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PARSHA INSIGHTS

TOO RICH AND TOO THIN

“This is the decree of the Torah” (19:2)

Who would ever have thought that Judaism, or at least its more arcane teachings, would have become hip amongst the *glitterati*? And yet it’s happened. Pop stars and other media darlings are all hot-footing it to be the latest adherents of Instant Kabbala. While one may suspect that this gross trivializing of the deepest secrets of the cosmos is no more than another quick fix for an increasingly jaded generation, this ‘one-stop’ spiritual shopping actually reveals a deep-seated longing.

Modern man displays a curious dichotomy: On the one hand he has rejected religion. Church attendance figures reveal a tide of apathy and empty pews. On the other hand - “Instant Internet Kabbala” - an enormous clamor for all kinds of spiritual exotica and esoteric wisdom.

Our Sages tell us that “the lover of money will not be satisfied by money.” To re-mint an old saying: “You can never be too rich or too thin.” (Anorexics of the world unite, you have nothing to lose but your appetites!) Someone who has a million dollars doesn’t want another million. He already has that and it didn’t do the trick. What he wants is two million. Of course, the same goes for someone who has two million, four million, or a million million. A person is never satisfied with what he has. Most of die with not even half our desires fulfilled.

But there’s another saying by our Sages which is a little more difficult to fathom. “The lover of Torah will not be satisfied by Torah.” It’s easy to understand why material craving leads to more material craving. The desire for possessions is really the desire to possess. The act of taking possession is the sweetness. The actual object of my desire itself ceases to give me the kick that I’m looking for once I own it. To engulf and devour is the lust for a process — not for the thing in itself.

But why should the lover of Torah never be satisfied with Torah?

In this week’s Torah reading, we learn about the mitzvah of the *Red Cow*. The Red Cow was the quintessential command whose function is hidden from the mind of man. King Solomon himself, the wisest of men, declared, “I said I would be wise, but it is far from me.” (Proverbs 7:23) The paradox of the *Para Aduma* (the Red Cow) is that while it purifies from the spiritual miasma that results from contact with death, it itself taints those who prepare it. In other words, it purifies the impure and taints the pure. This paradox is beyond the mind of man. Only the Mind of the Creator can fathom such antilogy.

The root of all knowledge is another seeming paradox. To know that there is a Knowledge beyond knowledge, beyond the hollow skull of man. We live in a world that has been tainted by the concept that what is beyond the mind of man cannot exist. This is the basis of all atheism. Those empty pews speak its impact, of its power to corrupt.

Those who reach for spirituality, albeit in a superficial way, reflect the axiom: “The one who loves Torah, will not be satisfied by Torah.” A person is never satisfied with his spiritual level. He always wants to be closer to G-d. And the closer he becomes, the more he feels the distance that remains.

In the book of Job it says, “Who can draw a pure thing out of an impure one? Is it not the One? (Job 14:4) Only He Who is One can draw a pure generation out of an impure one.

However, the Torah does not yield its secrets to everyone. Someone who thinks that they can achieve a quick spiritual fix by a superficial embrace with mysticism will find themselves, at best, disappointed. For G-d gave his most secret wishes in the form of a Divine kiss.

And just like a kiss, it is bestowed only on those of the greatest intimacy.

• Sources: Talmud Avoda Zara 35a, Tosefot ibid; Rabbi E. E. Dessler

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PARSHA OVERVIEW

The laws of the *para aduma* — the red heifer — are detailed. These laws are for the ritual purification of one who comes into contact with death. After nearly 40 years in the desert, Miriam dies and is buried at Kadesh. The people complain about the loss of their water supply that until now has been provided miraculously in the merit of Miriam's righteousness. Aharon and Moshe pray for the people's welfare. G-d commands them to gather the nation at Merivah and speak to a designated rock so that water will flow forth. Distressed by the people's lack of faith, Moshe hits the rock instead of speaking to it. He thus fails to produce the intended public demonstration of G-d's mastery over the world, which would

have resulted had the rock produced water merely at Moshe's word. Therefore, G-d tells Moshe and Aharon that they will not bring the people into the Land. *Bnei Yisrael* resume their travels, but because the King of Edom, a descendant of Esav, denies them passage through his country, they do not travel the most direct route to Eretz Yisrael. When they reach Mount Hor, Aharon dies and his son Elazar is invested with his priestly garments and responsibilities. Aharon was beloved by all, and the entire nation mourns him 30 days. Sichon the Amorite attacks *Bnei Yisrael* when they ask to pass through his land. As a result, *Bnei Yisrael* conquer the lands that Sichon had previously seized from the Amonites on the east bank of the Jordan River.

