

OHRNET

SHABBAT PARSHAT MATOT · 21 TAMMUZ 5774 - JULY 19, 2014 · VOL. 21 NO. 43

PARSHA INSIGHTS

THE SOUND OF MUSSAR

“They (Bnei Gad and Bnei Reuven) approached him (Moshe) and said: ‘We will build sheep-pens here for our livestock, and cities for our small children. We shall arm ourselves swiftly in the vanguard of the Children of Yisrael until we have brought them to their place.’” (32:16-17)

Everyone likes a pat on the back. Or better still — a standing ovation from a 100,000-seater stadium. Truth be told, success teaches us little in life. It just confirms how truly marvelous we always knew we were.

When someone pulls you up short and criticizes you, even if they’re wrong, treasure their words like jewels. Maybe there’s something in there that’s true.

We are a weak generation. We find even mild criticism difficult to swallow.

In the 19th century in Eastern Europe, Rabbi Yisrael Salanter (1810–1883) developed the “Mussar movement”. The name “Mussar” derives from the Book of Proverbs (1:2), meaning moral conduct, instruction and discipline.

It’s difficult to get people to learn Mussar when the reigning zeitgeist is “positive re-enforcement”. If we don’t get our daily dose of PR we are in danger of folding up completely. To be sure, we are a weak generation.

Don’t get me wrong. Positive re-enforcement has an essential role in Mussar. Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe *zatzal* stressed that the way to perfect one’s character is to identify one’s quintessential virtue and strengthen it. However, a love of reproof is equally essential: “The ear that hears life-giving reproof will reside in the midst of the wise (Mishlei 15:31)”.

When the Sfat Emet (1847–1905) was a young boy he once stayed up all night learning Torah with a friend. As the dawn started to break he lay down to sleep, exhausted from his efforts. It was nearing midday when the Sfat Emet’s grandfather — the Chidushei HaRim (1798–1866) — entered his room and gave him “mussar” for an entire hour about how his love of sleep had led to his failure to learn Torah with sufficient diligence.

The Sfat Emet listened to his grandfather’s words of rebuke with great attention and without any attempt to vin-

dicte himself. His friend who was standing there was amazed, and afterwards he said, “Why didn’t you say something to defend yourself? After all, you spent the whole night learning!”

The Sfat Emet replied to him, “I didn’t want to interrupt my grandfather in the middle because I wanted to hear more *mussar* from him.”

With that he picked up a Chumash and showed his friend a section in this week’s Torah portion, “*They approached him and said, ‘We will build sheep-pens here for our livestock, and cities for our small children. We shall arm ourselves swiftly in the vanguard of the Children of Yisrael until we have brought them to their place.’*”

The Bnei Gad and the Bnei Reuven only defended themselves after Moshe Rabbeinu had severely criticized them (32:6-9). However, from the beginning, the intention of the Bnei Gad and the Bnei Reuven had been to cross the River Yarden and be in the vanguard of the fight. Why then did they wait so long to vindicate themselves? Why did they stand silently while Moshe excoriated them: “Shall your brothers go out to battle while you settle here?” and “Behold, you have risen in the place of your fathers, a society of sinful people, to add more to the burning wrath of G-d against Yisrael, and you will destroy this entire people.”(32:14)

Pretty strong stuff (and this is only an excerpt).

Continued the Sfat Emet: “So why didn’t they stop Moshe at the beginning?”

He explained: “Because they wanted to hear more of the sound of *mussar* from Moshe.”(32:14)

• Source: based on *Mayana Shel Torah*

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Moshe teaches the rules and restrictions governing oaths and vows — especially the role of a husband or father in either upholding or annulling a vow. *Bnei Yisrael* wage war against Midian. They kill the five Midianite kings, all the males and Bilaam. Moshe is upset that women were taken captive. They were catalysts for the immoral behavior of the Jewish People. He rebukes the officers. The spoils of war are counted and apportioned. The commanding officers report to Moshe that there was not one casualty among *Bnei Yisrael*. They bring an offering that is taken by Moshe and Elazar and placed in the *Ohel Mo'ed* (Tent of

