

OHRNET

SHABBAT PARSHAT VAERA • 27 TEVET. 5779 - JANUARY 4, 2019 • VOL. 26 NO. 12

PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

Stereotype or Archetype?

"...See, I have made you a master over Pharaoh..." (7:1).

Sometimes I forget I'm a rabbi. Especially when I get behind the wheel of a car. Then the beard comes off and the shades go on and suddenly there's a twenty-two year old riding a wild set of wheels at an easy pace. Wheeeew!

You have to be careful. I have a sign facing me on the dashboard (actually it fell off and I really should put it back) that says, "You look like a rabbi; are you driving like one?"

Sometimes, however, it's good not to be so rabbi-ish. Anyone who lives in Israel and is identifiably *Chassidic-looking* knows that the reaction by our secular brethren may be a stereotypical resentment. Coming back from visiting my mother in London last week, I stepped up to the security officer at the airport and was met with a vaguely distasteful expression, as though she had smelled something that was well past its sell-by date. It seemed that she was addressing a stereotype of a community that was well past *its* sell-by date, but has refused to lie down on the scrap heap of the fossils of history.

She asked me for my passport, and as I placed the passport on the lectern in front of her, three or four brightly colored guitar picks slid out of the passport. Her expression changed completely. A smile lit up her face. I wasn't a dreary killjoy religious fanatic anymore. I had just become a musical rabbi!

Stereotyping can be anywhere. It's so much easier to see someone as an example rather than being unique.

"...See, I have made you a master over Pharaoh..." (7:1)

When Moshe stood for the first time before Pharaoh, Pharaoh didn't realize to whom he was speaking. He thought he was dealing with a stereotype Hebrew with a bad speech impediment. Little did he realize that he was meeting the man through whose agency the most powerful empire in the world would be brought to its knees!

He mistook the archetype for a stereotype.

subscribe @ ohr.edu

to receive Ohrnet directly to your email each week

TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Chullin 23-29

Minimum Age

“From here we learn that if a Torah student does not see a *‘siman yafeh’* (a sign of success) within five years, he will not see it ever.”

This oft-quoted statement is found in our *sugya*. A Tana derives it from two apparently contradictory minimum ages mentioned in the Torah regarding the service of a Levi in the Mishkan Sanctuary or Beit Hamikdash. One verse states: “From the age of *twenty-five* years and upwards he (the Levi) shall enter for the service” (*Bam. 8:24*), but another verse (*Bam. 4:3*) states “from the age of *thirty*”! How can his be so? From the age of twenty-five he will study (the laws relevant to the Levi’s service), and he will begin to serve at age thirty. (Rashi in Chumash cites this teaching.)

Since one of the types of service a Levi would perform was to carry the Mishkan when traveling with it in the desert, physical strength was a requirement. The Maharsha notes that the minimum age of thirty taught here for a Levi is the source for the more general teaching of our Sages: “Thirty years is the age for strength.” (*Avot 5:22*)

Rashi in our *gemara* explains that the five years of study preceding the Levi’s service were for learning the laws applicable for his service. Since this “five-year course” was a matter of *Torah study* for the Levi, not seeing a *siman yafeh* (meaning that *he learns and forgets* – Rashi) during this time period would serve as a *general rule of thumb* for *any* Torah student. It would be an indication as to whether he will have a *beracha* in his future Torah study, being able to remember what he learns. Based on this concept, I have heard of a custom for families or benefactors who desire to support newly-married “Kollel couples,” that it would be their honor to financially assist the young couples for five years after marriage.

However, Rabbi Yossi is a Tana who disagrees with the five-year rule of the first Tana, and holds that the “time limit” for knowing if a Torah student will have a future *siman yafeh* is less than five years. He teaches that it is only three years, and learns this shorter time measure from a verse in Sefer Daniel regarding Daniel, Chanania, Misha’el and Azaria. These righteous young men were taken by the Babylonian King Nevuchadnetzer into exile, and were

taught the local *Kasdi* language. The verse states that he “trained them for three years” (Daniel 1:5) to “teach them the script and the language of the *Kasdim*.” (Daniel 1:4)

The *gemara* explains that the first Tana did not want to learn a three-year time limit from the verse in Sefer Daniel since the study of the *Kasdi* language was relatively easy. And Rabbi Yossi did not want to learn an extended five-year “trial period” since learning the Levi’s service was relatively difficult. (Rashi explains that this service included not only learning the specific laws for service of the Levi, but also becoming highly trained in the *physical activities* of this service. This would include learning how to dismantle the Mishkan and handle its boards and beams correctly, in addition to gaining expertise in the songs and musical instruments that they would need while providing musical accompaniment for the offerings in the Beit Hamikdash.)

The Maharsha points out that the first Tana considered Daniel’s and his friends’ study of the *Kasdi* language relatively easy despite the verse (Daniel 1:4) saying that they *also* learned “*Sefer*” – which could be understood to imply learning Torah from a Sefer Torah. If this would be the meaning of the verse, their course of study would have been one that included Torah study, and, if so, the first Tana should agree to learn the time period of *siman yafeh* from the verse in the Book of Daniel. The Maharsha explains that this interpretation is not correct. Since we are taught that these youths “understood all wisdom and were erudite in all knowledge” (Daniel 1:4) it is clear that prior to their captivity they were already well-versed in Torah study.

