

# O H R N E T

SPECIAL SUMMER ISSUE · PARSHIOT VA'ETCHANAN-EKEV-RE'EH-SHOFTIM · 5776/2016 · VOL. 23 NO. 49

## PARSHA INSIGHTS

Va'etchanan

### NO RESPECT FOR THE HOARY HEAD

***“So that you will fear the L-rd, your G-d, to observe all His decrees and commandments that I command you — you, your child, and your grandchild — all the days of your life...” (6:2)***

It's true that years can make us wise — but they can also make us complacent. Our Sages teach, “Don't trust yourself until your dying day.” The negative drive is no respecter of a white beard. Quite the contrary, he becomes more subtle and more devious with each passing year.

*“So that you will fear the L-rd, your G-d, to observe all His decrees and commandments...”*

We can never let down our guard, we can never feel: “That's it — I made it — I'm sin-proof!”

A healthy fear of G-d is the only way we can safely arrive at our final harbor.

*“...you, your child, and your grandchild — all the days of your life...”*

Even if we have reached the stage in life when we have children and grandchildren, we are still commanded, “so that you will fear G-d...”, for the negative drive has an inexhaustible stash of tricks up his sleeve.

• Source: based on the Meshech Chochma

Ekev

### TASTE BOOST

***“...a Land where you will eat your bread without poverty — you will lack nothing there.” (8:9)***

Reading the ingredients on the back of a snack packet today is a bit like examining a chemical formula. The connection to ‘food’ seems somewhat tenuous. We live in a world where we crave taste, even if that taste is synthetic and raises health questions.

It seems to me that the taste of ‘sweets’ and ‘nosh’ was not as aggressive when I was a kid. Nowadays, the packet proudly proclaims that the contents are so ‘hot’, so spicy, that they compete with the “fires of the underworld”. Or ‘sour sticks’ that have so much acetic acid that the lining of your stomach is probably scoured better than your Shabbat urn after a good cleaning.

Really, the fact that the taste of things needs to be *maxed-out* is yet another symptom of Exile.

*“...a Land where you will eat your bread without poverty — you will lack nothing there.”*

The Chida writes that in his youth he heard from the Sages of Castille that a pauper eats his bread without anything on it because he has nothing to put on it. However, in Eretz Yisrael the bread will be so tasty that it will need nothing else.

That's what the verse is hinting to here: the bread that we will eat there in Eretz Yisrael without anything on it will be “without poverty” — i.e., it will not be because we won't have anything to put on it, rather it will be because, “you will lack nothing there.” The bread itself will be so full of taste that it will need no outside boost.

• Source: based on Talei Orot

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OHRNET magazine is published by OHR SOMAYACH Tanenbaum College

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**Va'etchanan**

Although Moshe is content that Yehoshua will lead the nation, Moshe nevertheless prays to enter the Land of Israel in order to fulfill its special *mitzvot*. G-d refuses. Moshe reminds *Bnei Yisrael* of the gathering at Sinai when they received the Torah — that they saw no visual representation of the Divine, but only the sound of words. Moshe impresses on *Bnei Yisrael* that the Sinai revelation took place before an entire nation, not to a select elite, and that only the Jews will ever claim that G-d spoke to their entire nation. Moshe specifically enjoins *Bnei Yisrael* to “pass over” the Sinai event to their children throughout all generations.

Moshe predicts, accurately, that when *Bnei Yisrael* dwell in *Eretz Yisrael* they will sin and be scattered among all the peoples. They will stay few in number but will eventually return to G-d.

Moshe designates three “refuge cities” to which an inadvertent killer may flee. Moshe repeats the Ten Commandments and then teaches the *Shema*, the central credo of Judaism, that there is only One G-d. Moshe warns the people not to succumb to materialism and thus forget their purpose as a spiritual nation. The *parsha* ends with Moshe exhorting *Bnei Yisrael* not to intermarry when they enter *Eretz Yisrael*, as they cannot be a treasured and holy nation if they intermarry, and they will become indistinguishable from the other nations.

**Ekev**

If *Bnei Yisrael* carefully observe even those “minor” *mitzvot* that are usually “trampled” underfoot, Moshe promises them that they will be the most blessed of the nations on earth. Moshe tells *Bnei Yisrael* that they will conquer *Eretz Canaan* little by little, so that the Land will not be overrun by wild animals in the hiatus before *Bnei Yisrael* are able to organize and settle the whole land. After again warning *Bnei Yisrael* to burn all carved idols of Canaanite gods, Moshe stresses that the Torah is indivisible and not open to partial observance. Moshe describes the Land of Israel as a land of wheat, barley, grapes, figs, and pomegranates, a land of oil-yielding olives and date-honey. Moshe cautions *Bnei Yisrael* not to become haughty and think that their success in *Eretz Yisrael* is a result of their own powers or vigor; rather, it was G-d who gave them wealth and success. Nor did G-d drive out the Canaanites because of *Bnei Yisrael's* righteousness, but rather because of the sins of the Canaanites; for the road from Sinai had been a catalogue of large and small sins and rebellions against G-d and Moshe. Moshe details the events after G-d spoke the Ten Commandments at Sinai, culminating in his bringing down the second set of Tablets on Yom Kippur. Aharon's passing is recorded as is the elevation of the *levi'im* to G-d's ministers. Moshe points out that the 70 souls

who went down to Egypt have now become like the stars of the Heaven in abundance. After specifying the great virtues of the Land of Israel, Moshe speaks the second paragraph of the *Shema*, conceptualizing the blessings that accompany keeping *mitzvot* and the curses that result from non-observance.

**Re'eh**

Moshe presents to the nation the blessing of a spiritually-oriented life, and the curse of becoming disconnected from G-d. When the nation enters *Eretz Yisrael* they must burn down any trees that had been used for idol-worship, and destroy all idolatrous statues. G-d will choose only one place where the Divine Presence will dwell. Offerings may be brought only there, not to a private altar. Moshe repeatedly warns against eating animal blood. In the desert, all meat was slaughtered in the Mishkan, but in *Eretz Yisrael* meat may be slaughtered anywhere. Moshe lists the categories of food that may be eaten only in Jerusalem. He warns the nation against copying ways of the other nations. Since the Torah is complete and perfect, nothing may be added to or subtracted from it. If a “prophet” tells the people to permanently abandon a Torah law or indulge in idol worship, he is to be put to death. One who entices others to worship idols is to be put to death. A city of idolatry must be razed. It is prohibited to show excessive signs of mourning, such as marking the skin or making a bald spot. Moshe reiterates the classifications of kosher and non-kosher food and the prohibition of cooking meat and milk. Produce of the second tithe must be eaten in Jerusalem, and if the amount is too large to carry, it may be exchanged for money with which food is bought in Jerusalem. In certain years this tithe is given to the poor. *Bnei Yisrael* are instructed to always be open-hearted, and in the seventh year any loans must be discounted — G-d will bless the person in all ways. A Jewish bondsman is released after six years, and must be sent away with generous provisions. If he refuses to leave, his ear is pierced with an awl at the door post and he remains a bondsman until the Jubilee Year. The *Parsha* ends with a description of the three pilgrimage festivals of Pesach, Shavuot and Succot.

