

O H R N E T

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PARSHA INSIGHTS

ONE SMALL STEP FOR A MAN

“Lest you become contaminated” (11:43)

The road to holiness does not start with lofty ideals or sublime thoughts. It does not begin with a mind-expanding revelation or a “close encounter”. It cannot be produced by psychotropic drugs, nor can it be experienced by climbing the Alps or the Andes.

True, gazing down from Mont Blanc or Everest may fill us with awe at the Creator’s handiwork. Nature can truly inspire closeness to G-d, but all this inspiration will vanish like a cloud of smoke if we lack the fundamental ingredients to concretize inspiration into actuality.

The road to holiness starts with a few small boring steps. Like being a decent moral person and controlling our emotions and appetites.

As Jews, we may not eat what we like when we like. On Pesach we may eat no bread. On Yom Tov we should eat meat. On Yom Kippur we may eat nothing. At all times we may not eat the forbidden foods that are the subject of this week’s Torah portion.

“Lest you become *contaminated*.” In Hebrew this sentence is expressed as one word: “*v’nitmaytem*”. The spelling of this word is unusual. It lacks an *aleph* and thus it can also read as “*v’nitumtem*”, which means “Lest you become *dulled*”.

In our search for holiness and meaning in this world, one of our greatest assets and aids are the laws of *kashrut*. Kosher food is soul food. Food for the soul. Food that feeds our spirituality and sharpens our ability to receive holiness. Food that is not kosher does the reverse. It dulls our senses. It makes us less sensitive, less receptive to holiness. A Jew who tries to find holiness sitting on top of some mountain in the Far East, living on a diet of salted pork, will find it impossible to achieve his goal. The view of Ganges or the Himalayas (or his navel) may titillate his spiritual senses, but he will find no growth or nourishment reaching his core.

The spiritual masters teach that if a person contaminates himself a little, he becomes contaminated a great deal. Spirituality is a delicate thing. It doesn’t take much to jam the broadcast from “Upstairs”. On the other hand, a little bit of holiness goes a long way. As the Torah teaches, “You shall sanctify yourselves and you shall become holy.” (11:44) A little bit of sanctity generates a lot of holiness. If we sanctify ourselves down here in this lowly world with all its barriers to holiness, if we guard our mouths, our eyes and our ears, then the Torah promises us that we will be given help to lift us to lofty peaks of holiness.

It all starts with one small step.

PLEASE JOIN US...

...in saying Tehillim/Psalms and a special prayer to G-d for the safety and security of all of Klal Yisrael in these times of conflict and conclude with the following special prayer:

“Our brothers, the entire family of Israel, who are delivered into distress and captivity, whether they are on sea or dry land – may G-d have mercy on them and remove them from stress to relief, from darkness to light, from subjugation to redemption now, speedily and soon.”

KIDDUSHIN 23 - 29

On the following day, Rav Acha said to them, "If not for a miracle, you have caused me to be in danger."

What happened on the previous day that led Rav Acha to say this, and why did the people put him in a potentially dangerous situation? The *gemara* relates that there was a "mazik" — a type of damaging demon — that resided in the Yeshiva headed by the Sage Abayei. When Abayei heard that Rav Acha was coming to town he told the people not to put him up for the night, so that Rav Acha would be forced to stay in the Yeshiva, "and perhaps a miracle will occur", and the danger would cease. In fact, Rav Acha stayed in the Yeshiva, and when he saw the *mazik* he prayed for help from G-d. Each time Rav Acha bowed while saying "*modim*" — "thank you" — to G-d, one of the seven "skulls" (Rashi) fell from the damaging force.

But how could Abayei rely on a miracle to save Rav Acha, in order to bring safety to his Yeshiva? From the words of Abayei, "*perhaps* a miracle will occur", it sounds like Abayei was not *certain* of Rav Acha's safety. Perhaps a miracle would occur but perhaps it would not!

