel life is worth living as long as possible despite the pain.”

LOVE OF THE LAND - THE PLACES

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

YARKON RIVER

emanating from the springs of Rosh Ha'ayin the Yarkon flows through the environs of Petach Tikvah, Bnei Brak, Ramat Gan and Tel Aviv into the Mediterranean.

First mentioned in the Book of Yehoshua in regard to the part of the land inherited by the Tribe of Dan, the river

is believed to be named for the green vegetation (*yerek*) which grows along its banks.

A major battle of World War One between British and Turkish forces was waged for control of the Yarkon crossings.



לע"נ

הרה"ח ר' דוד בן הרה"ח ר' אהרן זצ"ל

ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

PARSHA Q&A ?

Devarim

1. How do we see from the beginning of *Parshat Devarim* that Moshe was concerned for the Jewish People's honor?
2. How much time elapsed between leaving Mt. Sinai and sending the spies?
3. Moshe rebuked the Jewish People shortly before his death. From whom did he learn this?
4. Why did Moshe wait until he had smitten the Amorite kings before rebuking the Jewish People?
5. What were some of the achievements that resulted from the Jewish People "dwelling" at Mt. Sinai?
6. Why does the Torah single out the names of the *avot* in connection with the giving of the Land?
7. What did Moshe convey to the Jewish People by saying: "You today are like the stars of the Heavens"?
8. "*Apikorsim*" (those who denigrate Talmud scholars) observed Moshe's every move in order to accuse him. What did they observe, and what did they accuse him of?
9. Moshe was looking for several qualities in the judges he chose. Which quality couldn't he find?
10. Moshe told the judges, "The case that is too hard for you, bring it to me." How was he punished for this statement?
11. Why did Moshe describe the desert as great and frightful?
12. Which tribe was not represented among the spies?
13. Which city did Calev inherit?
14. How many kingdoms was Avraham promised? How many were conquered by Yehoshua?
15. Why were the Jewish People forbidden to provoke Ammon?
16. Why were the Jewish People not permitted to conquer the Philistines?
17. How did G-d instill the dread of the Jewish People into the nations of the world?
18. Why did Moshe fear Og?
19. Who was instrumental in destroying the Refa'im?
20. What was the advantage of Reuven and Gad leading the way into battle?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to Devarim's Questions!

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

1. 1:1 – Moshe mentions only the names of the places where the Jewish People sinned, but does not mention the sins themselves.
2. 1:2 - 40 days.
3. 1:3 - From Yaakov, who rebuked his sons shortly before his death.
4. 1:4 – So that no one could say, "What right has he to rebuke us; has he brought us into any part of the land as he promised?"
5. 1:6 - They received the Torah, built the *mishkan* and all its vessels, appointed a Sanhedrin, and appointed officers.
6. 1:8 - Each of the *avot* possessed sufficient merit for the Jewish People to inherit the Land.
7. 1:10 - They are an eternal people, just as the sun, moon and stars are eternal.
8. 1:13 – They observed the time he left home in the morning. If Moshe left early, they accused him of having family problems (which drove him from his home). If he left late, they accused him of staying home in order to plot evil against them.
9. 1:15 - Men of understanding.
10. 1:17 - When the daughters of Tzlofchad asked him a *halachic* question, the law was concealed from him.
11. 1:19 - Because the Jewish People saw huge, frightening snakes and scorpions in the desert.
12. 1:23 - Levi.
13. 1:36 - Hebron.
14. 2:5 - Avraham was promised the land of ten kingdoms. Yehoshua conquered seven. The lands of Moav, Ammon and Esav will be received in the time of the *mashiach*.
15. 2:9 - This was a reward for Lot's younger daughter, the mother of Ammon, for concealing her father's improper conduct.
16. 2:23 - Because Avraham had made a peace treaty with Avimelech, King of the Philistines.
17. 2:25 - During the battle against Og, the sun stood still for the sake of the Jewish People, and the whole world saw this.
18. 3:2 - Og possessed merit for having once helped Avraham.
19. 3:11 - Amrafel.
20. 3:18 - They were mighty men, and the enemy would succumb to them.

PARSHA Q&A ?