Meeting). The Tribes of Gad and Reuven, who own large quantities of livestock, petition Moshe to allow them to remain east of the Jordan and not enter the Land of Israel. They explain that the land east of the Jordan is quite suitable grazing land for their livestock. Moshe's initial response is that this request will discourage the rest of *Bnei Yisrael*, and that it is akin to the sin of the spies. They assure Moshe that they will first help conquer Israel, and only then will they go back to their homes on the eastern side of the Jordan River. Moshe grants their request on condition that they uphold their part of the deal.

TALMUD Tips

ADVICE FOR LIFE

Based on the Talmudic Sages found in the seven pages of the Talmud studied each week in the Daf Yomi cycle

MEGILLA 9 - 15

“Greater was the effect of the king removing his ring (Ahashverosh empowering Haman) than the effect of the forty-eight prophets and the seven prophetesses who had prophesied for Israel — because the rebuke from the prophets did not return the Jewish People to repent for the good, whereas the ‘removal of the ring’ succeeded in helping them repent for the good.”

Rabbi Aba ben Kahana teaches this in our *gemara* and bases it on what we read in the third chapter of the Book of Esther. There we learn that King Achashverosh removed his signet ring and gave it to Haman to write an edict for the destruction of the entire Jewish People, and to have it sealed with the king's signet ring. “And as for the money,” said the king, “keep it!” Letters were sent out by courier to every province.

The Maharsha cites a Midrash to give us a greater depth of understanding why the removal of the ring was so effective in shaking up the people to return to G-d. Normally a buyer gives an item of value to the seller, states the Midrash, as a sign of his commitment to keep his word in the transaction. Here the buyer is Haman and seller is Achashverosh, who is selling the Jews to Haman. The king's enormous degree of hatred of the Jewish People is clearly revealed here when he gave his ring to Haman the buyer, instead of the other way around. When the Jewish People realized the extent of his hatred for them, they returned to G-d in repentance.

• *Megilla 14a*

“Whoever reports a saying in the name of the one who said it brings geula (redemption) to the world as it states. ‘And Esther said to the king in the name of Mordechai (Esther 2:22)’.”

Rabbi Elazar in the name of Rabbi Chanina teaches this important and seemingly easy way to “save the world” on our *daf*. It is also taught in Pirkei Avot (6:6). Its basis is in the Purim story, in which Esther reported to the king the traitorous plan of Bigtan and Teresh that she had heard from Mordechai.

The Maharal explains that a person who credits the source knows how to “give credit where credit is due” and does not seek to give himself credit undeservedly. Only such a person — who recognizes and reveals the true source — will merit bringing *geula* and *Kiddush Hashem*. Only such a person credits the *geula* as the work of G-d and will declare the *geula* “in the name of the Redeemer”. So was it with Esther, and so it is with each *geula*, including the final *geula shleima*.

• *Megilla 15a*

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PARSHA Q&A ?

1. Who may annul a vow?
2. When may a father annul his widowed daughter's vows?
3. Why were the Jewish People not commanded to attack Moav, as they were to attack Midian?
4. Those selected to fight Midian went unwillingly. Why?
5. What holy vessels accompanied the Jewish People into battle?
6. Those who killed in the war against Midian were required to remain outside the "machane" (camp). Which machane?
7. Besides removing traces of forbidden food, what else is needed to make metal vessels obtained from a non-Jew fit for a Jewish owner?
8. "We will build sheep-pens here for our livestock and cities for our little ones." What was improper about this statement?
9. During the conquest of the Land, where did *Bnei Gad* and *Bnei Reuven* position themselves?
10. What promise did *Bnei Gad* and *Bnei Reuven* make beyond that which Moshe required?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to This Week's Questions!

