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PARSHA INSIGHTS

GILDING THE LILY

“Its knobs and its blossoms will be (hammered) from it...” (25:31)

In English, when we speak of “gilding the lily”, we mean that something has been unnecessarily adorned. How can the lily be made more beautiful? If you paint it gold will it be more radiant? When you paint a lily it detracts from its true beauty. It’s “overdone”.

There’s a common misconception that the Torah is like a lily and the Rabbis were a bunch of lily painters.

There is not a single Rabbinical dictum or law, not an extrapolation nor an embellishment that is not hinted to in the Torah itself. Everything stems ultimately from the Torah.

We can see this idea in this week’s Torah portion: “You shall make a Menorah of pure gold, hammered out shall the Menorah be made, its base, its shaft, its cups, its knobs and its blossoms will be (hammered) from it.”

The Menorah was extruded from one solid block of gold. Nothing was grafted on to it. Just as its base and its shaft and its cups were integral, drawn from the same block of gold, so too were its knobs and its blossoms integral and drawn from the same block of gold.

The same is true with every law that the Rabbis promulgated. Nothing is grafted on. Nothing is unrelated embellishment. Just as the Torah laws — the “shaft” and the “cups” of the Torah — stem from an indivisible unity, so does every last Rabbinical dictum and decree. It’s “knobs” and its “blossoms” derive from that same ‘block of gold’.

The lily is ungilded.

• Source: Chafetz Chaim

A PACKAGE DEAL

“The Keruvim shall be with wings spread upward, sheltering the Cover with their wings with their faces toward each other...” (25:16)

Rabbi, who is better? A) Someone who is scrupulous in observance of Jewish ritual, has Grade-A *tefillin*, is super-careful about what he puts in his mouth, but when it comes to what comes out of his mouth he’s not so vigilant. He can be hurtful and angry, and sometimes he speaks malicious gossip.

Or: B) Someone who drives to golf on Shabbat but just endowed an entire wing in the hospital and is universally loved by everyone he meets?

Many people think that you can be a good person without keeping the *mitzvot*. But what does it mean to be a “good person”. Judaism defines being a good person as someone who does what G-d wants. And what does G-d want? He told us in the Torah. G-d wants us to be good to each other, to care for the sick and the orphaned, to love converts and to protect widows. The human values that society cherishes are long-time Torah gifts to mankind-at-large.

However, for a Jewish person, G-d also wants us to keep Shabbat and to refrain from eating cheeseburgers. These are His desires no less than clothing the needy and visiting the sick. Torah observance is only complete when we commit to both a correct relationship with our Creator as well as our fellow man.

One without the other is only half the picture.

Look above the Holy Ark in any synagogue and you’ll notice a representation of the two tablets on which the Torah was engraved. Why weren’t the Ten Commandments written on one tablet of stone? Why did G-d hew two pieces of rock for His contract with the

Jewish People?

Obviously you can’t say that G-d couldn’t find a piece of stone big enough for all ten. A little bit of quarrying is infinitely less than a blink of the eye for He Who carved the Milky Way out of nothingness.

And you also can’t say that He made two just in case one got lost – a sort of Cosmic Data Backup – because what was written on the first tablet was different from what was written on the second.

In fact, if you examine what is written on the first tablet, you’ll notice that the commandments that they contain pertain to the relationship between G-d and man: “I am G-d... You shall not recognize other gods in My presence... Don’t make a carved image... Don’t take the Name of the L-rd your G-d in vain... Remember the day of Shabbat to sanctify it...”

The second tablet speaks of commandments between man and his fellow: Don’t murder... Don’t commit adultery... Don’t covet...

“The Keruvim shall be ... with their faces toward each other...”

The *Keruvim* on the cover of the Ark that contained Ten Commandments symbolize the Torah itself. The fact that they faced each other teaches us that it’s impossible to observe the Torah unless our relationship with our fellow man mirrors our relationship with G-d, and vice versa. One without the other is only half the picture.

For the Torah is a package deal.

