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PARSHA INSIGHTS

AN “ALL-NIGHTER” ALL-NITER

“Until the morrow of the seventh week you shall count” (23:18)

Staying up all night doesn’t sound very religious, but there are several times during the Jewish Year when the custom is to burn the midnight oil until the sun peeps through the blinds.

Many people stay up after the Seder on Pesach until the time of the morning prayer to recount and analyze the great miracles of the Exodus. As the Haggada itself says: Rabbi Eliezer, Rabbi Yehoshua, Rabbi Elazar ben Azaria and Rabbi Akiva stayed up all night talking about the Exodus until their students came to tell them that it was time to recite the morning *Shema Yisrael*.

On Yom Kippur, those with sufficient strength stay up all night in prayer and supplication atoning for their sins. On Hoshana Rabba, the time when the decrees of Yom Kippur are given over to those agents who will carry them out, there is a tradition to learn all night.

On the night of Shavuot, too, there is a widely observed custom to stay up all night. The Sages of the Kabbala formulated an order of study call a *tikkun* (lit. “fixing”) for the night of Shavuot. This includes passages from the written Torah, the oral Torah, the mystical Zohar, as well as a list of all 613 *mitzvot*.

The Zohar commends those who stay awake in anticipation of receiving the Torah. The giving of the Torah was, as it were, the wedding of the Jewish People and the Torah, and so it is fitting that we should be engaged in preparing the ornaments of the bride the previous night.

Another reason: On that first Shavuot morning, there were some who overslept and had to be awoken to receive the Torah. In order to rectify this, we stay up.

But there is a deeper reason that we don’t sleep on the night of Shavuot.

Sleep is the taste of death.

If fact, the Talmud tells us that sleep is 1/60th a part of death. One part in 60 is the threshold of perception. Similarly, Shabbat is a “taste” of the World-to-Come. It’s precisely 1/60th of the World-to-Come.

Sleep is the taste of death in this world. King David died on Shavuot. But before he died, he never even tasted the taste of

death, because he never fell into a deep sleep. Thus on the occasion of his *yartzeit* the anniversary of his death we avoid the “taste of death” by staying up all night.

The angel of death came to King David to try and take his life. But it had no power over him for he was immersed in learning Torah and Torah is the essence of the life-force in this world. The only way that the angel of death could take David’s life from him was through cunning: He managed to distract David from his learning, and in that split second, he was able to take his life from him. So on this night of Shavuot, which is both the anniversary of the giving of the Torah and the end of King David’s life, we stay awake all night and immerse ourselves in Torah study.

Torah breathes life into Man. But it was not always this way. When G-d first created Man, he was animated by G-d’s utterance: “Let Us make Man”. It was the power of these words spoken by the Creator that gave Man the ability to live and breathe and think and act.

However, this was only until the Jewish People stood at the foot of Sinai. When G-d said “I am the L-rd, your G-d” the first commandment the life-force that animated Man parted from the body and the entire Jewish People died. Miraculously their souls were put back into their bodies, but what animated them now was a different utterance. No longer was their life-force derived from “Let Us make Man.” Now they were like new creations. Their inner essence was powered by “I am the L-rd, your G-d.” From this moment, the Torah became the animating dynamic of the Jewish Soul.

And when the Mashiach, the scion of King David, arrives to herald the era of the revival of the dead, it will be the Torah, the dew of life, which will be the mechanism to awaken the body from its long sleep.

Then we will finally understand the words we have sung for so long:

“David, Melech Yisrael, *chai v’kayam!*”

“David, king of Israel, *lives and endures!*”

• Sources: Tehillim 73:5, Yalkut Shimoni; Talmud Berachot 3b; Tehillim 19:9; Book of Our Heritage, Rabbi Eliahu Kitov, translated by Rabbi Nachman Bulman; Time Pieces, Rabbi Aaron Lopianski

PARSHA OVERVIEW

The *kohanim* are commanded to avoid contact with corpses in order to maintain a high standard of ritual purity. They may attend the funeral of only their seven closest relatives: father, mother, wife, son, daughter, brother, and unmarried sister. The *kohen gadol* (High Priest) may not attend the funeral of even his closest relatives. Certain marital restrictions are placed on the *kohanim*. The nation is required to honor the *kohanim*. The physical irregularities that invalidate a *kohen* from serving in the Temple are listed. *Terumah*, a produce tithe given to the *kohanim*, may be eaten only by *kohanim* and their household. An animal may be sacrificed in the Temple

after it is eight days old and is free from any physical defects. The nation is commanded to sanctify the Name of G-d by insuring that their behavior is always exemplary, and by being prepared to surrender their lives rather than murder, engage in licentious relations or worship idols. The special characteristics of the holidays are described, and the nation is reminded not to do certain types of creative work during these holidays. New grain may not be eaten until the *omer* of barley is offered in the Temple. The Parsha explains the laws of preparing the oil for the menorah and baking the *lechem hapanim* in the Temple. A man blasphemes G-d and is executed as prescribed in the Torah.

