

O H R N E T

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PARSHA INSIGHTS

THE GLITTERING PRIZES

“Accursed is the man who will make a graven image... an abomination to G-d, a craftsman’s handiwork, and emplace it in secret...” (27:15)

The University of Oxford owns one of the most important collections of medieval Hebrew manuscripts in the world.

The Bodleian Library, established by Sir Thomas Bodley in 1602, is filled with treasures, including the manuscript of a commentary on sections of the Mishna by the hand of the Rambam (Moses Maimonides) (1135-1204), the great medieval Jewish philosopher and rabbinic authority.

A friend of mine once traveled to the Bodleian library with a leading Israeli Torah scholar. As my friend had been a student at Oxford, he had privileged access to this priceless repository of original Jewish manuscripts. As they were shown the manuscript of the Rambam, the Torah scholar broke down in tears.

The treasures of Judaism have been captured and locked in the vaults of the non-Jewish world. What is left for the eye to see bears the bruises of millennia of exile, of one hurried exit from one country to the next. From the outside it looks a bit like a shabby and worn-out coat.

One of the marvels of Jewish scholarship is that profound and complex thought and discourse has taken place against a backdrop of near-continuous persecution and hardship. As

Mark Twain once remarked, “He (the Jew) has made a marvelous fight in this world in all ages; and has done it with his hands tied behind him.”

Throughout the ages it has been difficult for the battered Talmud to battle the blandishments of the gorgeous visuals and pristine shining philosophy of the ancient Greeks and their heirs. Many a Jew has found irresistible the glittering prizes of the secular world, aesthetically unscarred, unlike Jewish Culture which has had to limp through history.

But, however beautiful the surface of secular studies may be, you cannot hide the atheism at the root of much secular thought. A bitter pill to swallow for the Jew in whose heart beats, “G-d is One!”

“Accursed is the man who will make a graven image... an abomination to G-d, a craftsman’s handiwork, and emplace it in secret...”

There’s nothing worse than creating an idolatrous idea — a graven image — and couching it in high-falutin’ phrases — a craftsman’s handiwork — to make it sound sophisticated and cultured — to emplace in secret — and lure the Jewish heart to the glittering prizes of secularity and denial.

• Sources: based on the *Avnei Ezel in Mayana shel Torah*

PARSHA OVERVIEW

When *Bnei Yisrael* dwell in the Land of Israel, the first fruits are to be taken to the Temple and given to the *kohen* in a ceremony expressing recognition that it is G-d who guides Jewish history throughout all ages. (This passage forms one of the central parts of the Haggadah that we read at the Passover Seder.) On the last day of Pesach of the fourth and seventh years of the seven-year *shemita* cycle, a person must recite a disclosure stating that he has indeed distributed the tithes to the appropriate people in the prescribed manner. With this *mitzvah*, Moshe concludes the commandments that G-d has told him to give to the Jewish People. Moshe exhorts them to walk in G-d’s ways because they are set aside as a treasured people to G-d. When *Bnei Yisrael* cross the

Jordan River they are to make a new commitment to the Torah. Huge stones are to be erected and the Torah is to be written on them in the world’s seventy primary languages, and they are to be covered with a thin layer of plaster. Half the tribes will stand on Mount Gerizim and half on Mount Eval, and the *levi'im* will stand in a valley between the two mountains. There the *levi'im* will recite 12 commandments and all the people will say “amen” to the blessings and the curses. Moshe then details the blessings that will be bestowed upon *Bnei Yisrael*. These blessings are both physical and spiritual. But if the Jewish People do not keep the Torah, Moshe details a chilling picture of destruction, resulting in exile and wandering among the nations.

NAZIR 16 - 22

Rabbi Elazar Hakapar says, “Why does the Torah say ‘He will atone for sinning against himself’ — what did he sin against? He sinned against himself by forbidding the pleasure of wine. And we can make a ‘kal vachomer’: since a nazir who denies himself only from wine is called a sinner, all the more so someone who lives ascetically and denies himself worldly physical pleasures is considered a sinner.”

The other opinion in the *gemara* of why a *nazir* is called a sinner is that he defiled his state of being pure by coming in contact with the ritual impurity of death. This opinion fits well with the fact that the Torah specifically wrote that the *nazir* sinned regarding one who became ritually impure (Bamidbar 6:11) and not by a *nazir* who remained ritually pure.