ISRAEL Forever

THE WORD AND THE SWORD

Words of peace by Israel's leaders are tragically countered by the swords of terror. There is hardly new. In this week's Torah portion we learn of the efforts of Moshe to negotiate with the Edomites for permission for his people to pass through their land on their way to Eretz Yisrael. Along with the assurance that Edom will only gain economically from allowing such passage, Moshe subtly reminded the Edomite king that G-d heard his people's prayers in Egypt and was likely to hear their prayers again should there be a military confrontation.

But the hatred of Yaakov's descendants which these descendants of Eisav inherited from him expresses itself in

Edom's mobilizing its army to prevent the requested passage.

The word was met with the sword before our ancestors even entered the land promised to the Patriarchs, and continues to encounter the same stubborn resistance of the sword in our own day.

When the Patriarch Yaakov declared that he sensed "the voice of Yaakov and the hands of Eisav", he prophetically described the conflict between word and sword, offering us the comforting assurance that as long as the words of Torah and prayer come from the voice of Yaakov's descendants, we will be safe from the sword of our enemies forever.

LOVE OF THE LAND - THE PEOPLE

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

LOVERS OF THE LAND

Throughout the generations Jews realizing their dream of coming to Eretz Yisrael have expressed their love of the land by kissing its earth upon arrival. They have thus dramatically fulfilled the vision of King David who wrote in Tehillim (102:15):

"For your servants hold dear her stones and cherish even her dust."



The Talmudic Sages were exceptional in expressing this love. Rabbi Abba kissed the rocks at the port of Acco. Rabbi Chiya bar Gamda literally rolled in the dust of the land. But Rabbi Chanina went a step further. He repaired the roads in his vicinity so that no one would be able to complain about even that facet of his beloved land.

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PARSHA Q&A ?

1. "Take a perfect *para aduma* (red heifer)." What does the word "perfect" — *temima* — mean in this context?
2. How many non-red hairs disqualify a cow as a *para aduma*?
3. A man dies in a tent. What happens to the sealed metal and earthenware utensils in the tent?
4. What happens to the one who: a) sprinkles the water mixed with the ashes of the *para aduma*; b) touches the water; c) carries the water?
5. Why was the *mitzvah* of the *para aduma* entrusted to Elazar rather than to Aharon?
6. Why does the Torah stress that *all* of the congregation came to *Midbar Tzin*?
7. Why is Miriam's death taught after the law of *para aduma*?
8. During their journey in the *midbar*, in whose merit did the Jewish People receive water?
9. Why did Moshe need to strike the rock a second time?
10. When Moshe told the King of Edom that the Jewish People would not drink from the well-water, to which well did he refer? What do we learn from this?
11. The cloud that led the Jewish People leveled all mountains in their path except three. Which three and why?
12. Why did the *entire* congregation mourn Aharon's death?
13. What disappeared when Aharon died?
14. Which "inhabitant of the South" (21:1) attacked the Jews?
15. For what two reasons did G-d punish the people with snakes specifically?
16. Why did the Jewish People camp in Arnon, rather than pass through Moav to enter *Eretz Canaan*?
17. What miracle took place at the valley of Arnon?
18. What was the "strength" of Amon that prevented the Jewish People from entering into their Land?
19. Why was Moshe afraid of Og?
20. Who killed Og?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

