

# OHRNET

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## PARSHA INSIGHTS

### THE LAST OF THE KIDDUSH WINE

“... pure red heifer” (19:2)

It’s difficult for us to imagine, but not so long ago, there were ordinary-looking people who displayed extraordinary powers.

There are literally hundreds of stories of Jews in the Second World War who risked and surrendered their lives, rather than transgress the smallest commandment of the Torah. One of these holy souls was Rabbi Shemuel David Ungar, the spiritual leader of Nitra. Rabbi Ungar had a reputation as a holy person and a great teacher far beyond his native Slovakia.

In early 1944, Rabbi Ungar fled to the woods around Nitra to escape deportation by the Fascists. Even though he was faced by acute hunger, he refused to make the smallest compromise in his observance of Jewish law.

As the weeks went by, he became weaker and weaker. A friend managed to find some grapes (Heaven only knows from where) and begged him to eat them. He replied, “How can I eat them now? If I use them now, I won’t have wine to make Kiddush on Friday night. Should a Jew enjoy grapes if he has no wine to sanctify the next Shabbat?”

When winter came, his health started to fail. Nevertheless, he still spent hours learning Torah at the mouth of his bunker, despite the heavy snow and the bitter cold. Suffering from starvation and exposure, Rabbi Unger passed from this world a few weeks before the fall of the Third Reich.

The Talmud relates the story of a non-Jew, Dama ben Netina, who possessed a precious jewel needed to replace a stone missing from the breastplate of the *Kohen Gadol*. The Sages came to him and offered him a fortune for the stone, but he would not sell it to them because the key to the safe

in which the jewel was kept was under his father’s sleeping head. He would not wake his father even for a king’s ransom.

Because he was prepared to give up so much to honor his father, he was rewarded that a red heifer was born into his flock, and he sold that animal to the Sages for the same amount that he had forfeited.

Why was Dama ben Netina rewarded specifically by a red heifer being born into his flock?

The role of the Jewish People is to be a “nation of priests” and a “holy people”, singled out from the rest of the nations by their exemplary behavior. So, when Dama ben Netina, a non-Jew, demonstrated such self-sacrifice to honor his father, it awakened an accusation in the Heavenly courts against the Jewish People. For here was a non-Jew whose devotion to the mitzvah of honoring his father was at least equal to that of the Jews, and where was the exemplary difference of the Jewish People?

Thus, the red heifer which was bought from him by the Sages demonstrated that even though Dama ben Netina was capable of giving up a fortune for a mitzvah that logic dictates, the Jewish People are prepared to give up an equal fortune for a mitzvah that is infinitely beyond the grasp of human logic, merely because it is the Will of their Father in Heaven.

And a holy Jew, freezing in a Slovak winter, to whom logic says eat the grapes and worry about Shabbat later, has the power to ignore the gnawing pains of hunger in his stomach. All so that he will not miss the chance of sanctifying the day of Shabbat and He who created it.

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POB 18103, Jerusalem 91180, Israel • Tel: +972-2-581-0315 • Email: info@ohr.edu • www.ohr.edu

*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 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.

## LOVE OF THE LAND

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

### OIL-RICH OLIVE — PROMISE OF THE FUTURE

Of all the seven species mentioned in praise of Eretz Yisrael the olive alone is referred to not as a fruit but as the oil that comes from the fruit.

To understand this we must analyze a point made by our Sages (*Menachot* 53b) about the comparison that the Prophet Yirmiyahu made (*Yirmiyahu* 11:16) between the olive and the Jewish People. "Just as the purpose of the olive is the oil which is extracted from it," says Rabbi Yitzchak, "so too the purpose of the Jewish People is realized only after it reaches the end of its processing."