The Maharsha explains that Abayei was 100 percent certain that the prayer of the pious scholar would destroy the predator. And this would *not* be considered a miracle, since it was purely "natural", according to Abayei, that G-d would answer Rav Acha's prayer and save him. Abayei was in doubt, however, that perhaps G-d would perform a miracle to vanquish the damager *before* Rav Acha began to pray. And if a miracle in fact would occur for Rav Acha, this would *detract* from his merits in his "Heavenly accounting", something that Rav Acha would not be happy about. Yet, since there was a *mazik* in the Yeshiva, Abayei felt that the *certainty* that Rav Acha's presence there would kill it justified causing Rav Acha to be there. This step of ensuring safety in the Yeshiva was warranted *despite* Abayei's *doubt* of whether the danger would be removed naturally by prayer (with no reduced merits), or "supernaturally" through a miracle (resulting in reduced merits).

Either way, Rav Acha would be safe according to Abayei's view, and the Yeshiva would be made safe again — perhaps with a miracle, but perhaps without.

Rav Acha, on the other hand, did not view the matter in the same manner as Abayei did. In fact, his prayer was enough, *without* a miracle, to naturally remove the demon, one head a time. However, Rav Acha was extremely humble and modest, and did *not* feel that his prayer could kill the damager in a natural manner. Rather, he felt that G-d answering his pray to destroy the damager would be considered a great miracle, and his own "merits" would be reduced. Therefore, he was "upset" when he spoke to the people of the town the next day and said to them, "If not for the miracle, you would have caused me to be in great danger." Meaning, since Rav Acha did not consider his prayer powerful enough that G-d should "naturally" answer him and save him, he had certainly suffered a loss by being "cornered" into staying in the place of the damager. He felt that only a miracle could save him. And since he was put into a situation that even if a miracle occurred and he was saved, which is how he viewed what had happened, he today had fewer merits than he had yesterday according to his humble view of himself.

• Kiddushin 29b

"The damager appeared in the form of a serpent with seven heads. Each time Rav Acha said 'modim' in his prayers, one of the heads of the serpent fell off."

What is special about saying "*modim*" — "we thank You, G-d" — that this particular part of the prayer was attributed to the death of the serpent? Our Sages (Bava Kama 16a) teach that if a person does not bow while saying the "*modim*" prayer during his lifetime, his spine becomes a "serpent" after seven years in the grave. Tosefot explains that since when a person says "*modim*" he should bow and then straighten himself like a serpent, with his head rising first, one who does not do this is punished measure-for-measure with his spine becoming in death what it should have "done" in life during prayer. In addition, the seven heads of the serpent represent the seven mystical powers of spiritual impurity, and through prayer, which is the opportunity to speak to G-d and thank Him, one can "connect" to the Divine purity. Proper prayer allows nothing but purity to remain. (Maharsha)

• Kiddushin 29b

PARSHA Q&A ?

1. What date was “*yom hashemini*”?
2. Which of Aharon’s *korbanot* atoned for the Golden Calf?
3. What *korbanot* did Aharon offer for the Jewish People?
4. What was unique about the *chatat* offered during the induction of the *Mishkan*?
5. When did Aharon bless the people with the *birkat kohanim*?
6. Why did Moshe go into the *Ohel Mo’ed* with Aharon?
7. Why did Nadav and Avihu die?
8. Aharon quietly accepted his sons’ death. What reward did he receive for this?
9. What prohibitions apply to a person who is intoxicated?
10. Name the three *chatat* goat offerings that were sacrificed on the day of the inauguration of the *Mishkan*.
11. Which he-goat *chatat* did Aharon burn completely and why?
12. Why did Moshe direct his harsh words at Aharon’s sons?
13. Moshe was upset that Aharon and his sons did not eat the *chatat*. Why?
14. Why did G-d choose Moshe, Aharon, Elazar and Itamar as His messengers to tell the Jewish People the laws of *kashrut*?
15. What are the signs of a kosher land animal?
16. How many non-kosher animals display only *one* sign of *kashrut*? What are they?
17. If a fish sheds its fins and scales when out of the water, is it kosher?
18. Why is a stork called *chasida* in Hebrew?
19. The *chagav* is a kosher insect. Why don’t we eat it?
20. What requirements must be met in order for water to maintain its status of purity?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this week’s Questions!