Va'etchanan

1. "And I prayed to G-d at that time." Why "at that time"?
2. What characteristic trait is represented by Hashem's "strong hand"?
3. What is ha'levanon?
4. What did G-d tell Yehoshua after the battle of Ai?
5. What will happen if the Jewish People fail to keep the mitzvot properly?
6. How did the decree that Moshe not enter the Land affect him even in death?
7. What is hinted by the word v'noshantem?
8. Why were the Jewish People exiled two years earlier than indicated by Moshe's prophecy?
9. "You'll serve man-made gods." Is this literal?
10. Why is east called mizrach?
11. "Keep the Shabbat day as I have commanded you." When had G-d previously commanded us to keep Shabbat?
12. Where did the Jewish People first receive the command to honor parents?
13. What is meant by "G-d, our G-d, G-d is One"?
14. What are two meanings of loving G-d "with all your might"?
15. How well-versed must one be in Torah?
16. Where does the word totafot come from?
17. Who is fit to swear in Hashem's name?
18. What does it mean that the Jews are the "smallest nation"?
19. When someone serves G-d with love, how many generations receive reward?
20. Why are evil-doers rewarded in this world?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to Va'etchanan's Questions!

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

1. 3:23 - Defeating Sichon and Og, whose lands were part of Eretz Canaan, Moshe thought perhaps G-d had annulled the vow against his entering the Land.
2. 3:24 - His willingness to forgive.
3. 3:25 - Ha'levanon means the Beit Hamikdash, which makes "white" (lavan), i.e., atones for, the Jewish People.
4. 3:28 - Yehoshua must lead the army into battle.
5. 4:9 - The non-Jewish world will regard them as foolish.
6. 4:22 - Even his remains weren't buried in the Land.
7. 4:25 - The gematria of v'noshantem, 852, hints at the number of years until the first exile.
8. 4:25 - So that the rest of the prophecy "that you shall utterly perish" would not be fulfilled.
9. 4:28 - No. It means you'll serve others who serve idols.
10. 4:41 - It's the direction from which the sun shines (mizrach means shining).
11. 5:13 - Before Matan Torah, at Marah. (Shmot 15:25)
12. 5:16 - At Marah. (Shmot 15:25).
13. 6:4 - G-d, who is now our G-d, but not [accepted as] G-d of the other nations, will eventually be [accepted as] the one and only G-d.
14. 6:5 - 1) With everything you own. 2) Whether G-d treats you with kindness or harshness.
15. 6:7 - If asked a Torah question, one should be able to reply quickly and clearly.
16. 6:8 - Tot means two in Caspi. Fot means two in Afriki. Together they allude to the four sections of tefillin.
17. 6:13 - One who serves G-d and reveres His name.
- 7:7 - B'nei Yisrael are the humblest nation.
- 7:9 - 2,000.
- 7:10 - So that they get no reward in the next world.

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PARSHA Q&A ?

Ekev

1. What must the Jewish People do to ensure that G-d will fulfill His promise to do good for us?
2. What were the: a. wonders b. strong hand c. outstretched arm that the Jewish People saw in Egypt?
3. When a group performs a *mitzvah*, whose name is attached to the *mitzvah*?
4. How did the Jewish People do their laundry in the *midbar*?
5. How did the Jewish People obtain clothing for their growing children in the *midbar*?
6. How many days did Moshe spend on Mt. Sinai altogether?
7. On what day did Moshe come down from Mt. Sinai having received complete forgiveness for the Jewish People?
8. How was Aharon punished for his role in the golden calf?
9. Who made the ark in which Moshe placed the second set of tablets? What special function did it later serve?
10. Which sin of the Jewish People was prompted by the death of Aharon?
11. Why were the *levi'im* chosen by G-d?
12. Why do the *levi'im* have no portion in the land?
13. All aspects of man's life are in Hashem's "hands" except one. What is this?
14. What is the "added benefit" of observing the *mitzvot*?
15. What is meant by circumcising one's heart?
16. What are the sources of water for the fields of Egypt and *Eretz Yisrael*?
17. What path does the Torah prescribe for gaining new knowledge?
18. Which activity is "serving G-d with the heart"?
19. When the Jewish People sin, why are they considered worse than the generation of the flood?
20. How does one "cleave to G-d"?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to Ekev's Questions!