**Shoftim**

Moshe tells *Bnei Yisrael* to appoint judges and officers in their cities. A bribe of even an insignificant sum is forbidden. Trees are not to be planted near G-d's altar, as was the way of idolaters. Blemishes in animals designated for offerings and other points of disqualification are listed. The Great Sanhedrin is to make binding decisions on new situations according to Torah criteria to prevent the fragmentation of the Torah. A very learned scholar who refuses to accept the Halachic decisions of the Sanhedrin

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## PARSHA OVERVIEW

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incurs the death penalty. A Jewish king may only have possessions and symbols of power commensurate with the honor of his office, but not for self-aggrandizement. He is to write for himself two *sifrei Torah*, one to be kept with him wherever he goes, so that he doesn't become haughty. Neither the *kohanim* nor the *levi'im* are to inherit land in the Land of Israel; rather they are to be supported by the community by a system of tithes. All divination is prohibited. G-d promises the Jewish People that He will send them prophets to guide them, and Moshe explains how a genuine prophet may be distinguished from a false one. Cities of refuge are to be provided an accidental killer to escape the blood-avenger from the deceased's family. However, someone who kills with malice is to be handed over to the blood-avenger.

Moshe cautions *Bnei Yisrael* not to move boundary markers to increase their property. Two witnesses who conspire to "frame" a third party are to be punished with the very same punishment that they conspired to bring upon the innocent party. A *kohen* is to be anointed specifically for when Israel goes to war, to instill trust in G-d. Among those disqualified from going to war is anyone who has built a new house but not lived in it yet, or anyone who is fearful or fainthearted. Enemies must be given the chance to make peace, but if they refuse, all the males are to be killed. Fruit trees are to be preserved and not cut down during the siege. If a corpse is found between cities, the elders of the nearest city must take a heifer, slaughter it, and wash their hands over it, saying that they are not guilty of the death.

## 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 Elazar hid for thirteen years.

Condemned to death by the Romans for publicly criticizing their oppressive rule in Eretz Yisrael, this great Sage, who authored the classical Kaballah work called *HaZohar*, fled to a cave. The Talmud recounts that he and his son were sustained with the fruits of a carob tree, and



water from a spring that miraculously appeared out of nowhere.

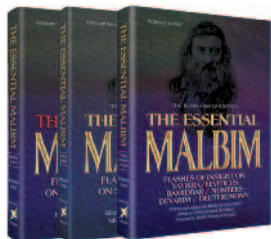
On Lag B'Omer, the day of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai's *yahrzeit* (anniversary of his death), tradition has it that this was also the day on which he revealed the teachings of the Zohar.

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

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## BAVA KAMA 72 - 106

*Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai answered his students: Because he (the “ganav”) did not equate the honor of the ‘servant’ (the victim of the theft) to the honor of his Owner (G-d), whereas he (the “gazlan”) equated the honor of the servant to the honor of his Owner.*

A *ganav* is one who steals in a way that he thinks he will not be caught by his fellow man, such as sneakily at night. A *gazlan* is one who steals openly and brazenly, such as snatching an item from another in broad daylight. They share the fact they are *both* thieves, although they steal in a different manner. The students of Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai asked their teacher why the Torah was stricter in regard to the payments the Torah associates with *ganav*, more so than with a *gazlan*. Why does a *ganav* pay double if he is caught with the theft, and four or five times the value of the theft if he stole or slaughtered an ox or a sheep after stealing it, while a *gazlan* is not subject to any of these fines? Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai answered them that the *ganav* is worse since he is more afraid of man than he is of G-d, while the *gazlan* shows as little fear of man as he does of G-d (Rashi). A verse cited by Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai helps elucidate this point: “For they said: G-d has forsaken the earth, and G-d does not see.” (Yechezkel 41:9)

A *ganav* steals in stealth since he is afraid of the punishment a human court might impose on him if he is caught. However, he shows no regard for the fact that G-d is watching him and knows that he is transgressing by stealing, since he knows it is wrong but does it anyway. This type of person is denying Divine Providence, and is denying the reality of reward and punishment for observing the teachings of the Torah. In this way he is worse than a *gazlan* who steals openly, since the *gazlan* realizes that “G-d has not forsaken the earth”, and is subject to punishment both by a human court and by a Heavenly court, yet chooses to transgress since he thinks he will benefit in this world from the theft *more* than the consequences he will face in the human and Heavenly courts. He is “bad”, but not as bad a *ganav*, since the way he acts does not indicate that he denies Divine judgment. (Maharsha)

• Bava Kama 79b

*Rabbi Yehuda said, “A blind person is exempt from paying for embarrassing another person”, and, likewise, Rabbi Yehuda exempted a blind person from all mitzvot that are stated in the Torah.*

This statement, which is taught in a *beraita* on our *daf*, is the ruling of Rabbi Yehuda regarding the lack of obligations of a “*suma*”, a blind person, and is derived from a verse in Devarim 6:1, as explained by Rav Shisha bar Rav Idi in the *gemara*.

Does this mean that a blind person has no *mitzvot* at all? Tosefot writes that although Rabbi Yehuda said that a blind person is exempt from “all *mitzvot* that are stated in the Torah”, a blind person is nevertheless obligated in *mitzvah* observance according to Rabbinical law, since otherwise he would be like a non-Jew who is not part of the Torah of the Jewish People. Tosefot points out that the Rabbis did not decree for a woman to “Rabbinically” observe time-bound positive *mitzvot* which the Torah exempts them from since they are at least obligated in all negative commandments of the Torah, as well as positive *mitzvot* that are not time-dependent. A blind person, however, would have no *mitzvah* obligation without Rabbinical intervention, and therefore the Rabbis obligated him in order that he will share in the role of the Jewish People in having a share in *mitzvah* fulfillment.

Another opinion is found in the writings of Rabbi Akiva Egger in Shulchan Aruch Yoreh De’ah (1:9), regarding the status of *shechita* (ritual slaughter of animal for food) done by a blind person who is supervised. The Shulchan Aruch rules that the *shechita* should not be done, but if it was (and was properly supervised) it is kosher. Rabbi Akiva Egger explains that although a blind person is exempt from *mitzvot* according to Rabbi Yehuda, this exemption applies *only* to positive commands, but not to negative ones (“*lo ta’aseh*”). Therefore, since a blind person is obligated by the Torah in the command to not eat meat that was not “*shechted*” correctly, his act of *shechita* is acceptable if supervised.

I once asked a great Rabbi in Jerusalem a question on the opinion of Tosefot: “If the blind person is exempt from all Torah *mitzvot*, why is he required to obey the command of the Rabbis who decreed him to be obligated according to their law? Isn’t the reason why a person must obey Rabbinical law the statement in the Torah in Devarim 17:11, “According to the law

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## BAVA KAMA 72 - 106

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they instruct you and according to the judgment they say to you, you shall do; you shall not divert from the word they tell you, either right or left.” But a blind person is not bound by any mitzvah of the Torah, including Devarim 17:11, and thereby seemingly not bound to the decrees of the Rabbis. How would Tosefot answer this?”

The Rabbi answered me that it is “logic”. Any person who is part of the Jewish People, even a blind person who is exempt from *mitzvot*, must certainly listen to and obey the teachings of the Rabbis. They are the leaders, the teachers and the authorities in this world who help lead us in the path of G-d.

• Bava Kama 87a

*“This is not a beracha — rather it is blasphemy.”*

This statement is taught regarding one who makes a *beracha* when eating food that he stole, and is thereby in possession of the food by means of a transgression. Rabbi Eliezer ben Yaakov teaches in a *beraita*: Behold, one who stole a *se'ah* (a certain measure) of wheat, and ground it, kneaded it, and baked it, and separated '*challah*' from it, how can he make a *beracha*?! Saying a *beracha* is not blessing G-d, rather blaspheming Him (G-d forbid). About this the verse says: “*Botze'ah berech, ni'etz Hashem*” (Tehillim 10:3).