The *gemara*, however, questions the placement of this verse, which calls him a sinner distinctively for a *nazir* who became ritually impure, according to the opinion of Rabbi Elazar Hakapar. Rabbi Elazar Hakapar deems the *nazir* a sinner for merely being a *nazir* without becoming ritually impure. The answer provided by the *gemara* is that although every *nazir* is indeed considered a sinner because of self-denial, the Torah emphasizes that a *nazir* who became ritually impure is a “sinner” since he “compounded his sin”. One explanation for this “compounding” is that not only did he sin by forbidding wine to himself, but he also was negligent in not being careful from becoming ritually impure (Rashi). Another explanation for the Torah calling him a sinner when he becomes ritually impure is due to the fact that his ritual impurity increased his sin by increasing the number of days of denying himself the pleasure of wine (Tosefot).

• Nazir 19a

One who said, “Behold, I am a nazir”, and his friend heard this and only after ‘toch kdei dibur’ said “Me too” — the first one is a nazir and the second one is not.

This statement is taught in a *beraita* on our *daf* and the length of time of “*toch kdei dibur*” (lit. “within the time of speech”) is explained in the *gemara* as the length time of a student greeting his Rabbi with the words “*Shalom alecha Rabbi*” (Rashi). The commentaries explain that this period of time is not called a “delay” in order to allow for a person to display honor in greeting his Rabbi without losing the sense of continuity of his current involvement.

• Nazir 20a

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Rav Bulman *zt"l*
on the
Torah Portion of the Week

PARSHA Q&A?

1. When historically did the obligation to bring *bikkurim* begin?
2. *Bikkurim* are from which crops?
3. How does one designate *bikkurim*?
4. Who shakes the basket containing the *bikkurim*?
5. What does “*v’anita v’amarta*” mean?
6. Which Arami “tried to destroy my father?”
7. When during the year may *bikkurim* be brought? Until when are the special verses recited?
8. Someone declaring that he separated *terumah* and *ma’aser* says: “And I didn’t forget.” What didn’t he forget?
9. What were the Jewish People to do with the 12 stones on Mount Eval?
10. Six tribes stood on Mount Eval and six on Mount Gerizim. Who and what were in the middle?
11. Who “causes the blind to go astray”?
12. How does one “strike another secretly”?
13. Eleven curses were spoken on Mount Eval. What is the significance of this number?
14. Why are sheep called “*ashterot*”?
15. How is the manner of expressing the curses in *Parshat Bechukotai* more severe than in this week’s *parsha*?
16. What is meant by “the Jewish People will become a proverb”?
17. Why did all the curses expressed in 48:16-44 befall the Jewish People?
18. “In the morning you shall say, ‘If only it were (last) evening’ and in the evening you will say, ‘If only it were (this) morning.’” Why?
19. To which tribe did Moshe give the Torah first?
20. How long does it take to understand the depth of one’s teacher’s wisdom?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week’s Questions!

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

1. 26:1 - After the Land was conquered and divided.
2. 26:2 - The seven species for which *Eretz Yisrael* is praised: wheat, barley, grapes, olives, figs, dates, and pomegranates.
3. 26:2 - When he sees the first fruit ripen on a tree, he binds a piece of straw around it to mark it as *bikkurim*.
4. 26:4 - The *kohen* places his hands under the hands of the one bringing it, and they wave the basket together.
5. 26:5 - Speak loudly.
6. 26:5 - Lavan.
7. 26:11 - *Bikkurim* are brought from Shavuot until Chanukah. The verses are recited only until Succot.
8. 26:13 - To bless G-d.
9. 10. 27:2 - Build an altar.
10. 27:12 - *Kohanim, levi'im* and the Holy Ark.
11. 27:18 - Any person who intentionally gives bad advice.
12. 27:24 - By slandering him.
13. 27:24 - Each curse corresponds to one of the tribes, except for the tribe of Shimon. Since Moshe didn’t intend to bless the tribe of Shimon before his death, he did not want to curse them either.
14. 28:4 - Because they “enrich” (*m’ashiro*) their owners.
15. 28:23 - In *Bechukotai* the Torah speaks in the plural, whereas in this week’s Parsha the curses are mentioned in the singular.
16. 28:37 - Whenever someone wants to express the idea of extraordinary suffering, they will use the Jewish People as an example.
17. 28:47 - Because they did not serve G-d with gladness when everything was abundant.
18. 28:67 - Because the curse of each hour will be greater than that of the previous hour.
19. 29:3 - To the Tribe of Levi.
20. 29:8 - 40 years.

