

O H R N E T

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PARSHA INSIGHTS

A DIVINE TAPESTRY

“Then Moshe and the Children of Yisrael chose to sing this song to G-d.” (15:1)

As a young boy, I remember my mother weaving a tapestry of Gainsborough’s “The Boy In Blue”. It took her forever. One day, shortly before she finished it, I remember picking it up and thinking to myself: “Mommy, you may be the best mother in the world, but when it comes to needlework, well... There’s a piece of red sticking out here. Over here, there’s a turquoise thread that seems to go nowhere. Clumps of wool all over the place. This doesn’t look anything like Gainsbrough. This thing is a mess!” The whole thing looked like chaos.

Suddenly, my fingertips detected smooth regular stitching on the other side of the tapestry. I turned the tapestry over and saw the most beautiful sight. An exquisite and precise copy of Gainsborough’s “Boy in Blue”. The stitches were so regular and well formed. The colors all blended so beautifully together. A divine tapestry! All the disjointed threads that I saw on the other side of the tapestry harmonized into a complete and beautiful whole.

Sometimes it’s very difficult to see sense in world events. It’s difficult to believe that the world is being run by Somebody. You wonder how things could be part of a Divine coherent plan. You hear about suffering and evil, and you wonder how this can this be the handiwork of a Merciful G-d?

Don’t think you’re alone if you feel like that. You’re in good company. Because one of the greatest men who ever lived felt exactly like you. Moses, our greatest teacher, also had his questions about how G-d was running the show. In last week’s Torah portion Moses went to Pharaoh to ask him to let the Jewish People go. Pharaoh, as you may remember, was not the easiest of negotiating partners. In reply to Moses’ request, Pharaoh told the taskmasters to stop giving the Jews straw. However, the Jews were still required to produce the same quantity of bricks as before. Not surprisingly, the Jews complained bitterly to Moses. So Moses went back to G-d and said, “Why have You done evil to this people; why have you sent me? *From the time* I came to Pharaoh

to speak in Your Name, he did evil to this People, but You did not rescue Your people.”

Moses wasn’t just complaining about the problems he was having *now* with Pharaoh. Rather, he was saying that “*from the time*” — *from its very beginning* — the whole plan to take the Jews out of Egypt was fatally flawed. He was saying to G-d that he didn’t see any order in what was going on.

When you look at life’s rich tapestry from the wrong side it looks like a complete mess. Moshe didn’t see the Divine needlework of the Creator. He was looking at events from the wrong perspective. However, the same word that Moshe used to complain to G-d, he repeated in G-d’s praise when he saw the perfection of the Divine Plan. The Midrash says that just as Moses erred with the expression *M’Az* — “From the time” — so too with that same word “Az”, Moses rectified his mistake.

After the Jewish People emerged from the splitting of the sea, they saw the mighty Egyptian army strewn across the beach like so many broken toy soldiers. It was there that every Jew, from the greatest to the most humble, reached a level of insight into the workings of the world that has never been repeated.

This perception moved Moses and the Children of Israel to song. Song in Jewish thought represents the ability to harmonize all the disparate events in our world and plug them back into the One — “G-d is One”.

“Then — Az — Moses and the Children of Israel sang a song.”

That song is part of the prayers we say every single day of the year. Maybe one of the reasons we say it every day is to remind ourselves that when life seems like a bad attempt at modern art, we must know that there is a Supernal Artist weaving the Divine Tapestry. And not a single thread is without design and beauty.

## PARSHA OVERVIEW

Pharaoh finally sends *Bnei Yisrael* out of Egypt. With pillars of cloud and fire, G-d leads them toward *Eretz Yisrael* on a circuitous route, avoiding the Pelishtim (Philistines). Pharaoh regrets the loss of so many slaves and chases the Jews with his army. The Jews are very afraid as the Egyptians draw close, but G-d protects them. Moshe raises his staff and G-d splits the sea, enabling the Jews to cross safely. Pharaoh, his heart hardened by G-d, commands his army to pursue, whereupon the waters crash down upon the Egyptian army. Moshe and Miriam lead the men and women, respectively, in a song of thanks. After three days' travel only to find bitter waters at Marah, the people complain. Moshe miraculously pro-

duces potable water. In Marah they receive certain *mitzvot*. The people complain that they ate better food in Egypt. G-d sends quail for meat and provides manna, a miraculous bread that falls from the sky every day except Shabbat. On Friday a double portion descends to supply the Shabbat needs. No one is able to obtain more than his daily portion, but manna collected on Friday suffices for two days so the Jews can rest on Shabbat. Some manna is set aside as a memorial for future generations. When the Jews again complain about a lack of water, Moshe miraculously produces water from a rock. Then Amalek attacks. Joshua leads the Jews in battle while Moshe prays for their welfare.