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

1. 30:2 - Preferably, an expert in the laws of *nedarim*. Otherwise, three ordinary people.
2. 30:10 - If she is under 12 and 1/2 years old and widowed before she was fully married.
3. 31:2 - Because Moav only acted out of fear against the Jewish People. Also, Ruth was destined to come from Moav.
4. 31:5 - They knew that Moshe's death would follow.
5. 31:6 - The *aron* and the *tzitz*.
6. 31:19 - The *Machane Shechina*.
7. 31:23 - Immersion in a *mikve*.
8. 32:16 - They showed more regard for their property than for their children.
9. 32:17 - At the head of the troops.
10. 32:24 - Moshe required them to remain west of the Jordan during the conquest of the Land. They promised to remain after the conquest until the Land was divided among the tribes.

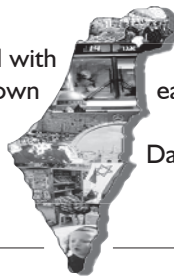
LOVE OF THE LAND

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

DALTON – TOMB OF THE GALILEE SAGE

While most of the Talmudic Sages are identified with the name of their father or simply with their own name, the exception is Rabbi Yosi Ha-Galili.

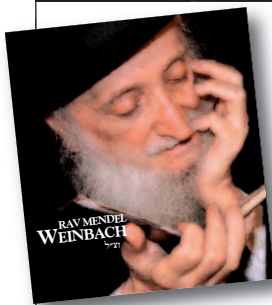
This colleague of Talmudic giants such as Rabbi



Akiva earned his surname through spending his early years in the Galilee.

Tradition has it that his tomb is located in Moshav Dalton, some three miles north of the city of Tsefat.

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Abarbanel

ON PARSHAT MATOT

By Rabbi Pinchas Kasnett

In this Parsha G-d commands Moshe to take vengeance for the Children of Israel against the Midianites. The commentators are all puzzled by the fact that Moshe is not commanded to take vengeance against the Moabites when it was the Moabite women who seduced the Jewish men into intimate immorality and idolatry.

Abarbanel explains that the Midianites were actually the instigators. He explains that Bilaam, after having failed to curse the Children of Israel, passed through Midian and advised them that the only way to bring about the downfall of the Jewish nation was through seduction. Bilaam remained in Midian in order to work out a plan. The Midianites gave their daughters free rein to encourage *Klal Yisrael* to transgress. Since the Jewish People had no quarrel with the Moabites, and had actually been instructed not to distress them or provoke war with them, the Midianite women were able to disguise themselves as Moabites and were able to circulate among the Jews, ostensibly selling them food and other supplies. Thus, when the Torah states in Parshat Balak, "Israel settled in Sheetim and the people began to commit harlotry with the daughters of Moab" — they were actually involved with Midianite women.

Abarbanel offers another possible explanation. When the

Torah states that "the people began to commit harlotry" it is referring to the idea that the Moabite women acted first, and when the Midianite women saw that the men were vulnerable they decided to use such seduction as a means to entice them to idolatry as well. This is why taking vengeance referred to Midian alone, as the Torah states in Parshat Pinchas, "Harass the Midianites and smite them, for they harassed you through their conspiracy that they conspired against you in the matter of Peor (the idol the Jews were enticed to worship)." The Moabite women caused the men to give in to their physical desires, but the Midianite women enticed them to commit idolatry, a much more serious and damaging transgression.

According to both explanations, however, the Midianite women were clearly guilty of bringing about both immorality and idolatry. This is reflected in Moshe's charge to the people after G-d had instructed him to "take vengeance for the Jewish People against the Midianites." When he instructs the people, however, he tells them: "Arm men from among yourselves, that they may be against Midian to inflict G-d's vengeance against Midian." The vengeance for intimate immorality belongs to the people, but the vengeance for idolatry belongs to G-d.

IT'S NOT *Quite That Simple*

by Rabbi Dr. Yitzchak Greenblatt

ONE IN SIXTY

If you ask someone what it means to keep kosher, one of the first things you'll probably be told (after "no pork") is that having meat and milk together is a big "no-no". Now, let's say you're cooking a delicious pot of glatt-kosher lamb stew (maybe with some rosemary, red wine and garlic). And while the scrumptious dish is bubbling away you feel a little warm and decide to have a nice, refreshing cup of cool milk. Unfortunately, after pouring the cup of milk for yourself, you slip on an inconveniently placed banana peel and the cup flies from your hand, and — oh no! — it spills into your stew. Meat and milk, cooking together. Not kosher, right? Well, as with many things in Judaism, it's not quite that simple.