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Abarbanel

ON THE PARSHA

Ki Tavo

In Sefer Devarim (28:49-68) the Torah enumerates a series of catastrophic events that will befall the Jewish People in the future if they stray from their observance of the Torah. Abarbanel points out that these specific verses are an uncannily accurate prediction of the catastrophic revolt against the Romans that culminated in the destruction of the Second Temple and the subsequent exile in the year 70 C.E. He refers to eight specific situations, many of which are also discussed by the Jewish historian Josephus:

The verses specifically refer to the severity of the famine which resulted from the sieges imposed by the Romans. This was clearly the main reason for their success.

These sieges lasted for a considerable length of time and resulted in mothers consuming their offspring — a fact which Josephus also clearly records.

Even those who did not die in battle or succumb to starvation were racked by disease. This is also mentioned by Josephus.

Verse 62 states, “You will be left few in number, instead of being like the stars of heaven in abundance.” This is a reference both to the enormous loss of life and to the wretched condition of the survivors. Josephus records that over 800,000 people were removed from Jerusalem alone to be buried outside the walls of the city.

Unlike the previous Babylonian exile, where for the most part the Jews lived separately and peacefully, the Roman exile would result in their being scattered amongst foreign peoples, making it very difficult to maintain their identity.

The Torah indicates that the exiles will serve “gods you did not know, you or your forefathers.” Unlike the previous exile during which many lapsed into idolatries with which they were already familiar, this worship is in reference to Christianity, which came into existence only after the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C.E. The verse continues, “And among the nations you will not be tranquil; there will be no rest for the sole of your foot.” Even

though you will assimilate and even worship their gods, you will have no peace, because they will always suspect you of harboring Jewish beliefs and customs. Abarbanel clearly indicates that he is referring to his own experiences in Spain, where Jewish converts to Christianity and their descendants were hounded for some three hundred years. He points out that there is a “silver-lining” here in that this is one of the ways that G-d employs to keep us from straying too far. The suspicions of the non-Jews will “push us back” to the path of Judaism.

The trials and tribulations of exile will produce constant fear and uncertainty which will produce a longing for redemption. We will have no rest, for in the day we will look forward to the night and in the night we will look forward to the day. This refers not only to the fully observant, but even to those who assimilate and have attained wealth and status. The non-Jews will always be their enemies, and their security will always be precarious — “the sword will always be against their necks.”

The Torah states, “G-d will return you to Egypt in ships...and there you will offer yourselves for sale to your enemies as slaves and maidservants...but there will be no buyers.” This is an indication of the shame and disgrace that the Jews will endure. They will offer themselves as slaves so as to at least avoid starvation. But they wouldn’t be purchased for two reasons: One, even though food in Egypt was cheap and plentiful, the Egyptians didn’t want to spend anything at all on the Jews. Two, the Egyptians didn’t want a repeat of what had happened earlier in history when we were enslaved and then rose up against our masters. Thus, we were doomed to die of starvation. Abarbanel again finds a silver-lining in that G-d prevented us from becoming a caste of slaves, serving even the lowest elements of non-Jewish society as occurred among the Arab and African peoples. Instead, throughout our history we have remained honored servants and advisors to kings, officers and important members of non-Jewish society.

PRENUPTIAL PRAYER

From: Darren

*Dear Rabbi,
My question is about praying to find one's soul-mate. What I'm wondering is, if it's the soul-mate why should we pray for it? Since it's Divinely ordained it should happen whether we pray or not. And if it's something that we should pray for, wouldn't that imply that it might not happen otherwise? But how can that be since it's already determined from before birth?*

Dear Darren,

This is a very engaging question!

It is true that the Talmud (Sota 2a) teaches that forty days before the formation of the fetus (i.e., at conception) a Heavenly voice proclaims, "The daughter of so-and-so is designated for so-and-so".

The Zohar (Lech Lecha 91b) explains that this couple-to-be is actually two halves of one soul that is separated by a specific angel appointed for this purpose, and whose reunification is the match referred to as *zivug* or soul-mates.

This would seem to indicate that the union between soul-mates is Divinely ordained and therefore not subject to change.

However, many sources nevertheless discuss the role prayer in finding one's *zivug*.