## ISRAEL Forever

### HOW MANY WANTED TO GO?

We live in an era of surveys and polls. Almost every day people are being asked who their candidate for leadership is and which products they like, and are submitted to earthshaking explorations of their minds.

Imagine if our ancestors in Egypt were polled on whether they wish to follow Moshe out of that country or to remain there. The surprising result of such a poll, according to what our Sages comment on a passage in this week's Torah portion, would have been 80% in favor of remaining in Egypt! This lack of faith in G-d's promise to free them, give them the Torah and a land of their own, was punished by the death of the doubters during the plague of darkness which was inflicted upon the Egyptians.

Did you ever wonder what would be the result of a poll taken today among Jews in Israel and throughout the world if they were asked what they would say if they had a choice to have the Torah and a land of their own or to just be a nation like all others?

Remember that those Jews who refused to leave Egypt had already been freed from the rigors of bondage once the plagues began, and their decision to stay in Egypt as free men was probably based on a desire to avoid the responsibility that would come with Torah. It is to be hoped that reflection of their tragic fate will inspire Jews to vote for a Torah way of life in their holy land of Israel forever.

## LOVE OF THE LAND

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

### YERUSHALAYIM — SERVICE, PEACE AND PERFECTION

The eternal capital of the Jewish homeland has a name bestowed upon it by the Creator as a combination of names given to it by two of His favorite sons.

After brilliantly passing the Divine test of his faith by being prepared to offer his beloved son as a sacrifice on Mount Moriah, the Patriarch Avraham called the location *Yireh*. He prophetically anticipated that this would be the site of the Beit Hamikdash and named it in honor of the service to G-d that would take place there.

In an earlier phase of his life, Avraham was welcomed, after his miraculous military victory over four mighty kings, by Malki-Tzedek, King of "Shalem" who brought out bread and wine to greet him. The welcomer is better known to us

as Shem, the righteous son of Noach, who gave the city he ruled its name.

The Midrash describes the Divine consideration that went into endowing the city with its final name.

"If I call it *Yireh* like Avraham did, the righteous Malki-Tzedek will feel slighted, and if I call it *Shalem* like Malki-Tzedek did, the righteous Avraham will feel slighted. I will therefore call it *Yireh Shalem Yerushalayim* to satisfy both."

*Shalem* means peace and perfection while *Yireh* means service of G-d. Only when man serves G-d can he hope to achieve the peace and perfection symbolized by *Yireh-shalem* —*Yerushalayim*.



## PARSHA Q&A ?

1. What percentage of the Jewish People died during the plague of darkness?
2. Why did the oath that Yosef administered to his brothers apply to Moshe's generation?
3. Why did the Egyptians want to pursue the Jewish People?
4. Where did the Egyptians get animals to pull their chariots?
5. What does it mean that the Jewish People "took hold of their fathers' craft" (*tafsu umnut avotam*)?
6. How did G-d cause the wheels of the Egyptian chariots to fall off?
7. Why were the dead Egyptians cast out of the sea?
8. To what future time is the verse hinting when it uses the future tense of "Then Moshe and *Bnei Yisrael* will sing"?
9. Why are the Egyptians compared to stone, lead and straw?
10. The princes of Edom and Moav had nothing to fear from the Jewish People. Why, then, were they "confused and gripped with trembling"?
11. Moshe foretold that he would not enter the Land of Israel. Which word in the parsha indicates this?
12. Why is Miriam referred to as "Aharon's sister" and not as "Moshe's sister"?
13. The Jewish women trusted that G-d would grant the Jewish People a miraculous victory over the Egyptians. How do we see this?
14. Which sections of the Torah did the Jewish People receive at Marah?
15. When did *Bnei Yisrael* run out of food?
16. What lesson in *derech erez* concerning the eating of meat is taught in this week's Parsha?
17. How did non-Jews experience the taste of the manna?
18. The Prophet Yirmiyahu showed the Jewish People a jar of manna prepared in the time of Moshe. Why?
19. Which verse in this week's parsha alludes to the plague of blood?
20. Why did Moshe's hands become heavy during the war against Amalek?