Rashi explains that the word *botze'ah* means “steals”, and the verse is teaching that one who steals food and makes a *beracha* on it is in fact committing blasphemy. Rava states on our *daf* that even though the thief acquired the wheat through “*shinui ma'aseh*” (changing the stolen item with an action), it is nevertheless blasphemy to say a *beracha* for this food because it would be a “*mitzvah haba'ah ba'veira*” — a mitzvah that comes through a transgression.

The Maharsha asks why this verse from Tehillim is not cited in Masechet Succah regarding a stolen lulav, which is invalid for the mitzvah due to the principle of “*mitzvah haba'ah ba'veira*”. The *gemara* in Succah teaches other sources for this principle — Malachi 1:13 and Yeshayahu 61:8 — but does not cite the verse in Tehillim from which our *gemara* derives the principle of “*mitzvah haba'ah ba'veira*”. Why not?

The Maharsha answers that the word “*botze'ah*” in Tehillim does not mean “to steal”, rather it means “to separate”. Therefore, it is suited *only* to the case in our *gemara*, when a thief stole wheat and processed it, and then “separated” *challah* with a *beracha*, and ate that bread with a *beracha* (also while eating he “separated” the bread he ate from the larger loaf). The Maharsha adds that it is clear from the context of the chapter that verse 10:3 in Tehillim is speaking about a thief.

• Bava Kama 94a

*Rav Yosef taught (the meaning of the verse in Ex. 18:20, when Yitro advised his son-in-law Moshe Rabbeinu on how to lead the Jewish People): “You will shall make known to them” — this refers to teaching them Torah (Rashi) — “the way” — this refers to doing acts of kindness for others — “they should go” — this refers to visiting the sick — “in it” — this refers to helping to bury one in need — “and the deed” — this refers to acting according to the law — “they shall do” — this refers to acting beyond the letter of the law.*

How does “the way” indicate teaching to do acts of kindness to others? Instead of saying “*derech*” — “way”, the Torah states “*ha-derech*” — “the way”. The *definitive* designation of the way communicates the sense of the ultimate way, the way of G-d. Walking in the way of G-d, say our Sages, means emulating “His way” — by clothing the naked as He did for Adam and Chava, visiting the sick as He did for Avraham Avinu, burying the dead as He did for Moshe, and comforting the mourners as He did for Yitzchak Avinu. (Maharsha)

• Bava Kama 100a

continued from page one

Re'eh

## A PROMISE OF ETERNITY

**“...You are children to the L-rd, your G-d — you shall not cut yourselves and you shall not make a bald spot between your eyes for a dead person.” (14:1-2)**

**T**he fact that the Jewish People are a holy people promises them eternity. It's axiomatic that G-d doesn't waste His time, so to speak. Why would He create a holy nation to then assign them to oblivion? What would be the point of infusing them with His own Holiness, and then have them evaporate like a mist after a few score years?

Thus, it is not fit to allow our mourning to break the bounds of reason, to cut and mutilate our bodies as was

the way of other cultures, and even for the death of a child, G-d forbid. The fact that we are “children of G-d...” reveals our promise of eternity.

However, to cry and to mourn is only natural when taking our leave of a loved one, and thus our Sages prohibited only excessive mourning, but to mourn a loved one is only a proper and natural expression of our own loss, not the fate of the departed one who has returned to our Father.

• Source: based on the Ramban

Shoftim

## WOMEN AND CHILDREN FIRST

**“When you go out to the battle to meet your enemy...the officers shall speak to the people, saying: ‘Who is the man who has built a new house and not inaugurated it? Let him go and return to his house lest he die in the war and another man will inaugurate it. Who is the man who has planted a vineyard and not redeemed it? Let him go...lest he die in the war and another man redeem it. Who is the man who had betrothed a woman and not taken her to be his wife? Let him go...lest he die in the war and another man take her’.” (20:1-8)**

**A** dangerous mission behind enemy lines. Chance of coming back alive? Not more than 50-50. Who do you send? The single men, of course. If they die it will be a tragedy for their loved ones, but at least there will be no grief-stricken widows and orphans. So says conventional wisdom.

In this week's portion the Torah writes “*Who is the man who betrothed a woman and not taken her to be his wife? Let him go...lest he die in the war and another man take her...*” This means that an engaged man is exempt from the war, but married men with children are sent out to battle.

Let's look at the other categories of military exemption:

“*Who is the man who has built a new house and not inaugurated it? Let him go and return to his house lest he die in the war and another man will inaugurate it.*” Rashi says that the reason is that he will be distressed that someone else will inaugurate it. Let me ask you a question: Does a person really care if someone else inaugurates a house that he never lived in? Shouldn't we be more concerned about someone who already has a house? Shouldn't we be concerned about the anguish he'll feel when he thinks that someone else will take it over?

Similarly regarding a spouse: Isn't a person more likely to suffer distress at losing the wife that he already knows and

loves, rather than losing his fiancée with whom he hasn't yet bonded deeply?

The Torah is concerned here with the spiritual angst that we feel when we have started a mitzvah and we fear that we won't be able to complete it. When our soul sees a spiritual project about to be cut off in its prime, we experience great loss and sadness.

The three scenarios in the above verse each represent a spiritual project in progress. When we build a house, our soul knows that when we finish the building we will be able to do the mitzvah of making a parapet around the roof.

In the time of the Holy Temple, when we planted a vineyard, the soul longed for the fourth year when there would be the opportunity to bring up the produce to Jerusalem, and eat it there in holiness and joy.

When we get engaged to someone, our soul yearns to fulfill the commandment to be fruitful, to multiply and bring children into the world.

The Torah is expressing here the longing of the soul. Not the longing of the body.

• Source: heard from Rabbi Yehuda Samet, based on the Abarbanel

## PARSHA Q&A ?

### Va'etchanan

1. "And I prayed to G-d at that time." Why "at that time"?
2. What characteristic trait is represented by G-d's "strong hand"?
3. What is ha'levanon?
4. What did G-d tell Yehoshua after the battle of Ai?
5. What will happen if the Jewish People fail to keep the mitzvot properly?
6. How did the decree that Moshe not enter the Land affect him even in death?
7. What is hinted by the word v'noshantem?
8. Why were the Jewish People exiled two years earlier than indicated by Moshe's prophecy?
9. "You'll serve man-made gods." Is this literal?
10. Why is east called mizrach?
11. "Keep the Shabbat day as I have commanded you." When had G-d previously commanded us to keep Shabbat?
12. Where did the Jewish People first receive the command to honor parents?
13. What is meant by "G-d, our G-d, G-d is One"?
14. What are two meanings of loving G-d "with all your might"?
15. How well-versed must one be in Torah?
16. Where does the word totafot come from?
17. Who is fit to swear in G-d's name?
18. What does it mean that the Jews are the "smallest nation"?
19. When someone serves G-d with love, how many generations receive reward?
20. Why are evil-doers rewarded in this world?