• Source: Based on the Malbim

PARSHA OVERVIEW

G-d commands Moshe to build a Mishkan (Sanctuary) and supplies him with detailed instructions. The Children of Israel are asked to contribute precious metals and stones, fabrics, skins, oil and spices. In the Mishkan's outer courtyard are an altar for the burnt offerings and a laver for washing. The Tent of Meeting is divided by a curtain into two chambers. The outer chamber is accessible only to the *kohanim*, the descendants of Aharon. This con-

tains the table of showbreads, the *menorah*, and the golden altar for incense. The innermost chamber, the Holy of Holies, may be entered only by the *kohen gadol*, and only once a year, on Yom Kippur. Here is the Ark that held the Ten Commandments inscribed on the two tablets of stone that G-d gave to the Jewish nation on Mount Sinai. All of the utensils and vessels, as well as the construction of the Mishkan, are described in great detail.

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A NATION OF GIVERS

“Jews give when they are asked” say our Sages. They gave their gold when asked to contribute to the sinful forming of the golden calf and they gave their gifts when asked to contribute to the building of the *Mishkan* Sanctuary as an atonement for that sin.

How true this tale of giving is even today is evident in the legendary philanthropy of Jews in so many areas of public life. But a Jew who is blessed by Heaven with the ability to give must be capable of distinguishing between a “golden

calf” and a Sanctuary as the beneficiary of his generosity.

It is indeed regrettable that Yeshivot and Day Schools in Israel and elsewhere are forced to struggle for financial survival while so much Jewish money is squandered on causes which have little to do with the spiritual survival of our people.

Perhaps this week's Torah portion about giving for the *Mishkan* will inspire the givers to make the right choice in supporting the causes which will secure Israel forever.

LOVE OF THE LAND

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

RECHOVOT – ROOM FOR ALL

The name Rechovot was originally given to a well dug by the servants of the Patriarch Yitzchak. It was only after two bitter disputes between these servants and the Philistines in whose territory they dwelled over



ownership of two other wells that a third well was not contested. Yitzchak called it Rechovot (expanses) as an expression of gratitude to “G-d Who has made room for us” and Polish settlers in 1890 adopted it for the city that they founded.

לע"נ

מרת פייגה בת ר' דוד ע"ה

ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

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PARSHA Q&A ?

1. How many types of items were the Jews to donate?
2. The donation of silver for the Mishkan differed from the donation of the other items. How?
3. What property do *techelet* and *argaman* share that *orot eilim m'adamim* do not share?
4. What property do the above three share that *shesh* and *orot techashim* do not share?
5. Onkelos translates "*tachash*" as "*sasgona*." Why?
6. What kind of trees did Yaakov plant in Egypt?
7. Describe two uses of: 1) oil, 2) spices, 3) jewels.
8. The *aron* was made with three boxes, one inside the other. Exactly how tall was the outer box?
9. Why is the Torah referred to as "testimony"?
10. What did the faces of the *keruvim* resemble?
11. On what day of the week was the *lechem hapanim* baked?
12. What does *miksha* mean?
13. What was the purpose of the *menorah's gevi'im* (cups)?
14. How did Moshe know the shape of the *menorah*?
15. What designs were embroidered into the tapestries of the Mishkan?
16. What is meant by "standing wood"?
17. How long was the Mishkan?
18. How wide was the interior of the Mishkan?
19. Why was the altar coated with *nechoshet*?
20. Which function did the copper *yeteidot* serve?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

1. 25:2 - 13.
2. 25:3 - No fixed amount of the other items was required. The silver was given as a fixed amount: a half-shekel.
3. 25:4,5 - They are wool; *orot eilim* are not.
4. 25:4,5 - They are dyed; *shesh* and *orot techashim* are not.
5. 25:5 - The *tachash* delights (*sas*) in its multi-colors (*g'vanim*).
6. 25:5 - *Arazim* — cedars.
7. 25:6-7: 1) The oil was lit in the *menorah* and used for anointing. 2) The spices were used in the anointing oil and for the incense. 3) The precious stones were for the *ephod* and the *choshen*.
8. 25:11 - The outer box was one and a half *amot* plus a *tefach* plus a little bit, because it rose a little bit above the *kaporet*. (The *kaporet* was a *tefach* thick — see 25:17).
9. 25:16 - It testifies that G-d commanded us to keep the *mitzvot*.
10. 25:18 - The faces of children.
11. 25:29 - Friday.
12. 25:31 - Hammered.
13. 25:31 - Purely ornamental.
14. 25:40 - G-d showed Moshe a *menorah* of fire.
15. 26:1 - On one side a lion; on the other side an eagle.
16. 26:15 - The wooden beams were to be upright and not stacked one upon the other.
17. 26:16 - 30 *amot*.
18. 26:23 - 10 *amot*.
19. 27:2 - To atone for brazenness.
20. 27:19 - They secured the curtains against the wind.