## PARSHA Q&A!

### Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

1. 13:18 - Eighty percent (four-fifths).
2. 13:19 - Yosef made his brothers swear that they would make their children swear.
3. 14:5 - To regain their wealth.
4. 14:7 - From those Egyptians who feared the word of G-d and kept their animals inside during the plagues.
5. 14:10 - They cried out to G-d.
6. 14:25 - He melted them with fire.
7. 14:30 - So that the Jewish People would see the destruction of the Egyptians and be assured of no further pursuit.
8. 15:1 - Resurrection of the dead during the time of *mashiach*.
9. 15:5 - The wickedest ones floated like straw, dying slowly. The average ones suffered less, sinking like stone. Those still more righteous sunk like lead, dying immediately.
10. 15:14 - They felt horrible seeing Israel in a state of glory.
11. 15:17 - "T'vi-aimo..." — "Bring them" (and not "bring us").
12. 15:20 - Aharon put himself at risk for her when she was struck with *tzara'at*. (See *Bamidbar 12:12*)
13. 15:20 - They brought musical instruments with them in preparation for the miraculous victory celebration.
14. 15:25 - Shabbat, Red Heifer, Judicial Laws.
15. 16:1 - 15th of Iyar.
16. 16:8 - One should not eat meat to the point of satiation.
17. 16:21 - The sun melted whatever manna remained in the fields. This flowed into streams from which animals drank. Whoever ate these animals tasted manna.
18. 16:32 - The people claimed they couldn't study Torah because they were too busy earning a livelihood. Yirmiyahu showed them the manna saying: "If you study Torah, G-d will provide for you just as he provided for your ancestors in the desert."
19. 17:5 - "And your staff with which you smote the river...."
20. 17:12 - Because he was remiss in his duty, since he, not Yehoshua, should have led the battle.

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- Collecting a *ketubah* or other debt from the resources which have been consecrated for Sanctuary use
- How much of his resources are left with the person who has pledged all he owns as *arachin*
- When may one donate or redeem an inherited field consecrated for Sanctuary use
- Rate of redemption of such a field
- Who are the redeemers and how long can they retain it
- If the field is not redeemed by the fiftieth year of *yovel*
- If the father who sold field to son subsequently donates it to the Sanctuary
- The bidding procedure in redeeming consecrated field
- Consecrating resource through *cherem*
- How much can one spend on charity
- Who benefits from *cherem*
- When can one redeem field sold to another.

## HOW MUCH TO SPEND

Rabbi Akiva once wished to donate more than a fifth of his resources for charity to the poor. His colleague, Rabbi Yesheivav, discouraged him from doing so. This was because of Rabbi Ila's report that when Sanhedrin were seated in the city of Usha they issued a decree that one should not donate more than a fifth lest he himself become a dependent through such magnanimous extravagance.

In our *gemara* we find two different positions in regard to one making a *cherem* consecration of his resources which will go to the *kohanim*.

Rabbi Eliezer rules that if once consecrates *all* of his resources it does not take effect. He predicates this limit on the pledge that the Patriarch Yaakov made to donate a tenth of his resources. Since he used the term *ma'aser* twice, it can

be deduced that he meant a gift to charity of two tenths – a fifth of his resources. The inference is that, based on the ruling in Usha, one may give away more than a fifth as long as he leaves himself enough to retain financial independence.

Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah, on the other hand, states that since one may not consecrate all of his resources in the form of a *cherem*, the lesson may be learned that one must be careful to avoid spending all his resources on secular matters. He disagrees with Rabbi Ila's report about a Sanhedrin decree of a limit of one-fifth and posits that one may indeed donate more than a fifth as long as he leaves something for himself, concluding that one should learn from this advice to avoid squandering all of his resources for non-religious matters.

• *Arachin* 28a

## WHAT THE Sages SAY

"If one cannot donate all of his resources for a sacred purpose, how much more must one be careful in regard to spending his resources."

