

SHABBAT PARSHAT BO · 8 SHVAT 5763 · JAN. 11, 2003 · VOL. 10 NO. 15

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PARSHA INSIGHTS

A SIGN FOR OUR TIMES

"And it [tefillin] shall be a sign upon your arm, and an ornament between your eyes, for with a strong hand G-d took us out from Egypt." (13:16)

There was once a child prodigy who, at the age of three, could play Rachmaninoff better than the best. A concert was arranged for her to play in public. Months before, posters and TV advertisements proclaimed that she would perform for one concert, and one concert only.

In order that this once-in-a-lifetime event would not be forgotten, special mementos of the concert would be sold. For example, a tiny white concert piano on a bracelet, or a tiara with a piano on it.

The morning after the concert, the newspapers fell over themselves trying to find superlatives to describe the performance.

About a month later, a couple of louts who had missed the show turned up at the child's home and demanded a "command" performance.

"Yeah, we know everyone says she was great. We read the newspapers and all, but we don't believe it. If you bring her down from her bedroom now and get her to perform here in your sitting room on this grand piano, then we'll believe she's as good as everyone says she is; if not we don't believe..."

When G-d created the world, there was no doubt that it was He who had brought everything into existence, that He knew all that was going on in the world, and that He was involved in the smallest event that happens in this world.

From the time of *Enosh*, Adam's grandson, people started to make mistakes about G-d. Some people denied that there was a G-d at all.

Others conceded the existence of a Divine Power, but said that He was so removed and exalted that He only had knowledge of the spiritual realm, but didn't know what was

going on down in this world.

Yet a third group admitted that G-d knows what is happening in the lower realms, but He isn't interested in what we do. In other words, He created the Universe, and then, as it were, went off to play golf.

G-d decided once and for all to quash these mistakes. He would bring a series of miraculous events that would show, by altering the course of nature, that He creates nature.

Not only this, but He would take a nation out of the midst of another nation and make them His people. This would show that not only is He aware of what transpires in this world, but He cares and interacts with Mankind.

G-d would do this only once, because by performing these miracles, He would remove the ability of man to have freedom of choice to believe in Him or not, and the purpose of Creation was the existence of a being, Man, who has free will to believe or not.

This is the story of the Exodus. G-d took the Jewish People out of Egypt to prove that He is alive and well and the world is living in Him!

In order that we should not forget this once-and-once-only re-orchestration of nature, He gave us souvenirs of the "concert" such as a *mezuzah* to put on our doors and *tefillin* to bind on our arms. Someone who has these reminders will go through his life as though he had a string tied around his pinkie and will never forget.

Not only that, G-d made it incumbent on every generation to *pass-over* - to recreate the events of this great concert of nature in every generation at a *Seder* so that each generation would know that it had actually happened. Parents don't lie to their children about things of importance.

For this reason, G-d will not perform at the whim of every boor who comes along and claims that he doesn't believe there was a concert at all. There are millions of fans who still have their tiny white concert pianos carefully handed down from generation to generation to prove the others wrong.

PARSHA OVERVIEW

G-d tells Moshe that He is hardening Pharaoh's heart so that through miraculous plagues the world will know for all time that He is the one true G-d. Pharaoh is warned about the plague of locusts and is told how severe it will be. Pharaoh agrees to release only the men, but Moshe insists that everyone must go. During the plague, Pharaoh calls for Moshe and Aharon to remove the locusts, and he admits he has sinned. G-d ends the plague but hardens Pharaoh's heart, and again Pharaoh fails to free the Jews. The country, except for the Jewish People, is then engulfed in a palpable darkness. Pharaoh calls for Moshe and tells him to take all the Jews out of Egypt, but to leave their flocks behind. Moshe tells him that not only will they take their own flocks, but Pharaoh must add his own too. Moshe tells Pharaoh that G-d is going to bring one more plague, the death of the firstborn, and then the Jews will leave Egypt. G-d