One such source (Mo'ed Katan 18b) permits getting engaged during a festival in order to avoid someone else preceding him. The Talmud raises a challenge that since the *zivug* is from G-d this should not happen, but it concludes

that the power of his rival's prayer may intercede. Another Talmudic source (Berachot 8a) enjoins one to pray in order that he should find a righteous wife.

This implies that the union between pre-ordained souls does not necessarily occur, and that prayer can affect the whether the *zivug* is realized or not.

There are several resolutions to this seeming contradiction in the sources, but one commonly accepted explanation is that while soul-mates are Divinely-ordained, factors involving free-will can override the pre-arranged *zivug*.

This would be akin to G-d's intention that people abide by His Will but nevertheless empowering them with the free-will to do otherwise. Thus, a person may mistakenly choose to marry someone other than the soul-mate. Similarly, a person may, through free-will, choose to transgress, thereby forfeiting his merit to find the soul-mate.

It would be for reasons such as these that a person is encouraged to pray to find the soul-mate – either for extra Divine providence to help lead him to make the right choice, or to ask for Divine forgiveness from sin or to ask for guidance in gaining merit, in order to find the soul-mate.

Of course, another way prayer is relevant to otherwise pre-ordained soul-mates involves asking G-d to help bring about the union in the easiest and most opportune way and time in order to spare each soul the anguish of prolonged solitude and unrealized potential, enabling them to unite as easily and as soon as possible in order to help each half work together toward perfecting their whole.

LOVE OF THE LAND

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

TZEFAT — THE OLDEST YESHIVA

The oldest yeshiva in history was that of Shem, the son of Noach who survived the great deluge, and his great-grandson Ever. It was in their yeshiva that the Patriarch Yaakov studied Torah.



Tradition has it that this place of study was in a cave located in the center of Tzefat. The Arizal is cited as stating that this cave was the final resting place of the Talmudic Sage Rabbi Dosa ben Hyrcanus.

SHEMONEH ESREI: SIXTEENTH BLESSING - PART 2

“From before You, our King, do not turn us away empty-handed, for You hear the prayer (i.e., requests) of Your people Israel with compassion.”

Why does G-d listen to our requests? One aspect of the “lowering” of the Infinite One is His enabling us to approach Him through prayer, since without His permission it would be forbidden to approach G-d with our requests. This is an aspect of G-d’s Kingship (*Malchut*): Just as a king allows his people to approach him with their requests, G-d allows us to approach Him with ours.

Free Will in Prayer

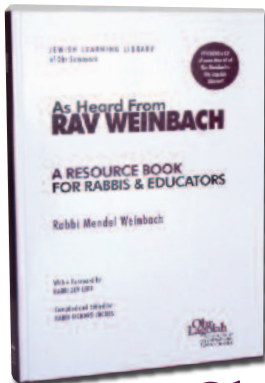
But why do we need to ask G-d for what we want? If He knows what is best for us, shouldn’t we just leave it up to Him?

“In the way that a person wishes to go, in that way he is led.” Since G-d made man a free-thinking person with different wants and desires, the ultimate expression of His kindness is to allow man to pursue and attain those wants and desires. Part of that allowance is man’s ability to ask G-d for what he wants, even if in reality something else is in fact better for him.

The reason for this is that it is a greater kindness to allow man to ask for what he wants, since G-d made man in such a way that having the opportunity to ask for and receive what a person truly wants will satisfy him much more than being given the same thing without a choice.

Imagine coming home after a long day at school. You ask your mother or father what’s for dinner. The answer is “Pasta. I hope you like it, because that’s all you’re getting.” Now imagine this scene. You come home and ask what’s for dinner. This time the answer is, “I was just about to start preparing it. Do you want to tell me what you would like?”

G-d, out of His great humility, allows man to state his requests. In fact, in many cases the end result of what a person receives can be influenced by his own requests and suggestions. This is part of the kindness of G-d, to accommodate the wants and desires of man. In relation to this idea the Sages have taught, “Where you find G-d’s greatness (i.e., kindness), there you find His humility.” We even find that G-d’s compassion extends to the wicked, granting them their desires as well, despite the fact that they misuse that which He gives them. This is in accordance with the verse, “Your mercy extends on all of Your creations.”



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LASTING TESHUVA — PART 2

Previously we discussed the importance of strategically planning one's resolutions in order to prevent the common relapse that usually follows Yom Kippur. The following is a continuation of tips from the great rabbis throughout the times for making teshuvah last.