1. 19:2 - Perfectly red.
2. 19:2 - Two.
3. 19:14,15 - The metal utensils are impure for seven days, even if they are sealed. The sealed earthenware vessels are unaffected.
4. 19:21 - a) Remains *tahor*; b) He, but not his clothing, contracts *tumah*; c) He and his clothing contract *tumah*.
5. 19:22 - Because Aharon was involved in the sin of the golden calf.
6. 20:1 - To teach that they were *all* fit to enter the Land; everyone involved in the sin of the spies already died.
7. 20:1 - To teach that just as sacrifices bring atonement, so too does the death of the righteous.
8. 20:2 - Miriam's.
9. 20:11 - After he hit it the first time, only a few drops came out since he was commanded to *speak* to the rock.
10. 20:17 - To the well that traveled with the nation in the *midbar*. This teaches that one who has adequate provisions should nevertheless purchase goods from his host in order to benefit the host.
11. 20:22 - *Har Sinai* for receiving the Torah, *Har Nevo* for Moshe's burial, and *Hor Hahar* for Aharon's burial.
12. 20:29 - Aharon made peace between contending parties and between spouses. Thus, everybody mourned him.
13. 20:29 - The clouds of glory disappeared, since they sheltered the Jews in Aharon's merit.
14. 21:1 - Amalek.
15. 21:6 - The original snake, who was punished for speaking evil, is fitting to punish those who spoke evil about G-d and about Moshe. And the snake, for whom everything tastes like dust, is fitting to punish those who complained about the manna which changed to any desired taste.
16. 21:13 - Moav refused them passage.
17. 21:15 - The Amorites hid in caves in the mountain on the Moabite side of the valley in order to ambush the Jews. When the Jews approached, the mountain on the *Eretz Canaan* side of the valley moved close to the other mountain and the Amorites were crushed.
18. 21:24 - G-d's command, "Do not harass them" (*Devarim* 2:19).
19. 21:34 - Og had once been of service to Avraham. Moshe was afraid that this merit would assist Og in battle.
20. 21:35 - Moshe.

- What a Torah Sage should be capable of doing
- The five basic laws of *shechitah*
- Doubts that arise in regard to validity of *shechitah*
- Doubts in regard to danger of exposed food
- Sources for the rule of *chazakah*
- Sources for relying on majority
- Can we rely on an agent having fulfilled his mission
- The *shechitah* of a minor or mentally unstable
- The *shechitah* of an idol worshipper
- *Shechitah* at night or on Shabbat and Yom Kippur
- Status of food which was prepared on Shabbat
- The instruments which can be used for *shechitah*

COMING AND GOING BACKWARDS

In an effort to find a source for the rule of *chazakah* – relying on status quo when there is a doubt as to whether a change took place – the *gemara* refers to the topic of the house afflicted with *tzara'at* (leprosy) which can be condemned only by a *kohen*. At one point there is a discussion as to whether the *kohen's* examination can be achieved by his walking out of the house backwards in order to ensure that the contaminated area has not diminished in size.

The question is then raised as to whether walking out backwards qualifies as the departure from the house stated

in the Torah. As proof that it does, the *gemara* cites the backward departure which the *kohen gadol* makes from the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur.

Tosefot raises the question of a backwards entry into a contaminated house. The *gemara* in *Mesechta Shavuot* (17b) states that even though if one enters a contaminated house he becomes ritually impure, if he does so in backwards fashion this does not apply. Why then does this differ from the *kohen gadol's* departure?

The answer given by Tosefot is that a backwards entry is not considered normal, while a backwards departure like that of a disciple taking leave of his master is proper and normal.

• *Chullin 10b*

What the SAGES Say

“Is there not a difference between a doubt concerning forbidden food and a doubt concerning food which is dangerous to health?”

• *The Sage Abaye - Chullin 9b*

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RATE THE RABBI

From: Alan

Dear Rabbi,

There's a certain rabbi on our college campus who is very dynamic and charismatic. Often, kids who don't have much of a background in Judaism are very taken by him, which I guess is a good thing. But being from a more observant background myself, I know for sure he's not on the level of what a regular rabbi is as far as Torah knowledge is concerned, and some of his practices are a bit questionable to me as well. In any case, when I hear kids heap praises on this rabbi, I'm not so comfortable. I kind of feel like maybe I should put things in perspective because they are so impressionable they may not realize that he's not always on the mark. But how could I possibly speak about somebody who is a rabbi in their eyes, and, after all, he is doing a lot of good work on campus in getting kids interested in Judaism. What should I do?

Dear Alan,

The Torah is perfect, and those who study, practice and preach it should be as perfect as humanly possible. It is to this effect that our Sages taught, "If the rabbi is as an angel of G-d, learn Torah from him; if he is not as an angel of G-d, do not learn Torah from him" (Chagiga 15b).