## PARSHA Q&A!

### Answers to Va'etchanan's Questions!

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

1. 3:23 - Defeating Sichon and Og, whose lands were part of Eretz Canaan, Moshe thought perhaps G-d had annulled the vow against his entering the Land.
2. 3:24 - His willingness to forgive.
3. 3:25 - Ha'levanon means the Beit Hamikdash, which makes "white" (lavan), i.e., atones for, the Jewish People.
4. 3:28 - Yehoshua must lead the army into battle.
5. 4:9 - The non-Jewish world will regard them as foolish.
6. 4:22 - Even his remains weren't buried in the Land.
7. 4:25 - The gematria of v'noshantem, 852, hints at the number of years until the first exile.
8. 4:25 - So that the rest of the prophecy "that you shall utterly perish" would not be fulfilled.
9. 4:28 - No. It means you'll serve others who serve idols.
10. 4:41 - It's the direction from which the sun shines (mizrach means shining).
11. 5:13 - Before Matan Torah, at Marah. (Shmot 15:25)
12. 5:16 - At Marah. (Shmot 15:25).
13. 6:4 - G-d, who is now our G-d, but not [accepted as] G-d of the other nations, will eventually be [accepted as] the one and only G-d.
14. 6:5 - 1) With everything you own. 2) Whether G-d treats you with kindness or harshness.
15. 6:7 - If asked a Torah question, one should be able to reply quickly and clearly.
16. 6:8 - Tot means two in Caspi. Fot means two in Afriki. Together they allude to the four sections of tefillin.
17. 6:13 - One who serves G-d and reveres His name.
18. 7:7 - B'nei Yisrael are the humblest nation.
19. 7:9 - 2,000.
20. 7:10 - So that they get no reward in the next world.

To our Ohrnet Readers  
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## PARSHA Q&A ?

### Ekev

1. What must the Jewish People do to ensure that G-d will fulfill His promise to do good for us?
2. What were the: a. wonders b. strong hand c. outstretched arm that the Jewish People saw in Egypt?
3. When a group performs a *mitzvah*, whose name is attached to the *mitzvah*?
4. How did the Jewish People do their laundry in the *midbar*?
5. How did the Jewish People obtain clothing for their growing children in the *midbar*?
6. How many days did Moshe spend on Mt. Sinai altogether?
7. On what day did Moshe come down from Mt. Sinai having received complete forgiveness for the Jewish People?
8. How was Aharon punished for his role in the golden calf?
9. Who made the ark in which Moshe placed the second set of tablets? What special function did it later serve?
10. Which sin of the Jewish People was prompted by the death of Aharon?
11. Why were the *levi'im* chosen by G-d?
12. Why do the *levi'im* have no portion in the Land?
13. All aspects of man's life are in G-d's "hands" except one. What is this?
14. What is the "added benefit" of observing the *mitzvot*?
15. What is meant by circumcising one's heart?
16. What are the sources of water for the fields of Egypt and *Eretz Yisrael*?
17. What path does the Torah prescribe for gaining new knowledge?
18. Which activity is "serving G-d with the heart"?
19. When the Jewish People sin, why are they considered worse than the generation of the flood?
20. How does one "cleave to G-d"?

## PARSHA Q&A!

### Answers to Ekev's Questions!

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

1. 7:12 - Guard even the "light" commandments.
2. 7:19 - a. Plagues; b. Pestilence; c. Slaying of the first-born.
3. 8:1 - The person who finishes it.
4. 8:4 - The *ananei kavod* (clouds of glory) cleaned and bleached their clothes.
5. 8:4 - As their children grew, their clothing grew with them.
6. 9:18 - 120 days.
7. 9:18 - The tenth of Tishrei, Yom Kippur.
8. 9:20 - His two sons died.
9. 10:1 - Moshe. This ark would accompany the Jewish People into battle.
10. 10:6-7 - When Aharon died the *ananei kavod* departed, causing many Jews to fear war with the King of Arad and to retreat toward Egypt.
11. 10:8 - Because they did not participate in the sin of the golden calf.
12. 10:9 - Since they served in the Temple, they were not free to work the land.
13. 10:12 - Fear of Heaven, which is dependent upon the person.
14. 10:13 - There is reward.
15. 10:16 - To remove those things that block the words of Torah from entering.
16. 11:10 - Egypt is irrigated by manually carrying water up from the Nile. *Eretz Yisrael* is supplied by rainwater requiring no work on the part of its inhabitants.
17. 11:13 - By repeatedly reviewing what one knows, one more easily acquires new knowledge.
18. 11:13 - Prayer.
19. 11:17 - Because the generation of the flood had no one from whom to learn.
20. 11:22 - Attaching oneself to Torah scholars.

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## PARSHA Q&A ?

### Re'eh

1. What were the sites designated for the “blessings and the curses” to be pronounced by the people?
2. On what condition will *Bnei Yisrael* receive the blessings from G-d?
3. Why does the Torah use idolatry as an example when describing one who strays from the path that G-d commanded?
4. What was to be the sign for the Jewish People that they would inherit the Land?
5. During the 14 years of the conquest and division of the Land, what types of offerings were permitted on private altars?
6. What must one do with consecrated animals that develop a blemish?
7. In what ways does a consecrated animal that develops a blemish retain a degree of *kedusha* (holiness) even after it has been redeemed?
8. Why was the tribe of Yehuda not permitted to conquer Jerusalem?
9. In consecutive verses, the Torah repeats the prohibition against eating blood. What two types of blood are referred to?
10. Why were the Jewish People allowed to see the extermination of the Canaanites?
11. What forms of idol worship are punishable by death?
12. If a person performs miracles in the name of G-d and then says that the laws of the Torah have been revised, what is done to this person?
13. The Torah says, “To Him (G-d) you shall cleave.” How does one fulfill this command?
14. The trial of a person accused of encouraging others to worship idols differs from the trial of other capital cases. How?
15. Who has the primary responsibility of inflicting the punishment on one who tried to entice others to worship idols?
16. What is the “source” of the Jewish People being an *am kadosh* (holy nation)?
17. How should the Jewish People maintain themselves as an *am kadosh*?
18. What is the order of priority regarding to whom one should give charity?
19. What *mitzvah* recalls the Exodus from Egypt?
20. Which four individuals are under G-d’s “special protection”?

## PARSHA Q&A!

### Answers to Re'eh's Questions!

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

1. 11:26 - Mt. Gerizim and Mt. Eval, respectively.
2. 11:27 - On condition that they listen to G-d's commandments.
3. 11:28 - Because those who worship idols are considered as if they have strayed from the entire Torah.
4. 11:31 - The miracles that would occur while crossing the Jordan River.
5. 12:8 - Vow offerings or free-will offerings.
6. 12:15 - They must be redeemed and may then be eaten.
7. 12:15 - Eating it is permitted, but use of its milk or fleece is forbidden.
8. 12:17 - When Avraham bought *ma'arat hamachpelah*, he made a covenant of peace with the Hittites who sold it; his descendants honored this pact regarding the Hittite descendants in Jerusalem.
9. 12:24-25 - Blood that seeps slowly from the incision as soon as the cut is made and again after it no longer gushes. Blood absorbed into the limbs of the animal.
10. 12:30 - To learn not to follow in their depraved ways.
11. 12:30 - Slaughtering or burning a sacrifice on an altar, pouring libations, prostrating oneself, and any normal manner of worshipping that idol.
12. 13:2-6 - He is put to death.
13. 13:5 - One should emulate G-d's actions by performing good deeds, assisting in burying the dead and visiting the sick.
14. 13:10 - If he was acquitted and new information of a condemning nature arises, he is retried. If he was judged guilty, he is not returned to court to plead in his favor.
15. 13:10 - The person whom the guilty one attempted to entice.
16. 14:2 - The *kedusha* is inherited from the *avot*.
17. 14:21 - By avoiding excesses even in permitted matters.
18. 15:7 - The most needy, a brother from one's father, a brother from one's mother, the poor of one's city, the poor of another city.
19. 16:3 - Eating the *korban pesach* and the *matzah* on the night of Pesach.
20. 16:10 - A *levi*, convert, orphan, and widow.