LOVE OF THE LAND

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

TERUMAH AND MA'ASER AND EARTHQUAKES

The Prophet Elyahu, of blessed memory, asked Rabbi Nehorai why earthquakes happen in Eretz Yisrael.

The reply was because of the sin of failing to do the separating of *terumah* and the tithing of the *ma'aser*.

He based this on the apparent conflict between two passages:

"The eyes of the L-rd, your G-d, are constantly looking with care upon it (Eretz Yisrael)." (*Devarim* 11:12)



"He (G-d) gazes upon the earth and it trembles, touches the mountains and they erupt." (*Tehillim* 104:32)

How do we reconcile these two passages?

When Jews do the will of G-d and do their tithing as they should, G-d's eyes "are constantly looking with care upon the Land" from the beginning of the year till the end of the year" (*Devarim* *ibid.*) and it suffers no harm. But when Jews fail to do the will of G-d and do not tithe as they should "He gazes upon the earth and it trembles." (*Talmud Yerushalmi Berachot* 9:2)

Remembering Rav Weinbach

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Love of the Land, What's the Right Thing to Do?, The Human Side of the Story written by Rav Mendel Weinbach, zt"l

Parsha Insights written by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair • *General Editor and Talmud Tips*: Rabbi Moshe Newman • *Design*: Rabbi Eliezer Shapiro

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PARSHA Q&A ?

1. Which male descendants of Aharon are exempt from the prohibition against contacting a dead body?
2. Does a *kohen* have an option regarding becoming ritually defiled when his unmarried sister passes away?
3. How does one honor a *kohen*?
4. How does the Torah restrict the *kohen gadol* with regard to mourning?
5. The Torah states in verse 22:3 that one who “approaches holy objects” while in a state of *tumah* (impurity) is penalized with excision. What does the Torah mean by “approaches”?
6. What is the smallest piece of a corpse that is able to transmit *tumah*?
7. Who in the household of a *kohen* may eat *terumah*?
8. If the daughter of a *kohen* marries a “zar” she may no longer eat *terumah*. What is a *zar*?
9. What is the difference between a *neder* and a *nedavah*?
10. May a person slaughter an animal and its father on the same day?
11. How does the Torah define “profaning” the Name of G-d?
12. Apart from Shabbat, how many days are there during the year about which the Torah says that work is forbidden?
13. How big is an *Omer*?
14. On what day do we begin to “count the *Omer*”?
15. Why do we begin counting the *omer* at night?
16. How does the *omer* differ from other *minchah* offerings?
17. The blowing of the shofar on Rosh Hashanah is called a “*zichron teruah*” (sound of remembrance). For what is it a reminder?
18. What is unusual about the wood of the *etrog* tree?
19. Who was the father of the blasphemer?
20. What is the penalty for intentionally wounding one’s parent?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week’s Questions!

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

1. 21:1 - *Challalim* — those disqualified from the priesthood because they are descended from a relationship forbidden to a *kohen*.
2. 21:3 - No, he is required to do so.
3. 21:8 - He is first in all matters of holiness. For example, a *kohen* reads from the Torah first, and is usually the one to lead the blessings before and after meals.
4. 21:10-12 - He may not allow his hair to grow long, nor attend to his close relatives if they die, nor accompany a funeral procession.
5. 22:3 - Eats.
6. 22:5 - A piece the size of an olive.
7. 22:11 - He, his wife, his sons, his unmarried daughters and his non-Jewish slaves.
8. 22:12 - A non-*kohen*.
9. 22:18 - A *neder* is an obligation upon a person; a *nedavah* is an obligation placed upon an object.
10. 22:28 - Yes. The Torah only prohibits slaughtering an animal and its mother on the same day.
11. 22:32 - Willfully transgressing the commandments.
12. 23:7-36 - Seven.
13. 23:10 - One tenth of an *eipha*.
14. 23:15 - On the 16th of Nissan.
15. 23:15 - The Torah requires counting seven complete weeks. If we begin counting in the daytime, the seven weeks would not be complete, because according to the Torah a day starts at nightfall.
16. 23:16 - It was made from barley.
17. 23:24 - The *akeidat* (binding of) Yitzchak.
18. 23:40 - It has the same taste as the fruit.
19. 24:10 - The Egyptian killed by Moshe (*Shemot* 2:12).
20. 24:21 - Death.