again hardens Pharaoh's heart, and Pharaoh warns Moshe that if he sees him again, Moshe will be put to death. G-d tells Moshe that the month of Nissan will be the chief month. The Jewish people are commanded to take a sheep on the 10th of the month and guard it until the 14th. The sheep is then to be slaughtered as a Pesach offering, its blood put on their door-posts, and its roasted meat eaten. The blood on the door-post will be a sign that their homes will be passed-over when G-d strikes the firstborn of Egypt. The Jewish People are told to memorialize this day as the Exodus from Egypt by never eating *chametz* on Pesach. Moshe relays G-d's commands, and the Jewish People fulfill them flawlessly. G-d sends the final plague, killing the first born, and Pharaoh sends the Jews out of Egypt. G-d tells Moshe and Aharon the laws concerning the Pesach sacrifice, *pidyon haben* (redemption of the first born son) and *tefillin*.

ISRAEL Forever

TWO SIDES OF COMPENSATION

Every time it seems that Israel and the Palestinians are on the verge of reaching an agreement which can bring peace to this part of the world there arises the problem of the demand for the resettlement of Arabs who fled their homes and compensation for the losses they suffered with the establishment of the State of Israel.

Those who make these demands are invited to recall a trial which took place over two millennia ago when Alexander the Great ruled over this region. The Egyptians brought before him a lawsuit against the Jews based on a passage in this week's Torah portion which relates that on their way out of Egyptian bondage their ancestors borrowed gold and silver vessels from the Egyptians. They now demanded the return of those precious borrowed items.

Since the Egyptian claim was based on a Torah source the sage representing the Jews at this trial based his refutation as well on the Torah account of the enslavement of

his entire people for so many years. He challenged them to calculate how much they owed the Jews for all the labor they forced them to do. Alexander gave them three days to respond to this challenge. Since they were unable to do so they fled their homes, abandoning their unharvested fields and vineyards to the Jews who were thus able to enjoy agricultural produce in that Sabbatical year when their own fields were left untended.

When those Arabs, who fled because their leaders urged them to do so in order to clear the country for a massacre of its Jewish inhabitants, make their claim for compensation we must remind the world of the countless millions of dollars worth of Jewish property which was confiscated when Jews were forced to leave the Arab countries in which they lived until the establishment of the State. Even if such a challenge fails to elicit the same flight of yesteryear it may at least silence the one-sided cry for compensation.



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READING IT RIGHT

How misleading a cursory reading of a passage in the Torah can be is demonstrated by the Sage Ulla as he analyzes for us the passages (*Devarim 25:1-3*) which form the basis for a main topic of this *mesechta*.

Two litigants come before the court and are judged, the Torah tells us “and they exonerate the righteous one and convict the sinful one”. Should the guilty one be deserving of lashes then the court is instructed to administer them.

Who is doing the exonerating and convicting? A superficial reading would lead us to assume that it is the judges mentioned at the beginning of that passage. And who is the righteous one and who the sinner? Again, a superficial reading would have us identify them as the two litigants mentioned at the outset of the chapter.

This reading, explains Ulla, makes no sense. Lashes apply only because someone is guilty of violating a Torah prohibition. What relationship is there between his guilt and the exoneration of the righteous party?

We are therefore compelled to understand these passages in an entirely different light. It is not the judges who are doing the exonerating and convicting but rather the witnesses who are testifying in regard to a defendant’s crime. First came false witnesses who incriminated an innocent man with their testimony. Then came other witnesses who completely nullified their testimony by testifying that they were together with them somewhere else at the time of the alleged crime and could not possibly be telling the truth. Since the Torah instructed us to believe this second set of witnesses the result is that the righteous, innocent defendant is exonerated and the false witnesses are convicted.

The standard punishment for witnesses thus exposed as liars is to suffer the penalty they wished to inflict with their testimony (*Devarim 19:19*). The passages Ulla deals with relate to situations where such tit-for-tat punishment is not applicable because of an exception made by the Torah (such as the two cases mentioned in the very first *mishna*). In such cases the Torah instructs us to punish the false witnesses with lashes.

• *Maccot 2b*

STRAIGHT FROM THE MOUTH

Only the testimony of at least two witnesses is sufficient for conviction in the case of a capital crime. In stating this rule the Torah uses the expression “through the mouths of the witnesses” (*Devarim 17:6*). The *mishna* states that this teaches us that judges should hear the testimony directly from the witnesses and not through an

interpreter.