### Shoftim

1. What is the role of *shoftim*? What is the role of *shotrim*?
2. What qualifications should one look for when appointing a judge?
3. May a judge accept a bribe if only for the purpose of judging fairly?
4. What is the source for the concept “seek out a good *beit din*”?
5. Although the *avot* built *matzevot*, the Torah later forbade doing so. Why?
6. “You will come to...the judge who will be in those days.” It’s impossible to visit a judge living at a different time, so why must the Torah add these apparently extra words?
7. What does G-d promise a king who doesn’t amass much gold, doesn’t raise many horses and doesn’t marry many wives?
8. How many Torah scrolls must the king have?
9. How was King Shaul punished for disobeying a minor command of the Prophet Shmuel?
10. Certain kosher animals are not included in the law of “*chazeh, shok and keiva*.” Which ones?
11. Families of *kohanim* served in the *Beit Hamikdash* on a rotational basis. When was this rotation system implemented?
12. Which three categories of false prophets are executed?
13. What does it mean to “prepare the way” to the cities of refuge?
14. How many witnesses are meant when the Torah writes the word *eid* (witness)?
15. “Through the mouth of two witnesses....” What types of testimony does this verse invalidate?
16. If witnesses in a capital case are proven to be *zomemim* (false-conspirators) before their intended victim is executed, how are they punished?
17. Why does the section about going to war follow the laws governing witnesses?
18. The Jewish army is warned of four “scare-tactics” the enemy might employ. What are they?
19. When a murder victim is found in a field, who determines which city is closest?
20. What happens if the murderer is found after the calf’s neck was broken?

### Answers to Shoftim’s Questions!

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

1. 16:18 - *Shoftim* are judges who pronounce judgment. *Shotrim* are officers who enforce it.
2. 16:18 - That he is expert in the law and that he is righteous.
3. 16:19 - No, because it will sway his judgment.
4. 16:20 - “*Tzedek tzedek tirdof...*”
5. 16:22 - Because the Canaanites used them for idolatry.
6. 17:9 - To teach that although a judge may not be as eminent as judges of previous generations, we must obey him nevertheless.
7. 17:18 - That his kingdom will endure.
8. 17:18 - Two. One stays in his treasury and one he keeps with him.
9. 17:20 - He lost his kingship.
10. 18:3 - *Chayot* (non-domestic-type animals).
11. 18:8 - During the time of David and Shmuel.
12. 18:20 - One who prophesies something he didn’t hear, something told to another prophet, or prophesies in the name of an idol.
13. 19:3 - To post direction signs saying “refuge” at the crossroads.
14. 19:15 - Two, unless otherwise specified.
15. 19:15 - Written testimony and testimony translated from a language which the judges don’t understand.
16. 19:19 - They are put to death.
17. 20:1 - To teach that if the Jewish People execute fair judgment they will be victorious in war.
18. 20:3 - a. Clanging their shields b. Making their horses stomp and whinny c. Shouting d. Blowing horns.
19. 21:2 - The Sanhedrin.
20. 21:9- He is tried and, if guilty, executed.

## PERPETUAL PARADISE LOST

**From: Saul**

*Dear Rabbi,  
Are children punished for the sins of their parents? If not, then why are we, the children of Adam and Eve, punished for the sin of the forbidden fruit? They were banished from Gan Eden – Adam was punished to toil to earn his bread and Eve was punished to bear children in pain. Why is their punishment carried over to us till today?*

Dear Saul,

The Talmud (Berachot 7a) actually discusses whether children are punished on account of their parents' misdeeds or not. The subject is addressed in the context of why righteous people may suffer while wicked people may prosper.

The first explanation that the Talmud presents is that a righteous man may suffer as a result of the misdeeds of his father if he is what's referred to as a "tzadik ben rasha", a righteous man who is himself the son of a wicked man. Of course, as you suggest, it is difficult to understand why a righteous person would suffer on account of no misdeed of his own. It is for this reason that the great Talmudic commentator and Kabbalist, Rabbi Yosef Chaim of Bagdad, the *Ben Ish Chai*, explains that the Talmud is referring to the concept of reincarnation, whereby a righteous man endures suffering in one lifetime, which is birthed by his misdeeds in a previous reincarnation. This transferring of punishment to the soul from one reincarnation to another is metaphorically referred to as delivering the punishment of the "father" upon the "son".

According to this explanation of the Sages, since all of humanity is a composite of the souls of Adam and Eve, their collective souls are a form of reincarnation of Adam and Eve, and thus their primordial punishment is actually transferred to themselves, i.e. us, from generation to generation, until the rectification and return to Eden will be achieved.

In continuing its discussion the Talmud in fact posits that children may literally be punished on account of their parents sins based on the verse, "He delivers the sins of the fathers upon the children" (Ex. 34:7), but notes that this contradicts another verse which states, "And children shall not die on account of their fathers" (Deut. 24:16). The

Sages reconcile these seemingly contradictory verses by explaining that the later verse refers to children who are innocent of the misdeeds of their parents, while the former verse refers to children who maintain the evil ways of their parents, and by affirming these evil ways, their own punishment is compounded by that of their parents. According to this explanation of the Sages, as long as humanity maintains Adam and Eve's rebellion against G-d, the punishment of our parents in Eden is transferred to us, their progeny.

However, it is also possible to answer your question in a way that is independent of reward and punishment, but rather based on ramification and repercussion.

Consider, for example, how you would view the situation that would have resulted from Adam and Eve's refraining from sinning, thereby passing the test and gaining eternal reward for themselves and their progeny who would have been born into a state of perfection. Would you object to this outcome by declaring it unjust that the children, who did not contribute to their parents' correct behavior, should benefit from the perfection achieved thereby?

Chances are you would not. Rather you would accept the benefit that would result to the children as a natural consequence and outcome of the parents' correct decision. The same applies in the opposite direction as well. Rather than viewing the current human condition as an extension of the punishment of Adam and Eve, view it as the ramification or repercussion of their sin. In this way it may be compared to children who simultaneously inherit their parents' wealth and liabilities. If the parents left no debts, the children inherit wealth they did nothing to earn, but if the parents departed with liabilities, the children must pay from the inheritance to make restitution for debt that their parents, not they, accrued.

Thus humanity, as a form of reincarnation of Adam and Eve, who continues to maintain our progenitors' rebellion against G d, and in addition, independent of considerations of reward and punishment, but rather as a natural consequence of their wrong decision, finds itself in a position of suffering. Yet, as their children, we have also inherited the possibility of rectifying their misdeed, correcting their wrong and perfecting ourselves in order to bring about the return to Eden.

## HOW TO WIN THE BATTLE

**R**abbi Eleizer Papo, in his book *Beis Tefillah*, offers some practical advice for someone who is having trouble concentrating on his prayers, with the following parable:

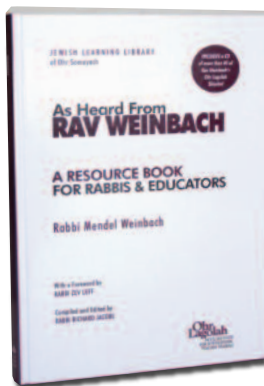
A man was carrying a chest full of precious stones. He tripped and fell, and with him fell the chest. The man stood bewildered, looking at all his stones scattered across the walkway. People around began to grab whatever they could carry in their hands. All of his precious jewelry, his life's savings, was being taken. The man, watching what was happening, began to panic, but then realized that he also should start grabbing whatever he could or he would be left with nothing for him and his family. And so, he began to throw as much as he could back into his chest. When the chaos ended he looked into his chest to find more than enough stones to sustain himself and his family for a long time to come.