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

1. 7:12 - Guard even the "light" commandments.
2. 7:19 - The: a. Plagues; b. Pestilence; c. Slaying of the firstborn.
3. 8:1 - The person who finishes it.
4. 8:4 - The *ananei kavod* (clouds of glory) cleaned and bleached their clothes.
5. 8:4 - As their children grew, their clothing grew with them.
6. 9:18 - 120 days.
7. 9:18 - The tenth of Tishrei, Yom Kippur.
8. 9:20 - His two sons died.
9. 10:1 - Moshe. This ark would accompany the Jewish People into battle.
10. 10:6-7 - When Aharon died the *ananei kavod* departed, causing many Jews to fear war with the King of Arad and to retreat toward Egypt.
11. 10:8 - Because they did not participate in the sin of the golden calf.
12. 10:9 — Since they served in the Temple, thus they were not free to work the land.
13. 10:12 - Fear of Heaven, which is dependent upon the person.
14. 10:13 - There is reward.
15. 10:16 - To remove those things that block the words of Torah from entering.
16. 11:10 - Egypt is irrigated by manually carrying water up from the Nile. *Eretz Yisrael* is supplied by rainwater requiring no work on the part of its inhabitants.
17. 11:13 - By repeatedly reviewing what one knows, one more easily acquires new knowledge.
18. 11:13 - Prayer.
19. 11:17 - Because the generation of the flood had no one from whom to learn.
20. 11:22 - Attaching oneself to Torah scholars.

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PARSHA Q&A ?

Re'eh

1. What were the sites designated for the “blessings and the curses” to be pronounced by the people?
2. On what condition will *Bnei Yisrael* receive the blessings from G-d?
3. Why does the Torah use idolatry as an example when describing one who strays from the path that G-d commanded?
4. What was to be the sign for the Jewish People that they would inherit the Land?
5. During the 14 years of the conquest and division of the Land, what types of offerings were permitted on private altars?
6. What must one do with consecrated animals that develop a blemish?
7. In what ways does a consecrated animal that develops a blemish retain a degree of *kedusha* (holiness) even after it has been redeemed?
8. Why was the tribe of Yehuda not permitted to conquer Jerusalem?
9. In consecutive verses, the Torah repeats the prohibition against eating blood. What two types of blood are referred to?
10. Why were the Jewish People allowed to see the extermination of the Canaanites?
11. What forms of idol worship are punishable by death?
12. If a person performs miracles in the name of G-d and then says that the laws of the Torah have been revised, what is done to this person?
13. The Torah says, “to Him (G-d) you shall cleave.” How does one fulfill this command?
14. The trial of a person accused of encouraging others to worship idols differs from the trial of other capital cases. How?
15. Who has the primary responsibility of inflicting the punishment on one who tried to entice others to worship idols?
16. What is the “source” of the Jewish People being an *am kadosh* (holy nation)?
17. How should the Jewish People maintain themselves as an *am kadosh*?
18. What is the order of priority regarding to whom one should give charity?
19. What *mitzvah* recalls the Exodus from Egypt?
20. Which four individuals are under Hashem’s “special protection”?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to Re'eh's Questions!

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

1. 11:26 - Mt. Gerizim and Mt. Eval, respectively.
2. 11:27 - On condition that they listen to G-d's commandments.
3. 11:28 - Because those who worship idols are considered as if they have strayed from the entire Torah.
4. 11:31 - The miracles that would occur while crossing the Jordan River.
5. 12:8 - Vow offerings or free-will offerings.
6. 12:15 - They must be redeemed and may then be eaten.
7. 12:15 - Eating it is permitted, but use of its milk or fleece is forbidden.
8. 12:17 - When Avraham bought *ma'arat hamachpelah*, he made a covenant of peace with the Hittites who sold it; his descendants honored this pact regarding the Hittite descendants in Jerusalem.
9. 12:24-25 - Blood that seeps slowly from the incision as soon as the cut is made and again after it no longer gushes. Blood absorbed into the limbs of the animal.
10. 12:30 - To learn not to follow in their depraved ways.
11. 12:30 - Slaughtering or burning a sacrifice on an altar, pouring libations, prostrating oneself, and any normal manner of worshipping that idol.
12. 13:2-6 - He is put to death.
13. 13:5 - One should emulate Hashem's actions by performing good deeds, assisting in burying the dead and visiting the sick.
14. 13:10 - If he was acquitted and new information of a condemning nature arises, he is retried. If he was judged guilty, he is not returned to court to plead in his favor.
15. 13:10 - The person whom the guilty one attempted to entice.
16. 14:2 - The *kedusha* is inherited from the *avot*.
17. 14:21 - By avoiding excesses even in permitted matters.
18. 15:7 - The most needy, a brother from one's father, a brother from one's mother, the poor of one's city, the poor of another city.
19. 16:3 - Eating the *korban pesach* and the *matzah* on the night of Pesach.
20. 16:10 - A *levi*, convert, orphan, and widow.