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

1. 9:1 - First of *Nissan*.
2. 9:2 - The calf offered as a *korban chatat*.
3. 9:3,4 - A he-goat as a *chatat*, a calf and a lamb for an *olah*, an ox and a ram for *shelamim*, and a *mincha*.
4. 9:11 - It’s the only example of a *chatat* offered on the courtyard *mizbe’ach* that was burned.
5. 9:22 - When he finished offering the *korbanot*, before descending from the *mizbe’ach*.
6. 9:23 - For one of two reasons: Either to teach Aharon about the service of the incense, or to pray for the *Shechina* to dwell with Israel.
7. 10:2 - Rashi offers two reasons: Either because they gave a halachic ruling in Moshe’s presence, or because they entered the *Mishkan* after drinking intoxicating wine.
8. 10:3 - A portion of the Torah was given solely through Aharon.
9. 10:9-11 - He may not give a *halachic* ruling. Also, a *kohen* is forbidden to enter the *Ohel Mo’ed*, approach the *mizbe’ach*, or perform the *avoda*.
10. 10:16 - The goat offerings of the inauguration ceremony, of *Rosh Chodesh*, and of Nachshon ben Aminadav.
11. 10:16 - The *Rosh Chodesh chatat*: Either because it became *tamei*, or because the *kohanim* were forbidden to eat from it while in the state of *aninut* (mourning).
12. 10:16 - Out of respect for Aharon, Moshe directed his anger at his sons and not directly at Aharon.
13. 10:17 - Because only when the *kohanim* eat the *chatat* are the sins of the owners atoned.
14. 11:2 - Because they accepted the deaths of Nadav and Avihu in silence.
15. 11:3 - An animal whose hooves are completely split and who chews its cud.
16. 11:4,5,6,7 - Four: Camel, *shafan*, hare and pig.
17. 11:12 - Yes.
18. 11:19 - Because it acts with *chesed* (kindness) toward other storks.
19. 11:21 - We have lost the tradition and are not able to identify the kosher *chagav*.
20. 11:36 - It must be connected to the ground (i.e., a spring or a cistern).

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Abarbanel

ON THE PARSHA

BY RABBI PINCHAS KASNETT

Shemini

The Rationale of Kashrut

This Torah portion describes the basic laws of *kashrut*. Abarbanel attempts to unravel the mystery of why certain animals, birds and fish are permitted while others are prohibited. He also analyzes the different approaches that the Torah takes towards identifying what is permitted and what is not.

In regard to land-dwelling animals the Torah specifies that they must have a split hoof and be classified as a ruminant — meaning an animal with several stomachs that chews, swallows and regurgitates its food several times at the beginning of the digestive process. Abarbanel emphasizes that these physical characteristics are not the *reason* that they are permitted. Rather, they are the *characteristics* that enable us to identify them as permitted animals. These animals are purely vegetarian and lack the teeth and claws that characterize carnivorous species. Abarbanel invokes the concept of “you are what you eat” in that these animals are generally placid and gentle. Carnivores, on the other hand, by necessity have a violent, cruel and cunning nature. Eating such an animal would transfer that very nature to us. Even though this distinction is blurred in regard to the four prohibited species that the Torah identifies as having one of the two characteristics but not the other — i.e. the pig, camel, hare and hyrax — Abarbanel points out that G-d in His infinite wisdom is the ultimate arbiter of what is best to ingest in order to maintain the purity of our souls.

Similarly, kosher birds have two characteristics which parallel those of the land-dwelling animals. Just like kosher animals have a unique foot structure, the claws of kosher birds have a unique structure which allows them to walk on land in order to find food. Parallel to ruminants, these birds have

a crop and a gizzard that grinds up their food. Additionally, kosher birds are not predatory. Just as in the case of carnivorous animals, G-d is preventing us from absorbing a violent and cruel nature. However, the Torah does not mention these two characteristics. It only mentions a specific list of non-kosher birds. There are two reasons for this. First of all, there are a large number of kosher species. Secondly, the internal characteristics of crop and gizzard have no external manifestations, unlike land-based animals whose diet, dental and jaw structure is a clear indication of their status as ruminants.