This story teaches us what to do when we find ourselves in the middle of our prayers, unable to concentrate on what we are saying. The *yetzer hara*, the "evil inclination", comes to a person during his prayers to trip him up, causing all of

his precious words of prayer to fall and become tarnished with negative intentions. When a person realizes this, in the middle of his prayers this *yetzer hara* again tries to discourage the person by telling him his prayers are worthless, and it is too late to fix them.

But this is simply not true! If one finds himself trapped in the clutches of the *yetzer hara*, he should act just like his evil counterpart, and he must "grab back" as many words as he can by saying them with proper intention. For if he just stands there feeling sorry for himself he will lose everything. His only hope is to salvage what he can. Even half of a prayer said properly is valuable. In fact, if it comes through hard work it will surely be extremely precious in G-d's eyes.

So too, if one realizes in the middle of a blessing during prayer that he is not praying with proper intention, he should realize that the *yetzer hara* has managed to steal away part of his prayers from him. However, he can make sure to at least say the rest of the prayers with proper intention, "stealing back" what he can from his evil adversary.



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## A SUMMER OF GROUPS AT OHR SOMAYACH IN JERUSALEM

The Jerusalem Campus of Ohr Somayach was a beehive of activity this summer. We were hosts to the largest number of summer students and programs in our history. Our reputation as perhaps the premier Jewish educational center has spread across the planet, attracting students from such far-away places as New Zealand, Kazakhstan and Cameroon. Outreach programs and outreach rabbis on all inhabited continents are sending their interested young Jewish students to Ohr Somayach for a few weeks of learning in the Holy City of Jerusalem. We are fortunate to merit seeing a fulfillment of what the Prophet Amos predicted thousands of years ago: *"Behold, days are coming, says the L-rd, G-d, and I will send famine into the land, not a famine for bread or a thirst for water, but to hear the word of the L-rd."* (Amos 8:11)

The following is a short description of the various programs that were here this summer:

**JLE SOUTH AFRICA** - Founded over 25 years ago in Johannesburg by a small cadre of alumni from Ohr Somayach in Jerusalem, it has become the largest *kiruv* organization in that country, with a yeshiva, various synagogues and learning centers in the Johannesburg area, as well as in Capetown. Their Israel trip, called "Ohrsom", brought more than 190 students here in June. Of those, 90 young men came to our campus to learn Torah. Included in this group were 15 students from our Ohr Somayach program in Sydney, Australia, headed by Rabbi David Blackman. They heard classes from Rabbis Breitowitz, Segal, Ullman, Shlomo Schiller, and Dr. Matalon. While here, the Mentor's Mission, led by Danny Lemberg, Yaakov Kaplan, Zecharia Fruchthandler and George Karasick, came to Ohr Somayach to learn and bond with the students. The Ohrsom students were able to learn one-on-one with successful businessmen and professionals to whom Torah and *mitzvot* come first, and then the obligation of making a living in accordance with the Shulchan Aruch. Danny Lemberg and Zecharia Fruchthandler lectured the group on the nexus of religion and the world of business.

**JLE NORTH AMERICA** - A group of students came for two weeks from June 23 to July 5th. They had a full learning program from 9:00 am to 1:00 pm. The group heard lectures from Rabbis Breitowitz and Greenblatt on such topics as Jewish philosophy, personal development and Jewish values. There were also small focus groups and tutorials. This group also interacted with the Mentor's Mission. The afternoons were for touring and activities. The trips included a three-day excursion to the North, kayaking, ATVing, hiking, Hebron, Gush Emunim, Kever Rachel, the Old City of Jerusalem, the City of David, paintball fights, Segway riding, and beaches. In follow-up surveys, 100% of the young men thought that it was an excellent experience and would recommend it to a friend. By the end of the program every one of them committed to take on himself some additional level of *mitzvah* observance.

**JLE CONNECT** - This is a program tailored to young men who are a bit more advanced than the JLE group. Another name for this program is "A Taste of Yeshiva", as the participants are learning the whole day. In the mornings they were occupied with *gemara*, and in the afternoons they learned *gemara* and heard philosophy lectures from Rabbis Gottlieb and Matalon. There were also occasional trips. A total of nine were on this program, and they ratcheted up their observance to a higher level. We hope to see them "next year in Jerusalem" for a full year program here in yeshiva.

**JINTERNSHIP** - This innovative program matches up guys who are interested in furthering their careers and burnishing their resumés by doing internships in their fields of interest. For the first three weeks of their stay in Israel they learn about Judaism in our Mechina program, and go on tours with the JLE and Mentor's Mission. The program began on June 22 and ended on Tisha b'Av. Some of the participants came early and spent a couple of weeks learning before the program began. Some have decided to stay in the yeshiva past the end date, for additional learning. Most are in college or graduate school, and will be returning to their home countries before the end of August. Because of the nature of the Jinterns program, they visited sites that are off the beaten track of most summer programs. In addition to the trips and activities mentioned above, they were introduced to Israeli businesses and government venues, such as City Hall Jerusalem, where they met with Deputy Mayor Yitzchak Pindrus, the son of senior staff member, Rabbi Moshe Pindrus; the offices of "app" start-up "Glide"; an Orthodox law firm; JVP — a large venture capital partnership, among others. The interns have landed jobs in medical research, biotech, finance, venture capital, law, engineering and computer programming. There are 18 young men in the program.

**PROJECT GENESIS** - The JLE in London, under the very capable leadership of Rabbi Danny Kirsch, sent 32 university students for a learning-and-touring program this summer. Rabbi Moshe Borger, who is both a rabbi in Derech and the coordinator for the English JLE students in Israel, taught classes in "Jewish Thought", along with other staff members. We also hosted a group of five other British students who came here for two weeks in order to strengthen their commitment to Torah and *mitzvot*.

**MERCAZ** - From May 18th to the first of June we hosted a group 44 students from the US. Most were from the University of Texas and the University of Missouri. They learned Torah half-day with Rabbis Ullman, Segal, Matalon and Shlomo Wiener. Touring occupied their afternoons. Trips included: The City of David, Hebron, the Blind Museum, the Old City of Jerusalem, Tsefat, the Dead Sea, Yad Vashem, the Tunnel tours adjoining the Kotel Plaza and the Bar Kochba Caves.

Va'etchanan

## MOSHE WANTING TO ENTER THE LAND OF ISRAEL

In the beginning of this Torah portion we are faced immediately with a perplexing situation. Moshe has already been told explicitly that he would not be allowed to enter the Land of Israel. Moshe, however, beseeches G-d to allow him to enter the Land, "My Lord, you have *begun* to show your servant your greatness and your strong hand... Let me now go over and see the good Land that is on the other side of the Jordan, this good mountain and the Lebanon." This is a reference to the conquest of the mighty rulers Sichon and Og, which Moshe interprets as the beginning of G-d's demonstration of His might, which would eventually result in the conquest of the Land of Israel as well.

Moshe had referred to this idea previously in Parshat Devarim when G-d told him, "This day I shall *begin* to place dread and fear of you on the peoples under the entire heavens." Moshe understands this to mean that his involvement in the final conquest of the Land is not finished with the conquest of Sichon and Og. Yet, since he has already appointed Yehoshua to be the leader in his place when they traverse the Jordan, he beseeches G-d only to allow him to "...go over and see the good Land that is on the other side of the Jordan..." Moshe's only request is to be allowed to enter the Land as simply one of the people, not as their leader. G-d rejects his plea, however, and tells him, "This is enough for you; don't speak to Me further about this matter." Since Moshe's punishment of not being allowed to enter the Land is the result of his culpability for the peoples' rebellion at the incident of the spies, G-d has allowed him to conquer Sichon and Og, and will give him the opportunity to miraculously

see the Land as if he were actually there — but no more.