Shoftim

1. What is the role of *shoftim*? What is the role of *shotrim*?
 2. What qualifications should one look for when appointing a judge?
 3. May a judge accept a bribe if only for the purpose of judging fairly?
 4. What is the source for the concept “seek out a good *beit din*”?
 5. Although the *avot* built *matzevot*, the Torah later forbade doing so. Why?
 6. “You will come to...the judge who will be in those days.” It’s impossible to visit a judge living at a different time, so why must the Torah add these apparently extra words?
 7. What does G-d promise a king who doesn’t amass much gold, doesn’t raise many horses and doesn’t marry many wives?
 8. How many Torah scrolls must the king have?
 9. How was King Shaul punished for disobeying a minor command of the Prophet Shmuel?
 10. Certain kosher animals are not included in the law of “*chazeh, shok and keiva*.” Which ones?
11. Families of *kohanim* served in the *Beit Hamikdash* on a rotational basis. When was this rotation system implemented?
 12. Which three categories of false prophets are executed?
 13. What does it mean to “prepare the way” to the cities of refuge?
 14. How many witnesses are meant when the Torah writes the word *eid* (witness)?
 15. “Through the mouth of two witnesses....” What types of testimony does this verse invalidate?
 16. If witnesses in a capital case are proven to be *zomemim* (false-conspirators) before their intended victim is executed, how are they punished?
 17. Why does the section about going to war follow the laws governing witnesses?
 18. The Jewish army is warned of four “scare-tactics” the enemy might employ. What are they?
 19. When a murder victim is found in a field, who determines which city is closest?
 20. What happens if the murderer is found after the calf’s neck was broken?

Answers to Shoftim’s Questions!

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

1. 16:18 - *Shoftim* are judges who pronounce judgment. *Shotrim* are officers who enforce it.
2. 16:18 - That he is expert in the law and that he is righteous.
3. 16:19 - No, because it will sway his judgment.
4. 16:20 - “*Tzedek tzedek tirdof...*”
5. 16:22 - Because the Canaanites used them for idolatry.
6. 17:9 - To teach that although a judge may not be as eminent as judges of previous generations, we must obey him nevertheless.
7. 17:18 - That his kingdom will endure.
8. 17:18 - Two. One stays in his treasury and one he keeps with him.
9. 17:20 - He lost his kingship.
10. 18:3 - *Chayot* (non-domestic-type animals).
11. 18:8 - During the time of David and Shmuel.
12. 18:20 - One who prophesies something he didn’t hear, something told to another prophet, or prophecies in the name of an idol.
13. 19:3 - To post direction signs saying “refuge” at the crossroads.
14. 19:15 - Two, unless otherwise specified.
15. 19:15 - Written testimony and testimony translated from a language which the judges don’t understand.
16. 19:19 - They are put to death.
17. 20:1 - To teach that if the Jewish People execute fair judgment they will be victorious in war.
18. 20:3 - a. Clanging their shields b. Making their horses stomp and whinny c. Shouting d. Blowing horns.
19. 21:2 - The Sanhedrin.
20. 21:9- He is tried and, if guilty, executed.

MANIPULATING NATURE

From: Raphael

Dear Rabbi,

Would you please explain the concept of great rabbis being able to manipulate nature? For example, how was Moshe able to command the Sea to open before the Israelites? Or how were other great rabbis able to do such miraculous things, even if on a lesser scale than the parting of the Red Sea?