It is for this very reason that Rabbi Yochanan lists (*Mesechta Sanhedrin 17a*) among the qualification of a judge that he be “conversant in all 70 languages,” to eliminate the need for an interpreter.

Even though the above-mentioned requirement is written in regard to capital cases, it is evident from our *gemara* that our Sages saw it as something to look for in judges in financial cases as well. The story is told of two foreigners who came before the court of the Sage Rava who appointed an interpreter to assist him in understanding them. How could he do so, comes the challenge, when the *mishna* states otherwise? The answer given is that Rava understood the language of these foreigners and required the services of the interpreter only in his communication to them. Since this challenge is presented to Rava who was judging a monetary matter it is clear that the requirement of hearing directly from the witnesses applies to such cases as well.

Many commentaries understood that the two foreigners mentioned here were witnesses and therefore assume that there is no source for insisting that the judge hear the *claims* directly from the mouths of the litigants as well and not through an interpreter. Support for this approach can be seen in the fact that this expression of “mouths” appears in the Torah in regard to witnesses. Rambam (*Hilchot Sanhedrin 21:8*), however, extends the requirement to understanding the litigants as well. His position is based on his understanding that the two foreigners in the court of Rava were the litigants and not the witnesses as is indicated in the words “they came before Rava,” a term applicable to litigants rather than witnesses.

For an explanation of why our courts today do rely on interpreters see *Shulchan Aruch Chosen Mishpat 17:6* and the *Pitchei Teshuva* there.

• *Maccot 6b*

The Weekly Daf

by RABBI MENDEL WEINBACH

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PARSHA Q&A ?

1. What was Pharaoh's excuse for not releasing the Jewish children?
2. How did the locusts in the time of Moshe differ from those in the days of Yoel?
3. How did the first three days of darkness differ from the last three?
4. When the Jews asked the Egyptians for gold and silver vessels, the Egyptians were unable to deny ownership of such vessels. Why?
5. *Makat bechorot* took place at *exactly* midnight. Why did Moshe say it would take place at *approximately* midnight?
6. Why did the firstborn of the animals die?
7. How did Moshe show respect to Pharaoh when he warned him about the aftermath of the plague of the firstborn?
8. G-d told Moshe "so that my wonders will be multiplied" (11:9). What three wonders was G-d referring to?
9. Why did G-d command the mitzvah of Rosh Chodesh to Aharon, and not only to Moshe?
10. Up to what age is an animal fit to be a Pesach offering?
11. Prior to the Exodus from Egypt, what two *mitzvot* involving blood did G-d give to the Jewish People?
12. Rashi gives two explanations of the word "*Pasachti*." What are they?
13. Why were the Jews told to stay indoors during *makat bechorot*?
14. What was Pharaoh screaming as he ran from door to door the night of *makat bechorot*?
15. Why did Pharaoh ask Moshe to bless him?
16. Why did the Jewish People carry their matzah on their shoulders rather than have their animals carry it?
17. Who comprised the *erev rav* (mixed multitude)?
18. What three historical events occurred on the 15th of Nissan, prior to the event of the Exodus from Egypt?
19. What is the source of the "milk and honey" found in *Eretz Yisrael*?
20. The only non-kosher animal whose firstborn is redeemed is the donkey. What did the donkeys do to "earn" this distinction?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