ERUVIN 51 - 57

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said, “One who has a headache should learn Torah ...” (based on Mishlei 1:9).

One might ask: How can a person learn Torah if he has a headache? The Meiri explains that Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi doesn't literally mean to learn Torah when unable; rather he teaches that a person who is weak by nature and fears that Torah study will make him unwell should not fear. The Torah will protect his health. The Maharsha states that our *gemara* is speaking about a person who is only not feeling “well” but it not actually ill. The study of Torah will help prevent deterioration to the point of illness.

• Eruvin 54a

“The Torah is not in the heavens” — it is not found in a person who ‘lifts his ego with it like the heavens are high — nor is it across the seas — nor is the Torah found in a person who ‘widens his ego with it like the seas’...”

This statement of Rava on our *daf* is based on *Devarim 30:12-13* and teaches that Torah does not reside in a haughty person. What is the difference between “high like the heavens” and “wide like the seas”? The Maharsha explains that the former refers to a person who feels so exalted that he needs no rabbi to teach him Torah. He can do it alone and needs no tradition of the *mesora*. The latter “wide” person, although he will learn from a rabbi, feels “large and great”, and sees no need to review his Torah study. Neither person will be a Torah scholar.

• Eruvin 55a

@ OHR Profiles of Ohr Somayach Alumni and Students

written by Daniel Keebler

David-Daniel Storfer Age: 22 Teaneck, NJ Derech and Intermediate Programs

Eight years of watered-down Jewish education made Judaism so repulsive to David-Daniel Storfer that he switched to public school. He was disappointed with the utter lack of explanations, “Why do we have two *challot* on Shabbat?” Whatever reason you feel like!” Storfer felt he was drowning in a sea of questions with no answers.

G-d sent him a life preserver in high school —

an Orthodox rabbi who taught a nearby Sunday school. His authentic Torah-based answers led Storfer to even deeper questions about his heritage. “I was seeking a yeshiva without knowing they existed,” recalls Storfer.

The Derech program was a perfect fit for him: outstanding rabbis to answer his questions, friends he can relate to, and a steadily earned skillset to access Torah wisdom on his own, not to mention college credits. Now in Ohr Somayach's Intermediate program, Storfer wants to eventually earn a degree in business and a PhD in industrial organization psychology with the aim of enhancing Jewish education in America.



OMER: COUNTING UP TO SHAVUOT

From: Yehuda

Dear Rabbi,

What is the connection between counting the Omer and working on ourselves and self-improvement? I imagine it has to do with getting ready for Shavuot, but I'm sure how that works. Thanks for any clarification you have on this.

Dear Yehuda,

According to the Zohar, as a result of exile and the spiritual impurity of ancient Egypt, the Jewish people sank to the 49th level of spiritual impurity. This was so much so, that if they had stayed there any longer, they would not have been deemed worthy of redemption at all. After the Exodus, during the 49 days between Pesach and Shavuot, they elevated themselves from each level of *tumah* to the corresponding level of *tahara*.

This is commemorated with the period of the counting of the Omer – Sefirat HaOmer – in preparation for the receiving of the Torah in purity on Shavuot.

The Torah refers to this with the verse: “*u’Sefartem l’chem...sheva shavuot*” – “count for **yourselves** seven weeks”. The word “yourselves” seems unnecessary. Wouldn’t it be enough to say “count seven weeks”? What’s the meaning of the additional “*l’chem*”? Similarly, the verse states that these weeks are to be “*temimot*” – complete. This also seems superfluous. Isn’t a week by definition 7 days, and therefore complete?

Obviously, the emphasis is on the idea that the counting is to be for us – for our benefit. But in what way?

The commentators explain that the answer to this lies in our understanding of “*sefartem*”.

Of course, the simple meaning of *sefira* is count – this is the count-up in anticipation of Shavuot, the receiving of the Torah which is certainly in our collective benefit.

But many commentators refine our understanding about how this is to be done based on various other meanings of *sefira*: “*Sefar*” refers to an outlying area — we are to push ourselves in self-improvement to the limits of our ability. This meaning also implies “border” — we are to limit/control ourselves within the confines of the Torah and *mitzvot*. Yet another meaning is related to “*safir*” or sapphire — we are to beautify, purify and polish ourselves in preparation of receiving the Torah.

Other commentaries add an additional understanding

based on the kabbalistic idea of the *sefirot*. The basic idea is to use the meaning, light and energy of the *sefirot* to guide us in achieving all of the above: maximizing our potential within the framework of Torah and *mitzvot* in order to make ourselves as luminescent gems in the crown of G-d’s glorious Coronation – which is Shavuot.