Kosher fish also have two identifying characteristics — fins and scales. Although some other commentators point out that fish lacking fins and scales are prohibited because they are bottom-feeders, living not in clear water but in murky, dirty water, Abarbanel rejects this idea and instead points to fins and scales as being indicative of a purer, less grossly physical creature.

Finally, Abarbanel rejects the idea that the main reason for the various prohibitions is to protect our physical well-being. He points out that gentiles eat these animals without any detrimental effects whatsoever. Additionally, there are numerous plant species that are exceedingly harmful which the Torah does not mention at all. The only reason for these prohibitions is to enhance our spiritual well-being by limiting our physical desires and curbing our animalistic nature. Prohibited species are never referred to in the Torah as “dangerous” or “unhealthy”. Rather, they are referred to as “impure” or “abominable”. Both of these terms refer purely to spiritual rather than physical consequences. G-d is concerned about the effect of the foods that we eat on our true essence, our character and our behavior.

PARSHA OVERVIEW

On the eighth day of the dedication of the Mishkan, Aharon, his sons, and the entire nation bring various *korbanot* (offerings) as commanded by Moshe. Aharon and Moshe bless the nation. G-d allows the Jewish People to sense His Presence after they complete the Mishkan. Aharon’s sons, Nadav and Avihu, innovate an offering not commanded by G-d. A fire comes from before G-d and consumes them, stressing the need to perform the commandments only as Moshe directs. Moshe consoles Aharon, who grieves in silence. Moshe directs the *kohanim* as to their behavior during the mourning period, and warns them that

they must not drink intoxicating beverages before serving in the Mishkan. The Torah lists the two characteristics of a kosher animal: It has split hooves, and it chews, regurgitates, and re-chews its food. The Torah specifies by name those non-kosher animals which have only one of these two signs. A kosher fish has fins and easily removable scales. All birds not included in the list of forbidden families are permitted. The Torah forbids all types of insects except for four species of locusts. Details are given of the purification process after coming in contact with ritually-impure species. *Bnei Yisrael* are commanded to be separate and holy — like G-d.

JEWISH DRESS

From: Nathan

Dear Rabbi,

It seems to me that if there is such a thing as Jewish appearance, it's not about dress or style but about the visual appearance of specific mitzvot such as tefillin, or actions in general according to Torah commands.

Even what many might consider to be "Jewish dress" is not really Jewish, such as black and white among Ashkenazim, or robes and turbans among Sephardim. Rather these were non-Jewish modes of dress that were adopted by Jews. So why should they now be considered any more "Jewish" than other forms of dress used by non-Jews, like jeans and t-shirts, or even orange jumpsuits for that matter?

Dear Nathan,

It is true that the Torah does not command any specific mode or style of dress (aside from the requirements of modesty which we're not dealing with here).

It is also true that the visual appearance of specific mitzvot or other actions commanded by the Torah create a particularly "Jewish" appearance.

However, neither of these points precludes the ideal and reality that there be an intentionally distinctive Jewish mode or style of dress.

Upon Yaakov's return to Israel after his extended sojourn with the wicked Lavan, the Torah refers to him as "shalem", or complete. The Talmudic sages taught that this term, spelled "shin"-*"lamed"*-*"mem"*, was praise for not having changed his distinctive "shem" (name), "lashon" (language) and "malbush" (dress). The same is said about the Jews meriting redemption from Egypt, namely that they were not entirely assimilated into the flesh-pots of non-Jewish culture because they maintained their uniquely Jewish names, language and wardrobe.

These are just a few of several sources which indicate the importance of having and maintaining a particularly unique Jewish mode and style of dress.

Who determines what is considered Jewish dress? The Jews do. Any dress that is accepted by the/a body of Torah observant Jews as their dress makes it the Jewish mode of dress for that group, in that place, at that time.