Maharsha explains this comparison in the following way:

The olive itself has no great value as a fruit and consuming olives too frequently, say our Sages, can be harmful to the memory. Only after the olive has been squeezed and crushed to extract its very valuable oil is this fruit's potential finally realized. The Jewish People have a great spiritual potential but it may take the crushing experience of suffering in exile to arouse them to repent their sins and realize that potential. In the days of Mashiach this process will be completed and the "oil" of the Jewish "olive" will come forth.

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מרת פייגא בת ר' דוד ע"ה

ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

## 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.

## ERUVIN 100 - 105

*“Even if the Torah had not been given we would be able to learn modesty from the cat and learn not to steal from the ant.”*

Rashi explains how the cat shows modesty in matters of relieving itself in private and proper disposal afterwards. He also states that ants store up food in the summer for the winter (as in *Mishlei 7*), and they don't steal food from one another.

The Ben Yehoyada points out that once the Torah was given we are to learn these and other positive character traits only from the Torah and not from animals. Animals also possess negative qualities which one might be influenced by, whereas the Torah is pure righteousness and goodness.

• *Eruvin 100b*

*“You fool! Look at the end of the verse!”*

This is how Rabbi Yehoshua be Chananya dismissed a barb from a heretic who quoted the first part of a verse in *Micha (7:4)*, who claimed it referred to the Jewish People in a derogatory way: “The best of them are like thorns”. However, the Sage silenced the foolish critic by citing the continuation of the verse which states clearly that the Jewish People are “straight like a fence” that protects and guards.

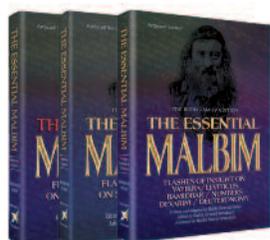
The entire verse is in fact a praise of the Jewish People, explains the Sage. Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananya teaches the true meaning as follows: “Just as the thorns protect an opening from trespassers, so too the righteous and wise members of the Jewish People protect the entire nation.”

• *Eruvin 101a*

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## ONE WORLD UNDER G-D

**From: Y.W.**

Dear Rabbi,

*Basically, G-d, the L-rd, is Master of the Universe, He is One, and of course there is no other. With regards to other religions and other people of non-Jewish faith, when they pray and have a connection with their deity and he answers their prayers or they feel a great devotion and connection, are they actually connecting to G-d? After all, He is the Father of the whole world, not just the Jews. So would it be true to say that at the end of the day we all pray and believe in the same G-d even though we all connect to Him through different ways?*

*You see the more complex my perception is of G-d, the more difficulty I have connecting with Him. Before I started becoming more observant, I had simple faith and I could connect very easily. However, once I started practicing more and keeping more mitzvot and changing my lifestyle, only then did I start having difficulty with emunah (faith), which has affected my davening etc. I hope my question is understandable.*

Dear Y.W.,

Regarding pagan or idolatrous religions of the world, one could not say that they inspire a connection to G-d, or that their adherents are praying to, or thereby receiving from, G-d. On the contrary, such beliefs are antithetical to G-d, and are strictly forbidden to all mankind.

The basic spiritual drive inherent in all people is certainly from G-d, and these religions' attempt to provide for that need results from an innate yearning to connect to G-d, but those venues don't work. Often, they are connecting to impure forces. And if G-d provides for them, it is not because of their prayer to these forbidden forces, but rather in spite of it – out of His great love for all His creatures.

Regarding the other monotheistic religions, insofar as they were inspired by Judaism, they do generally direct their belief, faith and prayer to our G-d, the L-rd. Rambam writes

that these religions were actually facilitated by G-d as a way to wean humanity away from false beliefs of idolatry, demonology, magic and witchcraft, and in order to get mankind involved in grappling with the idea of One G-d and with issues of Mashiach and the ultimate revelation of G-d in His world.

Unfortunately, these religions obscure the truth of Judaism upon which they are based, by claiming to supplant or supersede Judaism. But in terms of the ultimate belief in G-d and impetus to do good in His name (although ideally it should be ascribed to the teachings of Moses in the Torah), the prayer and service of their good adherents is desired and accepted by G-d.