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- When only a part of an animal is consecrated
- The effect of “drawn water” upon a mikveh
- Mixing of red heifer ashes with spring water
- Exchange of animal made by more than a single owner
- Differences between individual and communal sacrifices
- Recording the Oral Law
- When the person who designated an animal as a sin offering dies before it is offered

CHEERS AND TEARS

Cheers and tears hardly seem to go together. But such was the scene which is recalled in our *gemara* in its discussion about the atonement sacrifices offered in the second *Beit Hamikdash* by the Jews returning to Eretz Yisrael from Babylonian captivity.

Rabbi Yossi explains that the sacrifices were atonement for the sin of idol worship during the reign of King Tzidkiyahu in the last years of the first *Beit Hamikdash*. A suggestion is made that although some seventy years had passed, there were still some of that sinful generation around when the

second *Beit Hamikdash* was completed. This is based on the scene of that completion described in the Book of Ezra (3:11-13):

“The people shouted a great cheer of praise to G-d for the establishment of the House of G-d. But many of the *kohanim*, levites and elders who had seen the first *Beit Hamikdash* cried in a loud voice.”

They wept because the building now being inaugurated was considerably smaller in size than the building they remembered. Their weeping was so loud that it even drowned out the cheering of those who rejoiced.

• *Temurah 15b*

WHAT THE Sages SAY

“It is preferable to uproot one letter of the Torah (the ban on writing the Oral Law) than to allow Torah to be forgotten by Jews.”

• *Rabbi Yochanan and Reish Lakish - Temurah 14b*

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SHUL I OR SHUL I NOT

From: Josh

Dear Rabbi,

I was wondering, with all the dangers and threats against Jews nowadays, whether it's worth going to shul, which is a place that is more likely to be targeted? Would it not be better to pray at home, or to organize unofficial minyans that would be less conspicuous?

Dear Josh,

I am sympathetic to your concerns. Thank G-d, in the vast majority of countries in which Jews reside, the situation does not warrant such precaution.

Of course, safety and security is not to be taken lightly, and every measure within reason should be taken to ensure the safety of Jews on their way to and from *shul* and while within. Depending on the location and local conditions, this might involve police and/or civilian surveillance and patrol teams, security cameras, and armed *shul*-goers, even on Shabbat.

But to close the *shul* doors, thereby capitulating to our enemies' threats, would ultimately undermine our strength and security by putting us on the run. Rather, all communities should cultivate strong and close relationships with governmental and law-enforcement bodies in order to devise strategies to put our pursuers on the run.

The Talmud teaches, "One who fixes a regular place for prayer, his enemies fall before him" (*Berachot 8a*). On a simple level, this means that to one who expresses a regular commitment to maintain his connection with G-d despite

the many obstacles in doing so, G-d will give special aid to overcome his adversaries who desire to trip him up.

However, based on your question, perhaps the teaching can be understood in an additional way. Lest one think that regularly going to *shul* exposes one to danger because of its being Jewishly conspicuous, the teaching emphasizes that this is not so. Rather, G-d will extend His providential Divine protection over those who regularly go to *shul*, despite the designs of our enemies, and it is rather they who G-d will cause to fall in our stead.

This reminds me of a teaching regarding the verse, "Praise the L-rd, all nations; Laud Him, all peoples! For His lovingkindness is great toward us, and the truth of the L-rd is everlasting" (Ps. 117:1-2). The question is raised, "Because His kindness is great to us, the nations should praise Him?". Rather, the idea is that only our enemies know all they plan against us, and how much of that is foiled by G-d. This forces them to praise G-d for His protection of us despite their evil intentions.