Moshe had four specific reasons to enter the Land. First of all, he wanted to enjoy the merit of keeping those numerous *mitzvot* which could only be observed in Israel. Secondly, he wanted to see his efforts of the last forty years come to fruition. His entire purpose has been to bring about the fulfillment of the promise that G-d had made to the forefathers to give their descendants that Land of Israel as an inheritance. By entering the Land with them he would complete his mission. Thirdly, he wanted to prove to the people that the Land was good, as he says in his request, "Let me now go over and see the good Land." In so doing he could personally refute the spies' slander. Finally, Moshe wanted to reveal to the people the exact location of Jerusalem and the Holy Temple. Again, this is hinted at in his request where he asks to see, "...this good mountain and the Lebanon." "The mountain" is a reference to the Temple Mount, and "the Lebanon" is a reference to the Temple itself, since the word '*levanon*' in Hebrew refers to "whiteness", and the purpose of the Temple is to "whiten" (cleanse us) from sin.

What remains to be understood is why G-d doesn't respond favorably to Moshe's request. There is a basic principle that G-d forgives transgressions that are between Man and G-d, but transgressions between Man and Man are not forgiven by G-d, not even on Yom Kippur. It is up to the individuals who were wronged to grant forgiveness. Since it was Moshe who initiated the mission of the spies, and since he was ultimately responsible for leading the nation astray, G-d would not grant his request.

Ekev

## THE UNIQUENESS OF THE LAND OF ISRAEL

The last section of this Torah portion deals with the unique status of the Land of Israel, and its relationship to the Jewish nation. There are three dimensions to this relationship, which is based on the nation's adherence to the observance of both the positive and negative commandments of the Torah. The Land of Israel is essentially a gift to the Jewish People, a reward for their fidelity to the Torah. The first reward is the inheritance of the Land itself. The second reward is the permanence of that inheritance. The third reward is the ability of the Land to provide for the needs of its inhabitants.

The Torah makes it clear that the Land of Israel is unlike the land of Egypt that they had left, "Where you could plant

your seed and water it on foot like a vegetable garden" (Devarim 11:10). The Land of Israel does not possess a constant and dependable source of water like the Nile River. Rather it is a land of hills and valleys, totally dependent on rainfall from above, "from the rain of heaven will it drink water" (Devarim 11:11). The word "heaven" is not just a reference to the clouds in the sky, but rather refers to G-d's direct providential intervention in order to sustain the Jewish nation. Looking up to the sky in anticipation of life-giving rainfall symbolizes the Jewish awareness that all material success is a result of Divine intervention, which is based on our adherence to the Torah.

Even though the constancy of the water of the Nile in

*continued on page fifteen*

Egypt is also a product of G-d's direct will, Abarbanel quotes the Ramban who points out the difference between the Divine Providence in Israel and as opposed to that in Egypt. Dependency on the Nile can be compared to a healthy, complacent individual who, although he recognizes that his good health is a gift from G-d, does not feel the immediate need to scrutinize his deeds and constantly turn to G-d with prayer. Depending on capricious rainfall, on the other hand, requires the residents of the Land of Israel to be ever-vigilant

in their observance of the Torah. The Jews of the Land of Israel are like the infirm, whose lives are always hanging in the balance.

Finally, the reward for Torah observance is not simply adequate rainfall. Rather, the Torah makes it clear that the rainfall will occur at precisely the right times and in the right quantities to insure the maximum agricultural benefit. Furthermore, it will occur at night in order not to disturb the farmers working the Land.

## Re'eh

## KASHRUT

One of the topics of this Torah portion is the Laws of *Kashrut*. Although this was already discussed in Parshat Shemini in Sefer Vayikra, Abarbanel explains some of the dimensions of these laws which he did not discuss previously.

The Torah introduces this section by saying, "You shall not eat anything abominable" (Devarim 14:3). The Torah does not mean that forbidden foods are inherently disgusting and repulsive to human nature. The Sifra on Vayikra makes it clear that a person should not say, "I don't want to eat pork; rather it is something I desire, but my Father in Heaven has decreed against it" (Vayikra 20:26).

Abarbanel explains that the prevailing opinion that the main reason for the *Kashrut* laws is that the various animals, combinations of foods and methods of slaughter are inherently unhealthy is incorrect. If this were true the *Kashrut* section of the Torah would be reduced to a medical text and would take away from the lofty messages of the Divine Torah. If the Torah's concern were only in regard to health, then cures and countermeasures could be found to obviate the necessity for these laws in the first place. Furthermore, it is obvious that the world's non-Jews, who are free to eat these forbidden foods, are no less healthy than their Jewish counterparts, and in many cases are physically stronger.

Rather, these prohibitions are designed to protect the individual's pure spiritual and intellectual dimension — his *neshama* (soul). Man's physical nature and desires have a tendency to overcome his pure spirituality. Eating these foods

contributes to this "spiritual blockage". This is expressed clearly at the end of the *Kashrut* discussion in Parshat Shemini, "Do not contaminate your souls with creeping things of the ground and do not become ritually impure through them, because I am the L-rd, your G-d, Who sanctified you and made you holy, and you should be holy because I am holy" (Vayikra 11:43-44). The prohibited foods are never referred to as "harmful" or "unhealthy". Rather, they are always referred to as "ritually impure" or "spiritually abominable".

The concept of refraining from giving in to one's physical desires and eating whatever one wishes is also alluded to in the phrase, "You are children to the L-rd, your G-d" (Devarim 14:1). This indicates that we are members of an important royal family, and must conduct ourselves accordingly. The commandment to refrain from eating any abomination immediately follows the prohibitions against the barbaric practice of the Amorite mourners who mutilated their bodies by cutting their flesh or tearing out the hair between their eyes: "For you are a holy people to the L-rd, your G-d, and G-d has chosen you for Himself to be a treasured people from among all the peoples on the face of the earth" (Devarim 14:1-2). By refraining from eating certain foods, even when they are not injurious and may even be beneficial to our physical health, keeps us constantly aware of our lofty status and unique responsibility to serve G-d.

## Shoftim

## WITNESSES AND TESTIMONY

In this section the Torah deals with the laws of witnesses and testimony. Guilt in criminal cases or monetary obligation in civil cases must be established by the corroborated testimony of two witnesses. Normally in a case where one pair of witnesses is contradicted by a second pair, the case remains unresolved. However, there is one particular circumstance where different principles apply. For example, if two witnesses testify that Reuven killed

Shimon, and then two other witnesses come and testify that they know nothing about the alleged crime but that the first pair of witnesses was with them in a place where they could not have possibly seen the murder — we then believe the second pair. We not only believe that the first pair was lying but we also punish them with the exact same punishment to which they were attempting to subject Reuven. Stranger still, if the court executes Reuven based

continued on page sixteen

## ABARBANEL...continued from page sixteen

on their testimony and it is only later that the second pair of witnesses comes and reveals that the first set lied in the above manner, that first pair is not punished at all. They can only be punished if this revelation occurs after the court has declared Reuven guilty but before he is actually executed.

Abarbanel, as well as many other commentators, is puzzled as to why the second pair is believed over the first pair, and why the first pair is not punished at all when the individual that they attempted to frame actually loses his life as a result of their treachery.