Dear Raphael,

You may be familiar with the concept in Judaism referred to as “*gematria*” where the Hebrew letters have numerical values such that otherwise hidden connections between words may be revealed through their numerical values. One such example addresses your question:

One of the names of G-d is “Elokim” (spelled alef, lamed, hey, yud, mem). The Hebrew word for “Nature” is “HaTeva” (spelled hey, tet, vet, ayin). Interestingly, this name of G-d, which is the name associated with G-d’s rulership over Creation, has the *gematria* numerical equivalent as “HaTeva”. This reveals that everything that we view as Nature or the forces thereof are really outer, physical manifestations of the underlying creative force of G-d in existence.

Those who are truly connected to G-d, then, such as the greatest of righteous rabbis, can actually suspend or alter the normal functioning of nature by “tweaking” its source.

However, the answer is even deeper than this, and the example you bring of Moshe “parting” the Sea is especially instructive. The Midrash notes that the Sea did not actually comply with Moshe’s command. Rather, G-d intervened on the Jewish People’s behalf and only then did the Sea actually split.

Rabbi Chaim Atar, referred to as the Holy Ohr HaChaim, explains that this is in contradistinction to other examples where a righteous rabbi commands water to make way and the waters do his bidding:

In one case, Rabbi Pinchas Ben Yair was on his way to redeem Jewish captives. He came across a river and ordered it to part so he could complete his important mission and mitzvah. The river replied: “Regarding your mission, you might succeed and you might not. But I am certainly fulfilling my mission by allowing these waters to flow through me.” The rabbi responded, “If you don’t part for me, I’ll see to it that no water will flow here till the end of time!” Upon this, the river parted to enable the rabbi to redeem the captives.

In another case, Joshua ordered the waters of the Jordan River to part for the Jewish People’s entry into the Land of Israel. The waters stopped in their course and piled up in a wall upstream to enable the Jews to pass into the Land.

The question is, why in these cases did Nature comply with the will of the rabbi, but for Moshe it required direct Divine intervention? Particularly since Moshe was certainly greater than Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair, and as great as Joshua was, he was only Moshe’s disciple!

The Ohr HaChaim answers that since, according to Jewish sources, the Torah serves as a blueprint for Creation, a rabbi who is completely subservient and connected to the Torah can have the plan redrawn at his bidding at any time. The essential difference between Moshe at the parting of the Reed Sea and these later rabbis is that, at the Reed Sea, Moshe had not actually received the Torah yet.

Accordingly, what enables great rabbis to manipulate Nature is: 1] Their connection to G-d Who is the force behind everything, and 2] Their connection to the Torah which dictates the guidelines of how G-d’s creative power will be realized in Creation.

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GIVING DIRECTIONS

Question: I sometimes get stopped by a stranger while I am hurrying to some place and am asked to give him directions how to reach his destination. Can I simply tell him I don't have time to stop or must I comply with his request? What is the right thing to do?

Answer: Unless your delay will cause you a loss there is certainly a moral obligation to help someone by showing him how to get to where he wants to go. The reward for such a slight service is evident from what is described in *Shoftim* 1:24-26.

The Tribe of Yosef encountered difficulty in discovering the carefully concealed entrance to the city of Beit El, which they wished to conquer. When they saw someone leaving the city they asked him to reveal the entrance. All he did was point a finger to the entrance, which enabled the Yosefites to conquer the city. He, together with his family, were spared and they founded a city called Luz which survived all the invasions of foreign armies.

If this is the reward for a mere pointing of the finger, how much greater will be the reward for taking the time to give directions.

PARSHA INSIGHTS

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Va'etchanan

TOO JEWISH?

"Surely a wise and discerning people are this great nation!" (4:6)

A true story. A well-known Orthodox Rabbi was invited to a dinner at Buckingham Palace. The Rabbi replied that he would be honored to accept the invitation but he feared that his kosher dietary requirements would make it impossible for him to attend. The palace replied that far from being too much trouble, they would be happy to supply whatever food he needed and together with appropriate supervision.

The Rabbi happily accepted the invitation and a *mashgiach* (kosher food supervisor) was appointed to take care of his needs. In order to be unobtrusive, food was selected that appeared to be the same as the other guests'.