Sometimes it'll be kosher and sometimes it won't. It depends on the proportions. There are only two possibilities:

1) If there is at least 60 times more stew than milk, a law of

nullification (*bittul*) kicks in and the entire mixture is perfectly kosher. The milk becomes "part" of the stew. The reasoning is that a ratio of 60:1 is enough to nullify any of the milk's flavor. (There are exceptions. Some things need a greater ratio and some things can never be nullified, but 60:1 is more often than not sufficient.)

2) But any more milk than that and your mouth-watering lamb stew has just been given a one-way ticket to the garbage.

Let's imagine you find yourself in situation #1 above. The amount of milk which was mixed into the stew was negligible and your dinner is considered halachically up to code. No doubt many people would breathe a sigh of relief and start to dig in. But you can't bear the thought of eating meat and milk together, and you'd prefer to throw the stew out. Even though technically you could eat the stew, at the end of the day there's

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SHABBAT LUNCH AND LEARN

From: Leonard

Dear Rabbi,
I know it is important to learn on Shabbat, and particularly with one's children. But in my case I am so tired from work by the time Shabbat comes around that I find it very hard to learn with my children instead of relaxing or napping. Anyway, my kids aren't thrilled to study. They'd rather play outside, which is what most of the other kids seem to be doing (i.e., and not learning with their parents). Is this okay? What would you recommend that I do?

Dear Leonard,

I understand entirely the difficulty you have in balancing your need to rest and relax on Shabbat with the need to invest in your children's Jewish education on this very important day for Torah study.

One way many people attempt to balance both is by incorporating learning with the children and reviewing their weekly material in the context of the Shabbat meals. This might be accomplished by featuring a different child at each of the different meals, or by focusing on different children throughout the various courses of each meal.

In any case, this helps ensure that the discussion at Shabbat meals will be Torah-based, rather than on the news, the neighbors or other mundane topics.

Another thing you might try is to make the meals shorter so you have more time outside your nap to be with your children.

In addition, since eating big meals tends to make one lethargic, if you eat a bit less you may find you'll have less of a need to nap.

Regarding your kids wanting to play instead of study, that's perfectly natural and they should certainly be allowed and encouraged to play. But here too you need to find the right balance. Perhaps you could set times for both, so that they play while you rest. Let your kids know before Shabbat that you'll be studying together at such-and-such a time, and set an alarm which ensures you'll get up from your nap on time.

Of course, think of ways to make study-time with your kids more enjoyable for them by being pleasant, happy, patient, and by introducing games, quizzes, prizes and the like.

Although it seems to you that most other kids are also not learning with their parents — that might not be the case. They may be rotating by learning with one while the others play outside (which is another way to facilitate personal attention to each child's needs). But even if that is the case, that's no reason to neglect your own children.

On the contrary, when your children see the sacrifice you make to learn with them, and the special emphasis you place on their Jewish studies and your desire to be a part of them, they will come to appreciate and value Torah study all the more. This is generally passed on from generation to generation.

And even though initially they might resist the change and be reluctant to shorten their play time, ultimately they will enjoy the special attention and one-on-one time with you, particularly if you use the time to display love and affection with them as you learn by complimenting, encouraging, hugging, kissing and playing with them — as well as rewarding them for their efforts with appropriate incentives!

IT'S NOT Quite That Simple

continued from page four

really milk in there. Is this laudable? Well, it's not quite that simple.