Abarbanel first mentions Rambam, who does not attempt to explain the reasoning behind the law but rather considers it a Divine decree. Ramban and Rabbag, however, give a logical explanation as to why the second pair is believed. When the testimony of *contradictory* witnesses is canceled out, it is because they are both testifying on exactly the same thing. In this case, however, the two pairs are testifying on two very *different* things. The first pair is testifying on an act; the time and place are secondary facts that help to establish the veracity of their description of the act. The second pair is testifying on the first witnesses themselves, not the act. Both pairs are testifying about where the first pair of witnesses was located at the time of the alleged act. In essence, the first pair is testifying about themselves — i.e. where they were located. The Torah is clear that witnesses cannot testify about themselves or about people or situations in which they have a personal stake. Thus, the testimony of the first pair regarding themselves is disqualified and all that remains is the testimony of the second pair.

In order to explain the counterintuitive law that the first

pair is punished only for their treacherous intent, but not if they actually succeed, Abarbanel offers two possible explanations. First of all, courts and judges are considered G-d's agents, as the Divine Presence rests upon them. The Torah tells us that cases should be brought "before G-d". When the disputants appear in court they are considered to be standing "before G-d". Therefore, if the lying witnesses would be executed after their victim was already executed, the court would be sending a message that it was mistaken in its judgment. If the judges are G-d's agents, how can they make a mistake? Rather, it must be that the executed individual really was guilty, and the witnesses who "framed" him were actually correct. However, if the plot is uncovered before he is executed, it must be that he was innocent, and the witnesses can certainly be executed for their treachery.

Another possible explanation is that G-d wants to protect the honor and prestige of the courts. By killing the treacherous witnesses after their victim has already been executed, we would be sending a clear message to the public that the court made a mistake, and the court would lose its credibility to judge correctly in the future. The ensuing damage would be enormous. People would spread the word that these treacherous witnesses were killed because they were able to fool the judges into killing an innocent individual. However, if they are executed for their *attempted* treachery, people will realize that they attempted to mislead the judges but were not successful due to the diligence and efforts of the court to judge correctly. Thus, the prestige of the court remains intact.

## 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:

אחינו כל בית ישראל

*"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."*



## WHAT'S IN A WORD? *Synonyms in the Hebrew Language*

BY RABBI REUVEN CHAIM KLEIN

### MY THREE SUNS (AND MOONS)

In Biblical Hebrew there are three words for the sun and three words for the moon. The sun is variously called *shemesh*, *chamah*, and *cheres*, while the moon is called *yare'ach*, *levanah*, and *sahar*. Rabbi Aharon Marcus (sometimes known as the “Chasid from Hamburg”) explains that not only does each word of these threesomes focus on a different aspect of the sun and the moon, but these words may also represent different stages of development in the history of man’s relationship with the sun and moon. In the Bible’s account of the creation of the world (Gen. 1), the words *shemesh* (sun) and *yare'ach* (moon) do not appear. The Bible only refers to the sun as “the great luminary”, and the moon as “the small luminary”, as if to say that their entire purpose is simply to serve as luminaries, but they do not possess any inherent importance. Thus, the sun and moon did not originally have names.

However, as the generations progressed, people began to worship the sun and moon, calling them Baal (literally, “master”) and Asherah, respectively. In order to counter this unfortunate development, early monotheists who fought against idolatry coined specific words to identify the sun and moon, yet still downplay their importance. That is, they called the sun *shemesh* which literally means “the servant”, highlighting its subservience to G-d; and, they called the moon *yare'ach*, which is related to the Hebrew word *ore'ach* (pathway), and refers to the moon’s orbital path in the heavens.

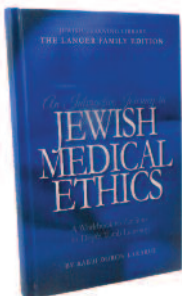
However, the names *shemesh* and *yare'ach* themselves came to be used as names of the idolatrous gods of the sun and the moon. In fact, archeologists have identified the worship of Shammash and Yarikh in ancient Canaan and Mesopotamia. Interestingly, place-names reflecting those old idolatrous practices are still in use today: Bet Shemesh (literally, “The House of the Sun”) and Yericho (related to *yare'ach*) were apparently ancient centers of the sun and moon cults before the Jewish People entered the Holy Land.

Anyways, using these names for idolatry necessitated coining new words to refer to the sun and the moon. For this reason the sun is later referred to as *chamah* (literally, “the hot one”) and *cheres* (literally “pottery”) to illustrate the sun’s scorching temperature and its ability to bake pottery — a mainstay of ancient civilization. Others explain that the sun is likened to pottery because of its reddish pottery-like hue at sunrise and at sunset. Similarly, the moon is later referred to as *levanah* (literally “the white one”) and *sahar* (“crescent”), to refer to its perceived color and shape. In short, *Shemesh* focuses on the sun’s utilitarian role in the celestial system meant to carry out G-d’s wishes, *chamah* refers to the sun’s heat, and *cheres* refers to the connection between the sun and pottery. Similarly, *yare'ach* focuses on the orbital path which the moon takes in travelling the solar system, *levanah* focuses on the moon’s color, and *sahar*, on its shape. Others note that *sahar* is not really Hebrew, it is actually an Aramaic loanword sometimes used to refer to the moon.

With time, even these words unsurprisingly also came to be associated with celestial idolatry, as those who worshipped the sun and the moon used ritual objects to “enhance” their cultic practices. The Torah (Lev. 26:30) refers to a ritual object known as a *chaman*, which was a type of idol that people erected on their roof to worship the sun, and Isaiah (Isa. 3:18) criticizes the Jews for wearing *saharonim*, which were talisman necklaces shaped like the moon.

Some might reject the historical aspect of this explanation because it would seem to contradict the notion of the Hebrew language’s Divine origins, but the basic argument still holds true. That is, the three words used to refer to the sun and the three words used for the moon somewhat parallel each other in their focus on different aspects of the sun and the moon.

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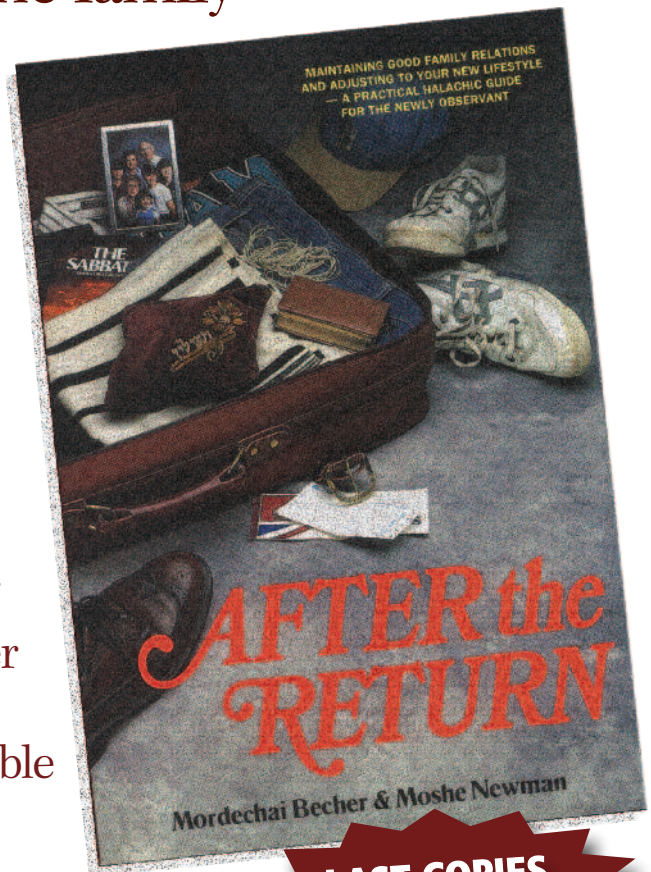
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