Before the other guests arrived, the *mashgiach* showed the Rabbi where he would sit. The *mashgiach* lifted a plate. Superficially it seemed identical to the other hundreds of plates in the dining hall. However on its underside was affixed a discrete sticker. The *mashgiach* had bought an entire new set of plates and cutlery. Everything had been *toveled* (immersed in a *mikveh*) and labeled.

The Queen, the Duke of Edinburgh, Prince Charles and others of the royal family entered the room. Everyone rose. The meal began in an atmosphere of stately grandeur. The Rabbi was not the only Jew at this dinner but he was certainly the most conspicuous in his large black *kippa*.

Immersed in conversation as the first course came to its end, the Rabbi suddenly noticed the lights dimming. "What's happening?" he asked the famous pop-star sitting to his right. "Oh, I can see you haven't been to one of these before. What happens now is that everyone changes table. That way everyone gets a chance to meet everyone." The pop-star may have noticed the cloud that momentarily passed across the Rabbi's sunny countenance, but certainly he had no idea of its cause.

The Rabbi was now faced with a problem. He realized that he would have to carry his entire place setting to his next location. However, there was nothing for it, and to the bemused smiles of his fellow guests, he proceeded to gather up his plates, knives, forks and spoon and carried them ceremoniously to their next location.

Palace dinners are not short affairs. While carrying his decreasing number of plates between the fifth and sixth courses, one of the other Jewish guests hissed at him under his breath. "Will you please stop that! I've never been so embarrassed in my life." "I'm sorry" said the Rabbi, "but I keep kosher." "Well, make an exception!" said the other.

The Rabbi stuck to his guns. For all twelve courses.

At the end of the meal, the guests all lined up to take leave of their royal hosts. As the Rabbi was shaking Prince Charles' hand, the prince said "Excuse me, but I couldn't help noticing that you were carrying your dishes around the room." "Yes," said the Rabbi "I did it because of the Jewish dietary laws." "Yes," said the Prince "I know about kosher food, but

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I didn't know it extended to the plates as well. How interesting! Please tell me more."

By this point, the master of ceremonies had come over to see what was holding up the line. In order to continue their discussion, the Prince beckoned the Rabbi to step out of the line and join him.

So there they were. The Rabbi and the Prince. Shaking the hands of the guests and discussing the laws of kashrut. Finally it came the turn of the Jewish guest who had objected to the Rabbi's behavior to shake the hand of the Prince. As he was doing this, he mentioned confidentially to the Prince "I'm Jewish too."

"Really?" said the Prince, "I didn't notice you carrying your dishes!"

When we keep the Torah properly with all its details, non-Jews know instinctively we're doing what we're supposed to, and they respect us for it. When we try and water down our Judaism to conform to our own preconceived secular standards, there will always be a voice asking us where our dishes are.

Ekev

THINGS

"...Carve for yourself two stone Tablets like the first ones..." (10:1)

Even though the G-d told Moshe to make the second two Tablets like the first ones, there were fundamental differences between the two sets. In the first set, not only did G-d write upon the Tablets, He fashioned the Safire stone Himself. Both the medium and the message were G-dly. The second Tablets were hewn by the hand of Man, only the inscription was Divine.

However, there was a deeper difference between the two sets of Tablets.

When we think of the Tablets, we think of words engraved on stone – words like any other words. However, in the case of the first Tablets this was not so. The first Tablets did not contain words, they contained *speech*. This doesn't mean the Tablets were like some kind of Biblical tape recorder. It means that when you saw the words, you saw in them G-d speaking at Sinai. Usually, when someone speaks, their words are present as long as they are still speaking them. When they stop speaking, the words vanish. The first Tablets perpetuated G-d's giving the Torah at Sinai, His speech at Sinai. That is what the Torah means when it says "all the people saw the voices..." (Shemot 20:15)

The word *davar*, which means "a thing" in Hebrew, has the same root as the word for "speech" — *dibbur*. What is the connection between a thing and speech?