• *Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah - Arachin 28a*

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## CONCEDED CONCEIT

**From: Dennis**

*Dear Rabbi,  
I find that I have a problem with arrogance. Is there anything you can tell me that might help me work on this shortcoming?*

Dear Dennis,

Interestingly enough, in your very question you admit to being flawed. Isn't that humbling enough?

A man once went to the Kotsker Rebbe with a similar request saying, "Rabbi, I am haughty. Please help me be humble."

The Rebbe told him to sit down with him in his study for a while.

Soon thereafter, a person entered the study asking the Rebbe for a blessing and help in marrying off his daughter. The Rebbe referred him to the visitor to seek financial help. Surprised, the visitor replied, "But Rebbe, I have no money of substance to help."

A little later, another person entered the study asking the Rebbe to clarify a certain intricate matter of halacha. The Rebbe referred him to the visitor for an answer. Taken aback, the visitor replied, "Dear Rebbe, my Torah knowledge is only very basic. I cannot answer this."

Then a third man entered the study asking the Rebbe for advice regarding a particular endeavor. The Rebbe referred him to the visitor for advice in the matter. Discomfited, the visitor replied, "Wise Rebbe, I am not qualified to counsel on this, or other, endeavors."

The Kotzker Rebbe then needled the visitor, "According to your own admission, you have little money, little Torah, and little worldly wisdom. So what exactly is it that you're arrogant about?"

## WHAT'S THE RIGHT THING TO DO?

REAL-LIFE QUESTIONS OF SOCIAL AND BUSINESS ETHICS

### THE NOISY NEIGHBOR

**Question:** I have a neighbor who seems to enjoy listening to loud music at an hour when I am trying to get to sleep. While I am interested in maintaining friendly relations with him, I do want to enjoy some peace and quiet as much as he enjoys the noise. What can I do?

**Answer:** You certainly have a case since neighbors should be sensitive to any irritation they may be causing to those living near them. Since your situation is one that can cause you to harbor a grudge against your noisy neighbor, you should follow the advice of Rambam (*Hilchot Deot 6:6*) who writes:

"When one man commits an injustice to the other, the victim should not remain silent and feel hatred, for that is the way of the wicked. It is rather a mitzvah for him to inform the other of his hurt and ask him why he did what he did."

By thus fulfilling the Torah's command to "reprove your neighbor" you offer the neighbor an opportunity to either explain that he was unaware that you were being hurt or at least to apologize and thus eliminate the disturbance and restore friendly relations.

A neighbor of mine, living directly above my apartment, used to disturb my efforts to get to sleep by making thumping noise (probably an exercise machine) above my bedroom. After writing him a note about this disturbance, I received a note from him promising to stop the noise but also calling to my attention the noise made by our washing machine on the porch in the early hours of the morning which disturbed his sleep.

The noise from both of us came to an end as a result of our "good neighbor policy".

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Rabbi Eli Lob is Youth Director of Savanna's 400-member Orthodox shul. He heads Savannah's NCSY and studies mornings in Savannah's four-member kollel.

In his "spare time" he teaches a Daf Yomi class,

*"Ohr Lagolah was a fantastic opportunity for me to grow".*

a Chumash shiur, shares the weekly Torah reading, writes for his shul bulletin, is a trustee on the Chevra Kadisha, and kashers kitchens of people becoming more observant.

"People are moving in the right direction here," says Rabbi Lob.

He also teaches Judaism to Jewish teens in a male Catholic military school. (His students are exempt from Catholicism class.) Students' favorite topic: All aspects of the interpersonal relationships.

## THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

### THE "EYES" HAVE IT

The current wave of anti-Semitism in Europe lends special relevance to a little-known Holocaust story that appears in a recent volume of *"Aleinu Leshabeach"* in Hebrew.

A Nazi officer decided to have some fun together with his comrades at the expense of a Jewish prisoner. He called him into the room where the group was gathered and said to him:

"When I was young I had an eye removed and replaced with a glass one. The surgeon did such a masterful job that no one was ever capable of detecting which of my eyes was real and which was glass. If you can correctly identify which

is the glass eye you will live, but if you fail to do so you will be shot on the spot."