1. 10:11 - Since children don't bring sacrifices there was no need for them to go.
2. 10:14 - The plague brought by Moshe was composed of one species of locust, whereas the plague in the days of Yoel was composed of many species.
3. 10:22 - During the first three days the Egyptians couldn't see. During the last three days they couldn't move.
4. 10:22 - During the plague of darkness the Jews could see and they searched and found the Egyptians' vessels.
5. 11:4 - If Moshe said the plague would begin exactly at midnight, the Egyptians might miscalculate and accuse Moshe of being a fake.
6. 11:5 - Because the Egyptians worshiped them as gods, and when G-d punishes a nation He also punishes its gods.
7. 11:8 - Moshe warned that "All these servants of yours will come down to me" when, in fact, it was Pharaoh himself who actually came running to Moshe.
8. 11:9 - The plague of the firstborn, the splitting of the sea, the drowning of the Egyptian soldiers.
9. 12:1 - As reward for his efforts in bringing about the plagues.
10. 12:5 - One year.
11. 12:6 - Circumcision and *Korban Pesach*.
12. 12:13 - "I had mercy" and "I skipped."
13. 12:22 - Since it was a night of destruction, it was not safe for anyone to leave the protected premises of his home.
14. 12:31 - "Where does Moshe live? Where does Aharon live?"
15. 12:32 - So he wouldn't die, for he himself was a firstborn.
16. 12:34 - Because the commandment of matzah was dear to them.
17. 12:38 - People from other nations who became converts.
18. 12:41 - The angels came to promise that Sarah would have a son, Yitzchak was born, and the exile of the "covenant between the parts" was decreed.
19. 13:5 - Goat milk, date and fig honey.
20. 13:13 - They helped the Jews by carrying silver and gold out of Egypt.

ANTI-SEMITISM

From: Jason in Buffalo, NY

Dear Rabbi,

Why is there so much anti-Semitism and anti-Jewish sentiment in the world?

Dear Jason,

I try to offer a logical explanation, although I personally believe there is a mystical reason as well.

Many different forms of Jew hatred spring up from time to time. Several different reasons lie behind them. These include:

- 1) Jealousy towards us for having the original Bible
- 2) Anger at our continued resistance to being converted
- 3) Ideological clash

But why is it so universal? Why are the Jews always the bad guys? Other nations and religions guilty of the same “crimes” are not victim to this hatred to the extent that we are.

To trace the roots of anti-Semitism we must journey back over 3300 years to the revelation at Mt. Sinai.

Before presenting the Torah to the Jews, G-d offered it to all the other peoples of the world. It was up for grabs, yet every nation turned the offer down. They simply weren’t willing to change their lifestyles in order to accommodate the Torah into their daily living.

When the Jews accepted the Torah, the jealousy of the nations was aroused. “They now have an advantage that we neglected and we can never forgive them for it.”

We have something that the other nations lack. We were

chosen for the task to be G-d’s “emissaries” to the rest of the world. Exemplary, Torah-true lives should impact on others and cause them to draw closer to G-d.

Nobody likes being told what to do, and the flag that we wave flaps irritatingly in their faces. We represent a threat to them; an irritating reminder that maybe they should be striving for higher things.

This hatred frequently lies dormant in the subconscious, flaring up when an excuse can be found. Often it’s intensified at times when we enjoy material success. The Jew in the Mercedes “runs them down”! Not only do we have the audacity to advocate a Torah; we also have the chutzpah to live luxurious lives.

The State of Israel especially is a thorn in the side of many of our enemies. From the brink of annihilation in the Holocaust we have risen to become a modern, relatively wealthy nation with a powerful military. The paupers from the shtetl are now high-tech tycoons.

Is anti-Semitism only a bad thing? Strange as it may sound, it may also be the best thing that the gentiles have ever bequeathed us with! Should it happen that we begin to neglect our responsibilities as Jews, G-d nudges us to remind us who we are and what we are doing here. Anti-Semitism works as shock treatment. Never forget that you are a Jew. And a Jew has duties that may never be abandoned.

Nowadays too, the problems that are rapidly escalating are a signal from G-d. Let us take this warning to heart, and do what we can to strengthen ourselves and others in the service of G-d.

WHAT’S THE RIGHT THING TO DO?

REAL-LIFE QUESTIONS OF SOCIAL AND BUSINESS ETHICS

THE UNWANTED CALLS

Question: I have a very busy schedule during the day and look forward to a restful evening at home when I can do some studying of Torah and spend some quality time with my family. But there are always phone calls from business or social contacts which I have no interest in answering. Is it right for me to tell a family member answering the phone to tell the caller that I am not at home?

Answer: When the Torah warns us against lying it does not say “Don’t lie!” but rather “Distance yourself from lying”. This phrasing is intended to warn us against prevarication of any sort, regardless of how much you can find justification for it. (The one exception is saying a “white lie” in order to preserve or restore peace between mates and neighbors.)