Nothing in this physical world can have an existence without it having a spiritual underpinning. What sustains every

object in this physical world is G-d speaking through that object. That object is no more than G-d speaking, it is a *davar*, an expression of something that G-d wishes to reveal in His world. In the future we will clearly see the intention behind every thing in Creation, the *dibbur* behind every *davar*. This is what the prophet Yishayahu means when he writes, "...the Glory of G-d will be revealed and all flesh together will see that the Mouth of G-d has spoken" (40:5). Just as at Sinai G-d's speech assumed a concrete form, so at that time in the future, every concrete form will reveal its purpose, its *dibbur*.

Only the first Tablets contained the level of revelation where it was possible to see the *dibbur* as though it were an object. Usually a physical object does not reveal the intent of its maker. The first Tablets, however, revealed G-d's intent. They were a *davar* that revealed *dibbur*. However, after the sin of the golden calf, the world was a different place. It could no longer contain the level of revelation epitomized by the first set of Tablets. That is why the Tablets grew suddenly heavy in Moshe's hands and they fell to the ground. From that time until *Mashiach*, things will not reveal their true identity as being no more than the Word of G-d.

Re'eh

"See! I am putting in front of you today a blessing and curse..." (11:26)

When one hears a rabbi exhorting his flock to lead more spiritual lives and spurn the "flesh-pots", the thought might cross one's mind: "What does he know about flesh-pots that he can tell me how much better a spiritual life is? Maybe if he had a Rolls Royce he wouldn't be so quick to reject materialism!" That's what Moshe is hinting to here: "See! Look at me! I was a prince in Egypt; I'm one of the richest men in the world! I know what material wealth is. On the other hand, I've ascended to spiritual realms to which no other mortal has reached. I spent 120 days speaking to G-d 'face-to-face'. As a result I now wear a veil over my face except when I teach Torah, because my face radiates a light that you can't look at! Look at me! I know both worlds and I'm telling you: Choose the spiritual path!"

• Source: Adapted from the *Ohr HaChaim*.

"See! I am putting in front of you today a blessing and curse..." (11:26)

Wealth and poverty do not always have the same effect on a person. There are those whose wealth influences them for the good, that through the

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blessing of their wealth they come to a greater appreciation of G-d. However, had they been poor, they would have been so preoccupied trying to find food, that they would have forgotten their Creator, as we see was the case in Egypt, that the Bnei Yisrael were so exhausted by the hard labor that they didn't listen to Moshe. On the other hand, there are those whom wealth removes from the path of righteousness, as we see so often in our history, that the Jewish People became successful and self-satisfied and forgot Who gave them what they have. However, when a person is poor and broken, G-d never ignores his supplications. That's what the verse is saying here: "See — I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse. And don't think that the blessing is wealth and the curse is poverty. Rather, everything depends on how a person *deals with* his riches or poverty. And whether he be rich or poor, if he turns his focus to the Torah and *mitzvot*, then whatever his status is in life — *that* is the blessing."

Shoftim

THE LAST MOMENT

"Who is the man who has built a new house and has not yet inaugurated it. Let him go and return to his house, lest he die in the war and another man will inaugurate it." (20:5)

Rashi: "And this thing will pain him". Rashi's comment on the above verse cannot mean that the thought of someone else inaugurating his new home will be

extremely painful to him. For in the painful thoughts department nothing is more painful than the thought of death itself.

The Midrash teaches that when the Romans executed Rabbi Chananya for teaching Torah in public, they wrapped him in his Sefer Torah and set it alight. To prolong his agony, they packed water-soaked wool around his chest. Rabbi Chananya said, "The parchment is consumed, but the letters fly up in the air." The Roman executioner was deeply moved by Rabbi Chananya's holiness and asked, "If I remove the wool from around your heart, will I have a share in the World to Come?" Rabbi Chananya promised him that he would. The Roman then removed the wool, added wood to the fire to curtail Rabbi Chananya's agony and jumped into the flames and died. A Heavenly voice proclaimed, "Rabbi Chananya and the executioner are about to enter the World to Come." One thought of *teshuva* can undo a life of sin.

And one thought of sin can undo a lifetime of *teshuva*.

The most important moment in a person's life is his last moment. At that moment he has the potential to fix a lifetime's wrongdoing. What a waste to spend that last moment immersed in the cares of this world rather than one's gaze on eternity!

That's what Rashi means when he says "And this thing will pain him." How great will be this man's pain should he spend his last moments thinking about his real estate, rather than preparing himself to enter the World of Truth.

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