While all the officers chuckled with sadistic pleasure at what they viewed as an exercise in futility, the Jew marched towards his one-eyed tormentor and correctly pointed to the glass eye. When asked by the surprised Nazis how he had managed to succeed where all others had failed, he offered this explanation:

"Your hatred of Jews is so intense that it is reflected in your very eyes. When I failed to see this hatred revealed in one of your eyes, I realized it couldn't be your real one!"

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## LEEUVENHOEK'S HALACHIC LEGACY

**A**ntonie van Leeuwenhoek (1632-1723), although not the developer of the first rudimentary microscope, nonetheless is the figure most closely associated with the microscope's mystique. He is credited with discovering microorganisms, and is considered the greatest contributor toward making the microscope the essential research tool that it is known as, even today. In fact, his designs for improving the microscope were not successfully replicated until 1957, over two hundred years after his death! Although the scientific, research, and medical significance and benefits of Leeuwenhoek's work are obvious, this article sets out to explore what *halachic* relevance his innovations have.

This issue actually affects many different aspects of *halacha*, the foremost being what status something that can only be seen with a microscope has in Judaism. For example, before Sukkot everyone checks their *etrogim* for blemishes. What is the status of an *etrog* that has no noticeable blemish, but when viewed under magnification glass, loupe or microscope, one can perceive imperfections? Similarly, if one can ascertain a problem in the script of a Sefer Torah only via a magnifier, would that invalidate the Sefer Torah? The most common question though arises when checking produce for insects. If one cannot detect any sign of bugs in the produce, but may perhaps be visible through magnification, is one allowed to eat the produce? And if not, is one required to use such a magnifying device to check to ensure that there are no lurking insects?

This issue, although a recurring theme in Judaism, is not a new one; it has already been addressed hundreds of years ago. There is a minority opinion that if a magnifying glass can help better find insects one would be required to use it to do a proper thorough inspection. However, the majority of late *Acharonim*, including such luminaries as Rabbi Shlomo Kluger, the Chochmas Adam, the Tiferes Yisrael, and the Aruch Hashulchan, emphatically state that the Torah would not require something that could not have been kept at all times. As such, a magnifying glass or microscope could not possibly have been mandated for a *halachic* inspection, as it has only been around for several hundred years. Additionally, when the Torah commands an inspection, it must be something that the average Joe can personally per-

form, without the aid of instruments.

These authorities cite several proofs of this from diverse Biblical passages, such as the passage dealing with a Nazir, to whom all wine and wine byproducts (including wine vinegar) are prohibited, and by Ruth, who was told by the greatest authority of the time to dip her bread in vinegar. Yet, nowhere do we find that they pulled out a magnifying glass to check the vinegar (which was one product that over the millennia had a high infestation rate) to ascertain that no microscopic insect might have been inside. Furthermore, if minuscule mites would be prohibited due to the ability to see them under a microscope, how can anyone breathe? Every time we inhale we would be ingesting thousands of infinitesimal insects! The Torah was given to people, not angels!

The vast majority of contemporary authorities, almost without exception (!), rule this way as well, that *re'eyah* — seeing — can only be referring to natural G-d given eyesight, and any magnifying tool will not change the *halachic* status of whatever needs to be checked, whether an *etrog*, *tefillin*, Sefer Torah or flour.

However, as mentioned in a previous article “Bubby Didn't Eat Bugs”, there are those who opine that it might be worthwhile to use a magnifier to help check better, if one can already see something, but is unsure what he is seeing. For example, if one can see a black dot, these authorities feel that one should use a magnifying glass to ascertain if it is an actual insect or merely dirt. As stated previously, not everyone agrees with this though. Another application of this concept is to familiarize yourself to what you are seeing, i.e. checking lettuce by using the magnifier, as it is entirely possible that you are really seeing an insect, but don't realize it as it might be camouflaged. Once one checks with magnification, he will recognize what the bugs look like and will be able to see them without visual aid.

But the bottom line is that using a magnifier or microscope to see something that cannot be seen by the naked eye would have no *halachic* bearing, “*bein lehakel bein lehachmir*”. So, although Leeuwenhoek's impact on the world in various important areas is immeasurable, nevertheless, his *halachic* legacy remains interestingly, microscopic.

### IMPORTANT NOTE:

**Please ask your local halachic authority for any real-case ruling and do not rely on the discussion in this article.**