Naturally, people are influenced by the sensitivities and aesthetics of the culture at large, and Jews throughout the ages adopted modes of dress according to the style and materials that were accessible to them wherever and with whomever they lived. But once it was adopted by them, it became "Jewish", particularly since Jews generally did modify the local custom in ways that made their clothing in some way different than that of the gentiles.

While you mention the traditional black and white garb of the Ashkenazim vs. the traditional turban and robe of the Sephardim as an example for there being no one Jewish mode of dress, in fact these examples prove the opposite — that Judaism promotes uniformity of dress since nearly all Jews of either of the two major geographical areas dressed basically the same. Furthermore, despite what we retroactively assume to be the similarity between the dress of the Jews and gentiles, the peoples of those cultures themselves were certainly sensitive to, and aware of, the subtle but intentional differences.

Even today, what makes Jewish dress is what Jews wear. Anybody would consider the various black and white combinations that many Orthodox Jews wear to be Jewish dress. But nobody would consider jeans and a t-shirt, or an orange jump suit, to be "Jewish". The reason is simple — neither is worn on a large scale by observant Jews.

By the same token, theoretically, if observant Jews would ever adopt either as their dress to the extent that it became recognizably associated with the wardrobe of Jews, it would become Jewish dress.

But since that's currently not the case, but rather, on the contrary, these styles, as well as many others, are found particularly among non-Jews, they are non-Jewish styles. As such, if not prohibited, they should nevertheless be discouraged. For one reason, they look non-Jewish. Secondly, they deviate from what looks Jewish as defined by everything explained above.

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PRAYING IN ANY LANGUAGE

Regarding the language of prayer, the Talmud clearly states that one may pray in any language that he understands. (*Berachot 40b; Shulchan Aruch 101:4*)

However, this ruling seems to apply only to an individual, and only on a temporary basis. This is why we see that all places of worship, not only in Israel but even in America and other countries around the world, pray only in Hebrew. In fact, praying publicly in a language other than “*lashon hakodesh*” (“the holy language”) is strictly forbidden. (*Mishna Berurah 101:13 in the name of Sefer HaBrit*)

Therefore, if at all possible, it is preferable to pray in *lashon hakodesh* (*Mishna Berura* *ibid.*). Some authorities stress that due to the great spiritual power invested in the *lashon hakodesh* it is preferable to pray the set, daily prayers (i.e., Shacharit, Mincha and Ma’ariv) in Hebrew even if one does not understand the words (*Solet Belulah*). Others maintain that it is best to pray in the language that one understands (*Asara Mamarot; Sefer Chassidim*). Based on the above the Kaf HaChaim (101: 16) rules that one who is able to pray in *lashon hakodesh* should do so even if he does not understand; and only one who cannot pray in Hebrew at all should pray in another language.

One fulfills his obligation of prayer in another language only if he understands that language. (It seems that paying

attention to the words he is reciting is also required. Thus, when a person does not pay attention to the words he is saying it is questionable if he fulfills his obligation to pray.) One of the differences in halacha between Hebrew and other languages is that when praying in Hebrew one fulfills his obligation even if he does not comprehend the words he is saying. (*Mishna Berurah 101:14 and others*)

On the surface this ruling appears difficult to understand. How can one be considered to be praying to G-d if he has no idea what he is saying? The answer is that the text of the prayer we are talking about is of rabbinical origin, instituted when the Jewish People went into exile. Therefore, when the great Sages, known as the *Anshei Knesset HaGedolah* (“Men of the Great Assembly”), established the set text of prayer in Hebrew, they instilled within it the power to ascend to Heaven even without understanding the words. (*Kaf Ha’Chaim* *ibid*; *Mishna Berurah 101:14*)

In closing I would like to say: It is taught that all of the prayers of the Jewish People unite as one, ascending Above, becoming a “crown for G-d” (*Zohar*). Accordingly, it would seem that the heart we invest into our prayers is the crown jewel, for Above, the Merciful One desires the heart. (*Zohar*)

LOVE OF THE LAND

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

PEKI'IN — A LEGENDARY CAVE

In the center of the Peki'in village in the north of Israel there is a cave which is purported to be the one in which the Sage Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and his son Rabbi Elazar hid for thirteen years. Lag B'omer is the *yahrzeit* (anniversary) of Rabbi Shimon's death.