However, this should not undermine your commitment or feelings of being able to get close to Him. On the one hand, as you grow, and your belief and knowledge of G-d becomes more sophisticated, you will be challenged to appreciate your relationship with Him because He has thereby “grown” away from you in your greater appreciation of His greatness. But as you work on solidifying your belief and making it more consistent, you will appreciate it more than before.

You might compare this to learning a discipline or a sport. As a hobby, or on a more introductory level, you might find it easy and enjoyable. But as you progress, and therefore come to focus on more technical aspects of the matter or game, it becomes more difficult, and usually there's a lull in your actual enjoyment of it. But if you persevere, the deeper understanding and more sophisticated technique actually enable you to perform better than before, such that when you master the new level, your appreciation of it is that much greater.

So if you feel a lull, or even a backslide, as a result of your spiritual growth, that's par for the course. What you need to do is to keep working on it until you pass over the threshold and onto a new plateau. Then you'll really enjoy the benefit of your efforts - until you're ready to grow again.

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# QUESTION MARKET

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### A QUESTION OF PRIORITIES

**Question:** Does a terminally ill father with no one to care for him except his engaged daughter have a right to ask her to postpone her wedding in order to care for him in what may be his last year?

**Answer:** Such a case actually came before Rabbi Yitzchok Zilberman, rav of the Ramat Elchanan community in Bnei Brak, and he recorded this experience in his very popular *Aleinu Leshabeiach* volume of *Sefer Bereishet*.

While his own inclination, based on halachic considerations, was to rule that the daughter had an obligation to fulfill the mitzvah of honoring her father, Rabbi Zilberstein decided to consult his venerable brother-in-law Rabbi Chaim Kanievsky. This Torah giant concurred with the halachic considerations but presented a surprising consideration for going through with the wedding on schedule for the greater benefit of the ailing father.

In the Talmud we find that the mother of the *Kohen Gadol* would bring treats of food to those Jews confined to the cities of refuge because they were guilty of unintentional

manslaughter. Since these people could return to their homes only upon the death of the *Kohen Gadol* there was fear that they might pray that he would soon perish. The gifts brought by his mother were intended to bribe them against such an appeal to Heaven.

If the young man engaged to the daughter feels that his wedding is being delayed by her father, concluded Rabbi Kanievsky, it can be assumed that deep down in his heart he will be praying for this obstacle to be removed. It is therefore in the father's greater interest that the wedding take place as scheduled.

Upon hearing this sage advice, Rabbi Zilberstein went to see the father. In diplomatic fashion he omitted mention of the suspicion that there might be prayers for his death, but rather stressed that if the wedding was held on schedule his new son-in-law would join the rest of the family in praying for his good health.

The happy ending was that the father gave in and the wedding took place on time.

## THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

### SHAMPOO AND THE JEWISH PROBLEM

“You didn't shampoo your hair so we can't operate!” This shocking statement was made by a nurse to the wife of the head of a Day School in Minneapolis who had not been given instructions on how to prepare herself for surgery.

The only way she would be able to avoid postponing the operation and remaining in the hospital an extra day was to rush out to a drugstore and purchase the required shampoo. But when she reached the nearby pharmacy she was disappointed to find it closed. After desperately banging on the door she was relieved to see a clerk open it, only to inform her that there was no way he could sell her anything since all the computerized cash registers had been shut down.

Explaining her urgent need for the shampoo, the lady begged the clerk to give her a tube and promised that her husband would arrive at eight o'clock, opening time, on the next morning to pay for it. Her appeal touched the clerk's heart and he consented.

The next morning her husband, a Slonimer *chassid* in traditional black garb, did indeed arrive at the designated hour to make payment. To his surprise, this created a hubbub among the clerks. They had made bets that morning as to whether he would actually come to pay. One clerk who lost the bet cried out, “It's not fair. You didn't tell us his wife was Jewish!”

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