We see from here just how exacting and demanding we should be in what we are to expect and accept from a rabbi. Throughout the ages, our rabbis, of blessed memory, were always the most upright, outstanding examples of ethical and spiritually elevated behavior. They were literally as emissaries for G-d in this world, indeed as angels on earth.

However, unfortunately, times have changed and so have we. Most Jews are no longer observant, and even those who are find it extremely difficult to attain and maintain the level of purity in creed and deed as did our ancestors, and even many rabbis are simply not what a rabbi used to be – including me.

In such times, one can either give up, G-d forbid, or make the best of what he's got. Our Sages therefore also taught, "In a place where there is nobody, try to be somebody"

(Avot 2). Hundreds of thousands of Jews simply have no knowledge of Judaism, and there aren't enough "angelic" rabbis to go around. In these circumstances, anybody who has even just a little knowledge or ability to inspire has got to give what he's got.

Apparently, the rabbi you're discussing is doing just that. And what's more, he may be more inspiring for college students on their level than someone others might view as more knowledgeable and righteous. In other words, for them, he's good for starters, while another rabbi might be a non-starter.

So if there are specific instances that you feel he's misleading students on fundamental issues of Jewish belief or practice, perhaps you could respectfully discuss it with him, another rabbi, or delicately and privately suggest to the specific student at hand to get a second opinion. But otherwise, let it be. Stop wallowing in negativity (which also might not be the most purely motivated) and rather revel in his ability to get kids interested in Judaism where many others could not.

I'll conclude with a beautiful analogy by the Chafetz Chaim:

There was once a town whose benevolent governor required that all water be filtered from impurities before use. The town enjoyed better health and a higher standard of living than all other towns in the region. Then a fire broke out. Despite the efforts of the inhabitants, the town burned down. Afterwards, the governor found water in the wells. Perturbed, he asked the inhabitants why they weren't able to put out the fire. The townspeople answered that as hard as they tried they couldn't manage to filter the water fast enough to extinguish the flames. The governor cried, "You fools! I required you to filter the water to maintain purity in normal times. But when fire breaks out, there's no time to filter. Throw water with its impurities on the fire; the main thing is to put out the conflagration!"

There is a spiritual conflagration out there threatening to destroy the Jewish people. Now is not the time to demand the ideal of purity and expect and accept only the highest standards. Every available person must give whatever Torah they've got to put out the fire.

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WHO GETS THE MAFTIR?

Question: The synagogue I regularly attend serves hundreds of families and has found it necessary to make a rule that anyone who wishes to reserve the maftir call-up to the Torah reading for his son's Bar Mitzvah must notify the officer in charge of such matters a year in advance so as to avoid conflicts with other candidates for this honor. While I dutifully made such notification, a fellow congregant with a Bar Mitzvah that very Shabbat who assumed there would be no problem did not bother to notify until a couple of weeks before the date in question. Since both of us want our sons to have maftir what is the right thing to do?

Answer: A case exactly like yours was once brought before the foremost halachic authority, Hagaon Rav Yosef Shalom

Eliyashiv, *shlita*. It was assumed by the fellow in your position that he had priority because he acted according to the rules while the other fellow had not.

He was surprised to hear otherwise from the great rav. The privilege of being called up to maftir, he pointed out, was one that belonged to every boy in the congregation coming of age. The father's negligence in reserving the maftir for his son in accordance with the rules should therefore not compromise his son's rights since he as a minor could not be held responsible for the oversight.

With the rights to maftir thus being equal, the ruling was to draw lots to determine who gets the maftir that Shabbat.

• As reported by Rabbi Yitzchak Zilberstein,
Rabbi of the Ramat Elchanan community in Bnei Brak

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY _____

A GOLDEN GIFT

A Holocaust survivor recently passed away in the Israeli coastal city of Netanya. During their condolence visit to his surviving son in Jerusalem the comforters heard a fascinating story that expressed the inextinguishable spirit of survival and faith of the Jewish People.

In a safe in the home of this Jew was a bar of gold around

which was wrapped a note with the following explanation:

"Upon arriving in Eretz Yisrael after the destruction of European Jewry I wished to express my gratitude to Heaven. I therefore used the first money I earned in the Holy Land to purchase this bar of gold which I have dedicated as a gift to the Beit Hamikdash which I hope to see rebuilt in my days."

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