After being condemned to death by the Romans for publicly criticizing their oppressive rule in Eretz



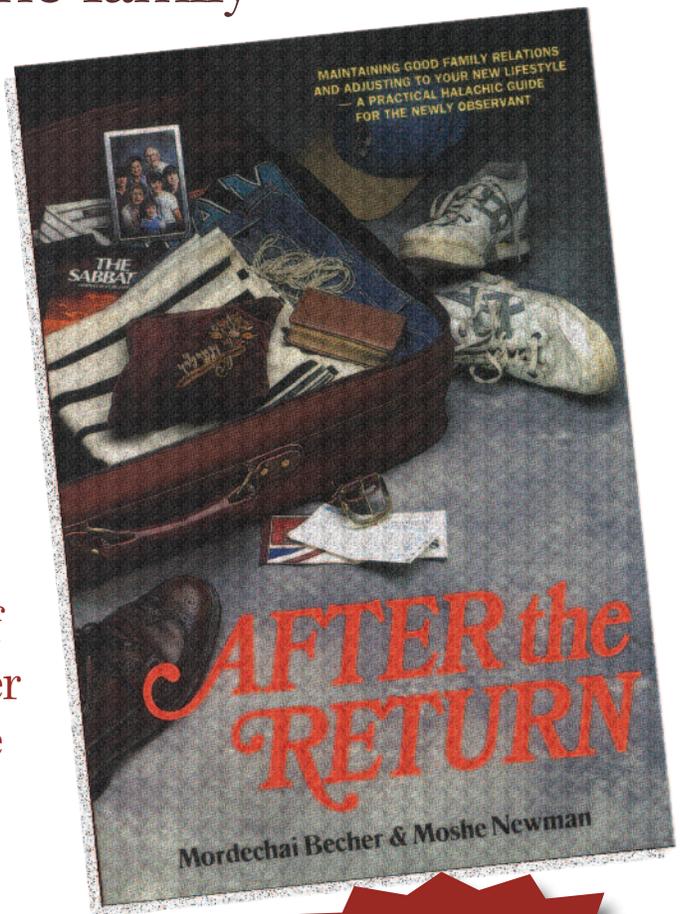
Yisrael, this great Sage, who authored the classical Kaballah work “*Hazohar*”, fled to a cave. The Talmud recounts that he and his son were sustained with the fruits of a carob tree, and with water from a spring that miraculously appeared out of nowhere.

Next to the cave there is a synagogue which the Israeli government renovated, and which serves as a prayer site for visitors to the cave.

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After returning to the faith of their ancestors, many re-enter the secular world without the tools to respond to the inevitable challenges to their newly adopted set of beliefs.



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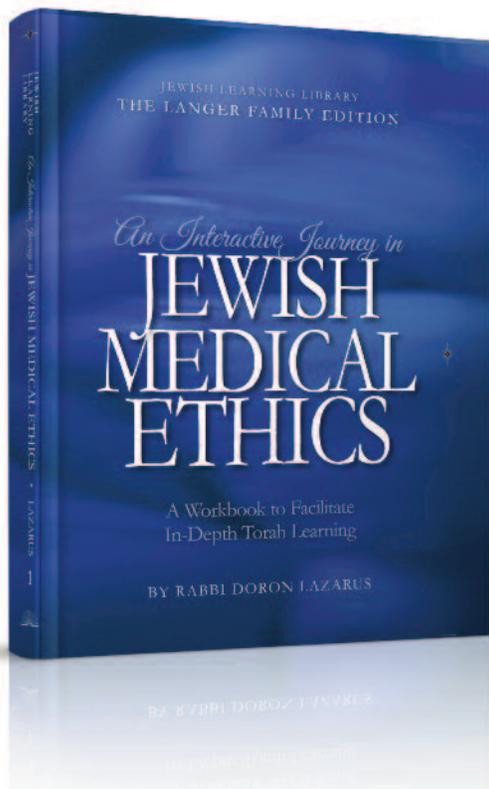
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