While it’s beyond our scope to go into this last explanation in depth, generally, the seven lower *sefirot* are associated with 7 attributes or character traits. Thus each of the 7 weeks of the Omer corresponds to one of these 7 *sefirot*, where each week highlights the improvement of that (Omer-specific) attribute: week 1 – Chesed/lovingkindness; week 2 – Gevurah/self-control; week 3 – Tiferet/spirituality; week 4 – Netzach/consistency; week 5 – Hod/gratitude; week 6 – Yesod/sanctity; week 7 – Malchut/consolidation (of all of the above).

In truth, our work of self-improvement during the Omer is intended to be even more fine-tuned and specific. This is what’s suggested by the Torah’s referring to 7 complete, full or perfect weeks. Each week is to be complete through the perfection of its individual days. Thus, each week and *sefira* is subdivided into the 7 days of each week such that there are 49 permutations of *sefirot* corresponding to each of the 49 days of the Omer.

Also, in the special service of Sefirat HaOmer found in all *siddurim* [including Ashkenaz, and ArtScroll], this corresponds to the 7 verses of “*la’menatzeach*” (Psalm 67), often portrayed in the form of the 7-branched menorah, which has a total of 49 words; the central verse of “*la’menatzeach*” starting with “*yismachu*” corresponding to the central branch of the menorah, which itself has 49 letters (including *vav*’s in “*tishpot*” and “*mishor*”); the seven lines of the “*ana b’koach*” prayer which have 7 words each for a total of 49 (including the phrases made by the first letters of the words in each line [which, by the way, form the 42 letter name of G-d]).

It is also customary to learn the ethical teachings of Pirkei Avot during this period of self-improvement in anticipation of Shavuot. This is in fulfillment of the dictum, “*derech erez kadma l’Torah*” – “good character traits are a prerequisite for Torah”. This particularly applies to the 48 ways of acquiring Torah enumerated in the 6th chapter where each of these ways corresponds to one of each of the 49 days, and the 49th day is a culmination, synthesis and review of all of them together in preparation for receiving the Torah!

PUTTING OUT THE FIRE

Question:

I sometimes see two neighbors getting into a heated argument over some trivial matter. What is the right thing to do to calm them down and restore good relations?

Answer:

A Talmudic Sage was once directed by the Prophet Eliyahu to two men whom he described as “Citizens of the World-to-Come”. When he asked these fellows of rather ordinary appearance what it was that they did to deserve such a title, they responded that they had a special talent for making people happy which they utilized for cheering up depressed people and for putting out the fire of a quarrel between two parties.

Even if you are not blessed with the talent of these men, you are certainly capable of adopting their strategy. Two people quarrelling with each other tend to forget that there are

more important things in life than the matter about which they are so worked up. Your intervention with a light touch may succeed in helping them see things in the right proportion and inspire them to abandon their quarrel.

You must also bear in mind that no one wants to feel like a loser. It is therefore crucial to give both parties the feeling that they are right. Although this is an illogical proposition you will be pleasantly surprised to see how two people weary of fighting are prepared to clutch at this straw to save their pride.

The other strategy for restoring peace is the one which was used by Aharon Hakohen. Our Sages tell us that when he became aware of discord between two parties he approached each of them separately and told him a “white lie” that the other party was very upset with the rupture in their relations and was anxious to make up. When the two eventually ran into each other, they were happy to be friends again.

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

GENERATION GAP AS WIDE AS A LAKE

Do you recall how you were taught in elementary school to remember the names of the five Great Lakes of North America?

If you are from the generation that had no Jewish Day Schools and received your geography education in public school, you probably would answer HOMES (for the non-American reader this acronym stands for Huron, Ontario, Michigan, Erie and Superior). But when Binyomin Albin, a student of Yeshivat Telshe of Chicago, was asked how he remem-

bers the Great Lakes, he had a surprising answer.

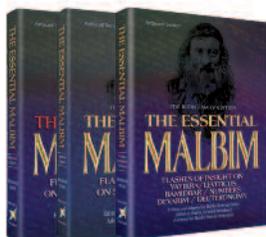
Binyomin was visiting Eretz Yisrael together with his father, Rabbi Yehuda Albin of Chicago, and the question was put to him by the rabbi who hosted them for a Shabbat meal. His answer was MOSHE!

The host proudly concluded that this was an expression of the gap between generations. (But he thought to himself that it was perhaps also an expression of local patriotism to use an acronym that placed Chicago’s Lake Michigan first!)

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