If it is your child that you instruct to lie about your not being there you have compounded your guilt by setting a bad example which the youngster is likely to emulate in other situations.

What then can you do?

If it is studying Torah that you wish to do it is in any case preferable to do so in a local Beit Midrash where you will not

be disturbed by phone calls. When spending time with the family at home, in order to avoid these “nuisance calls,” either remove the receiver during that special period, or request that whoever answers the phone inform the caller that you are not available at that moment (which is true!) and invite them to call back at an hour which you have previously designated as the time you are prepared to receive calls.

The important thing to remember is what the Sage Rav told his son when he caught him lying to his mother for the noble purpose of assuring that she would prepare the sort of meal for her husband that he desired rather than continue her practice of ignoring his wishes. The son was always the go-between, relaying to his mother his father’s menu wish. When he grew older and realized that his mother was spitefully preparing meals opposite to his father’s instructions he hit on the idea of switching the instructions. When Rav surprisedly came home that day to a meal he really wanted he discovered what his son had contrived. He praised his ingenuity but scolded him for indulging in falsehood which is so habit-forming that it twists the tongue of its perpetrator and makes it difficult for him to ever adhere to the truth.

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

THE SHIDDUCH THAT ALMOST WASN'T

A very moving story about the Heavenly reward for a special effort is related in the new work "Aleinu Leshabayach" by Rabbi Yitzchak Zilberstein, Rav of the Ramat Elchanan Community in Bnei Brak.

A distinguished Torah scholar was finally on the verge of seeing his daughter become engaged to an outstanding yeshiva student after many unsuccessful attempts to find her a proper *shidduch*. At the last moment, however, the match did not come off. Disappointed and somewhat heartbroken he still maintained his round of public *shiurim* lectures. One evening at the conclusion of the Ma'ariv prayer the *gabbai* of the synagogue approached him with an urgent request to deliver a *shiur* usually given by someone else, who was prevented from doing so by an emer-

gency. Mindful of his busy schedule his initial response was negative. It was only after he was on his way home that he regretted his answer and hurried back to give the *shiur* as requested.

A young man happened to be in the synagogue that evening and stayed to enjoy the brilliant Torah presentation together with the regular participants. It was only when the *shiur* was over did he realize that the rabbi who had so impressed him with his knowledge and delivery was none other than the father of the girl he had turned down. Finally realizing what sort of an opportunity he had almost missed he hurried to give his consent to the engagement. The delighted father told everyone that he saw this as a reward for making a special effort to teach Jews Torah.

DID YOU KNOW THAT...

...The Central Campus of Ohr Somayach is located on "Ohr Somayach Street" which the Jerusalem Municipality named for the Torah giant whose name is honored by the Yeshiva.

...Ohr Somayach's top-rated program for post-high school students from throughout the world is called "Derech" because it provides a *derech* (road) to Jewish self-fulfillment and a *derech* (way) for reaching that goal.

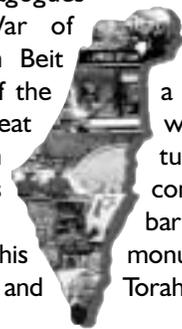
LOVE OF THE LAND - THE PEOPLE

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

RABBI CHAYIM BEN ATAR – THE MIRACLE OF THE FIG TREE

One of the many old Jerusalem synagogues destroyed by the Arabs in the War of Independence was the "Ohr Hachayim Beit Midrash". It was called by that name in honor of the classic commentary on Chumash written by the great sage Rabbi Chayim ben Atar who arrived in Yerushalayim 260 years ago after a long, dangerous journey.

The author of "Ohr Hachayim" spent most of his time studying in this synagogue wrapped in *tallit* and



tefillin, his face beaming an angelic radiance.

There was, however, one obstacle to his intense Torah study. In the courtyard of the synagogue was a fig tree which attracted the local Arab youngsters whose loud activity of picking the fruit greatly disturbed his ability to concentrate. The sage thereupon commanded the tree to cease producing fruit, and this barren tree stood for many years in the courtyard as a monument to the value which Heaven placed on the Torah study of Rabbi Chayim ben Atar.

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