The Gemara (Yoma 86b) tells us that when a person repeats a sin on a constant basis it becomes permissible in his eyes. A person may then easily lose sight of the prohibition in his actions. When a person reaches this state he needs to include in his resolution an action or behavior that will re-sensitize him to the severity of the prohibition. One way to do this is by "fining" himself every time he commits the sin. The fine can range from money to *tzedaka* to denying oneself something he likes for every time he repeats the sin. Through this he can gradually condition himself to have a negative association with the sin, and, with the help of G-d, come to leave it altogether.

Another way of keeping oneself sensitive to the gravity of sin is to set aside time to learn mussar. Rabbi Yisrael Salanter used to say that someone who wants to change his ways without learning mussar is analogous to someone who wants to see without eyes or to hear without ears. Constantly reviewing words of mussar is vital for reminding a person to analyze his ways and prevent himself from going back to his old bad habits.

Perhaps the most efficient method for keeping a resolution is by getting rid of the "tool" that one uses to do the undesirable act. This is very effective because one is essentially making it impossible to return to his old ways. Based on this idea, the Gemara (Sanhedrin 25b) tells us that a gambler completes his process of repentance by breaking the dice that he used for gambling. This act of ridding himself of the dice is not only a testament to his inner desire for change but is also a practical way of preventing himself from falling once again. In addition to one's resolve for change one should get rid of the tool that aids him in performing the immoral act.

All or Nothing

There is a very common device the *yetzer hara* (evil inclination) uses to make us give up our new resolutions. When we slack off in keeping up with our new resolutions, we suddenly hear a familiar voice in our head: "I told you it wouldn't last. Who are you fooling? Did you really think you were going to change? You barely lasted this long!"

The way to combat this attack is by catching the *yetzer hara* on the false assumption that "it's all or nothing". We must constantly remind ourselves that every second one abides by his new resolution is tremendous. Even if he will eventually falter, those precious moments of accomplishment are still his.

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein demonstrates this idea by asking why Yehoshua deserved such a generous reward for bringing good

reports about the Land of Israel, since his reports weren't even accepted by the people. Careful analysis of the sequence of events reveals that the ten spies spoke first, followed by Yehoshua's rebuttal, after which the ten spies spoke again. The reason why the ten spies had to speak again after Yehoshua was because Yehoshua's words convinced the people that the original remarks of the other spies were a fabrication. Therefore, the spies had to speak to the nation again to persuade them against Yehoshua's remarks. Rabbi Feinstein says that the reward that Yehoshua received was for those brief moments the people rejected the false words of the ten spies. Even though the people ultimately chose the spies' words over Yehoshua's, nevertheless, Yehoshua succeeded in convincing them of the truth for the brief time he spoke. We see from here the power of temporary change; even a few moments count.

The type of resolution that a person takes on can also help him overcome the false assumption of "it's all or nothing." Rabbi Dessler suggests that one way to do this is to set a minimum and maximum on any resolution one is taking upon himself. For example, if he is resolving to add to his Torah learning, he should set a minimum of one hour of learning and a maximum of two hours. Or he can take on to add to his learning for a maximum of seven days a week or a minimum of four days a week. In this way, even if he slacks off in sticking to his resolution he doesn't get the depressing feeling of all is lost, because he can still save his resolution by meeting the minimum standard he set for increasing his Torah learning.

This can also be accomplished by taking on an additional "undemanding" resolution as well. Even if one slacks off in one resolution, he can still feel inspired by knowing he kept up with his other resolution. Taking on an easy resolution has another advantage as well. The Gemara (Menachot 43b) says that the punishment for not wearing the white strings of *tzitzit* on one's clothing is greater than the punishment for not wearing the *techeilet* string. The reason for this is that white strings are easily found, whereas the *techeilet* string is scarce. Therefore, a person who refuses to be bothered with the minimal effort of getting white strings has committed a bigger affront than one who is not willing to go through the effort of getting the rare *techeilet* string. The same idea is true with all other *mitzvot*. By also taking on easy resolutions one can demonstrate his vigilance to fix the areas for which he may be held more accountable.

May we all merit using the special energy of this time to make lasting changes and thereby bring about the coming of Mashiach speedily in our days.

This Kennes is dedicated to the speedy recovery of our alumnus
CHAIM ROTMAN, CHAIM YECHIEL BEN MALKA,
who was critically injured in the Har Nof terror attack and needs our prayers



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