You see, the Torah does not allow a person to waste things for no good reason, and this includes food. Does being extra careful warrant throwing out food that is perfectly kosher? Many of our most learned scholars have addressed themselves to this question. One of them, Rabbi Menachem Eichenstein (in his book *Torat Ha'Asham*), writes that "if someone wants to be stringent and consider [the food] forbidden ... for example in the case of 60:1 nullification ... this is comparable to heresy!" These are strong words, but the point is straightforward. If G-d says the food is okay to eat, refusing to eat it because you are "holier than G-d" is tantamount to not believing in G-d! Similarly, there are those people who, even when they are ill to the extent that the Torah exempts them from fasting on Yom Kippur, insist on fasting. They are mistaken. The same G-d who invented the idea of fasting on Yom Kippur stipulated that in certain circumstances you *may not* fast.

One of the great Chassidic masters, who lived around 200

years ago, Rabbi Tzvi Elimelech Spira (Bnei Yisasschar, Adar 2, *Drush 7*) addresses a similar case: when a piece of pork (less than 1/60) falls into the a kosher dish. His opinion is based on Kabbala, but perhaps we can try to understand some of what he says. According to Kabbala, items in the world contain within them certain spiritual "sparks" of holiness. Certain of these "sparks" can be elevated to higher levels by using a certain item in a certain way at a certain time and in a certain place. This is what we call a mitzvah. Another idea is that some of these sparks can be elevated from their position in a plant or animal life-form to a new position in a human-being. This is what can happen when a person eats. Certain food is kosher and the sparks contained within it can be elevated, whereas other food is non-kosher and its sparks cannot generally be elevated. Rabbi Spira explains that in our case, when a piece of pork falls into a kosher pot of food, we have a unique situation. This is in fact a rare opportunity to take those sparks which are contained in a pig and elevate them. There is actually a special mitzvah to eat such food!

THE SHEMONEH ESREI - THE FOURTH BLESSING (I)

The fourth blessing marks the beginning of the middle section of the Shemoneh Esrei, where one requests his needs from G-d. Although many of the requests in this section are for one's personal needs, the worshipper is ideally meant to see himself both as an individual as well as part of the whole of *Klal Yisrael*. Therefore we find that even the personal requests for knowledge, forgiveness or a good livelihood are said in the plural, in order to include everyone in the request.

When the worshipper includes others together in his requests he emphasizes the fact that all Jews have a spiritual connection to each other. By virtue of this connection there is a collective merit of the Jewish People that can help awaken G-d's mercy, causing one's prayers to be answered. Also, the added merit of the worshipper's selfless act to include others in his request can help his request to be answered for either himself or even for someone else who needs the same request as him.

"You Bestow upon Man..."

The phrase "You bestow upon Man" marks the beginning of our requests. Thus, it can be understood as an introduction for all of the blessings of this section.

The Hebrew word used here to convey the message of giving is "*chonen* - bestow." Rashi explains that the meaning

of the word *chonen* always implies a request for an underserved favor. With this introduction we express before G-d that we are unworthy of His goodness, relying not on our merits, but rather His grace.

A Timeless Question:

What purpose would praying for a particular good serve if G-d has already decided to grant it? So too, if G-d has not decided to grant a particular good, then how would praying for it help to change G-d's mind to want to grant something that He has not decreed? It is impossible to cause G-d to change from wanting to give something to not wanting, or to change from not wanting to yes wanting. As such, there is *seemingly* no purpose in praying (Sefer Halkarim, 4:18).

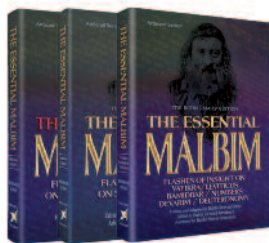
Sincere prayer can cause G-d to judge a person with mercy and kindness instead of harsh judgment. It is possible for a person to be granted a request that would otherwise have been declined.

Accordingly, the Talmud relates the following story: "One Yom Kippur I entered the Holy of Holies to burn incense and G-d said to me: 'Yishmael, My son, bless Me'. I said to Him: 'May it be Your will that Your mercy conquer Your anger, and that for their sake You go beyond the letter of the law, favoring them in judgment.' When I concluded the blessing, G-d nodded to me with His head, demonstrating His approval."

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