This can be understood by an analogy: There was a certain Jew who left his house for *shul* everyday at the same time, traveling the same path. A certain anti-Semite decided he would lay in wait for the Jew and drop a huge stone upon him from the roof of his house as the Jew passed below. Just as the Jew approached the appointed spot, a sudden gust of wind blew off his hat, forcing him off course, into the street, and out of harm's way, just as the stone shattered on the path he would otherwise have passed. After picking up and dusting off his hat, unaware of what occurred, the Jew continued on to *shul*, and only the anti-Semite was forced to admit the Providential protection of G-d over the Jew.

WHAT'S THE RIGHT THING TO DO?

REAL-LIFE QUESTIONS OF SOCIAL AND BUSINESS ETHICS

A MIXED BLESSING

Question: A woman who had suffered greatly from a bad marriage finally succeeded in ending her misery through divorce. As soon as she received the long-awaited "Get" document of divorce, she happily made the blessing of "*Shehechyanu*". Should the witnesses and rabbinical judges present say "*amen*" to such a blessing?

Answer: Although we see that this blessing is said on holidays when eating a new fruit or wearing a new garment we find that it applies only to expressing appreciation for the good that one receives and not for the elimination of a bad situation. Just as it is not appropriate when being freed from

prison to make such a blessing, the woman escaping the "imprisonment" of bad marriage must express her gratitude to Heaven in some way, but not through this particular blessing reserved for happy occasions with no background of tragedy.

It is therefore obvious that those hearing this blessing made in an improper occasion for this blessing should not respond with the "*amen*" intended for properly pronounced blessings.

• From the ruling of Rabbi Yitzchak Zilberstein, rav of the Ramat Elchanan community in Bnei Brak

Yosef Blalock

North Georgia

Agriculturist/Talmud Torah Teacher

“**S**atan” does not usually make people more religious, but the Blalocks are not most people. Yosef, the eldest of his nine siblings, began life in the Church and on the farm. His father’s questions about his birth-religion made him an outcast and eventually the whole family as well. After a search, the Noachide Church satisfied the family’s desire for Truth for a time, but the lure of Shabbat and learning the Oral Torah drew Yosef Blalock into the process of conversion and then into the Beit Midrash of Ohr

Somayach and marriage. He began with Aleph Beit and ended with a *shidduch* arranged by Rabbi Mordechai Perlman, *shlita*.

His brothers and father decided to come home as well, and at one point all five Blalock brothers were learning at Ohr Somayach together! He remembers how “they took us all in and gave us a family in Israel.” Today, Yosef, his four brothers, and their father all live in Yavna’el, teaching Torah and farming together. His three sisters and mother also converted and moved to Israel. The family’s connection to Ohr Somayach has only grown stronger over the years, planting roots in Israel and adding their efforts to build a greater Torah community in the Galilee.

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

TURNING POINT IN THE LOBBY

It happened in the lobby of a Swiss hotel. An Israeli visitor active in charitable causes noticed a family parked on lobby sofas at a late hour of the night. Upon inquiring he learned that the father, mother and daughter had an early morning return flight to Israel. In order to save the expense of another night in their hotel room they had checked out and were spending the remaining hours till their ride to the airport parked in the lobby.

When they refused his invitation to come to his room for some refreshments he brought some cookies and chocolates to them in the lobby. Upon his return to Israel he forgot the entire incident until some months later when he received an invitation to the daughter’s wedding referring to him as the

main *mechutan* (title usually reserved for the parents of the bride and groom).

Unaware of his connection he called for clarification. He was told that the bride had strayed from the religious lifestyle of her parents and had become engaged to marry a non-Jew. The trip to Switzerland was a desperate attempt to dissuade her but she refused to budge. It was only on the flight back to Israel that she kept talking about how wonderful that religious Jew was to them in the hotel lobby. She was so moved by his thoughtfulness that she decided that she wanted to return to a lifestyle which had such values.

The result was that she called off the intermarriage and soon became engaged to marry a fine, religious Jew.

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