(For “extra credit” I suggest seeing the ruling of the Rambam in Mishneh Torah, *Hilchot Klei Hamikdash 3:7*, who writes two *different* minimum ages for the Levi’s service: 13 and 30, while always requiring five years of study. The Kesef Mishneh offers three possible ways to explain the Rambam’s opinion.)

• Chullin 24a

PARSHA Q & A

1. Did G-d ever appear to Avraham and say "I am G-d"?
2. What cause did the forefathers have to question G-d?
3. How was Moshe commanded to act towards Pharaoh?
4. How long did Levi live?
5. Who was Aharon's wife? Who was her father? Who was her brother?
6. Why are Yitro and Yosef both referred to as "Putiel"?
7. After which plague did G-d begin to "harden Pharaoh's heart"?
8. Why did Pharaoh go to the Nile every morning?
9. Give two reasons why the blood was chosen as the first plague.
10. How long did the plague of blood last?
11. Why did the frogs affect Pharaoh's house first?
12. What did Moshe mean when he told Pharaoh that the frogs would be "in you and in your nation"?
13. What are "chamarim"?
14. Why didn't Moshe strike the dust to initiate the plague of lice?
15. Why were the Egyptian sorcerers unable to bring lice?
16. What were the Egyptians likely to do if they saw the Jews slaughtering lambs?
17. Why didn't the wild beasts die as the frogs had?
18. The *dever* killed "all the cattle of Egypt." Later, boils afflicted their cattle. How can this be?
19. Why did Moshe pray only after leaving the city?
20. What was miraculous about the way the hail stopped falling?

Answers

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

1. 6:9 - Yes.
2. 6:9 - Although G-d swore to give them the land, they never actually had control over it.
3. 6:13 - With the respect due a king.
4. 6:16 - 137 years.
5. 6:23 - Elisheva, daughter of Aminadav, sister of Nachshon.
6. 6:25 - Yitro fattened (*pitem*) cows for idol worship. Yosef scoffed (*pitpet*) at his evil inclination.
7. 7:3 - After the sixth plague — *shechin*.
8. 7:15 - To relieve himself. Pharaoh pretended to be a god, who did not need to attend to his bodily functions. Therefore, he secretly used the Nile for this purpose.
9. (a) 7:17 - Because the Nile was an Egyptian god.
(b) 8:17 - Because an invading army first attacks the enemy's water supply, and G-d did the same.
10. 7:25 - Seven days.
11. 7:28 - Pharaoh himself advised the enslavement of the Jewish People.
12. 7:29 - He warned that the frogs would enter their intestines and croak.
13. 8:10 - Piles.
14. 8:12 - Because the dust protected Moshe by hiding the body of the Egyptian that Moshe killed.
15. 8:14 - The Egyptian sorcerers' magic had no power over anything smaller than a barley kernel.
16. 8:22 - Stone the Jews.
17. 8:27 - So the Egyptians would not benefit from their hides.
18. 9:10 - In the plague of *dever* only the cattle in the fields died. The plague of *shechin* affected the surviving cattle.
19. 9:29 - Because the city was full of idols.
20. 9:33 - The hailstones stopped in mid-air and didn't fall to the ground.

ASK!

Your Jewish Information Resource – www.ohr.edu
by Rabbi Yirmiyahu Ullman

L’Chaim – To Life!

From: Sam in Portland

Dear Rabbi,
When Jews drink alcohol together, especially wine, they say *l’chaim*. What is the source of the custom? Thank you.

Dear Sam,

Despite the spiritually elevating potential of wine (or perhaps because of its great potential) mankind hasn’t fared well with the vine.

According to one opinion in our sources (Sanhedrin 70a), the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil was the grape vine. (By the way, none of our sources consider the forbidden fruit an apple.) Mortality, therefore, was brought upon Adam, Eve and all humanity through the vine.

Not only immortality, but also immorality, passed through the grape vine: “And [Noah] drank of the wine and became drunk, and he uncovered himself within his tent...And Noah awoke from his wine, and he knew what his youngest son had done to him. [Our Sages assert that Cham abused and/or castrated his father - Rashi]. And Noah said, Cursed be Canaan; he shall be a slave among slaves to his brethren.” (Gen. 9:21-24)

Lot similarly suffered wine’s blush through his own seed: “Our father is old, and there is no man on earth to come upon us, as is the custom of all the earth. Come, let us give our father wine to drink, and let us lie with him...And Lot’s two daughters conceived from their father...And the elder bore a son, and she named him Moab [“from father”]...and the younger also bore a son, and she named him Ben-ami [“from my people”]. (Gen 19:31-38)

No less licentious is an account of the first recorded non-Jewish “toast” given at a Saxony feast in the year 450. British King Vortigern was so moved by the simple sentiment “Lord King, be of health,” offered by Rowena, daughter of the Saxony leader Hengist, that he proceeded to seduce her. Intoxicated by drink, lust and greed, he then bargained with her father Hengist for her hand.

In contrast, a distinctly Jewish toast far preceded this infamous event in time, and exceeded it in quality. The Talmud (Shabbat 67a) relates that Rabbi Akiva (15-135 CE) blessed the guests at his son’s wedding with the toast “Wine

and life to the mouths of the rabbis and to the mouths of their students!” On a purely simple level this is a beautiful toast. However, it has a deeper meaning as well. The numerical value of the Hebrew word for “wine” is the same as that for “secret”; and “life” is interchangeable with “Torah”. Accordingly, Rabbi Akiva toasted that the mouths of the Sages should always be full with both the revealed and the “hidden” Torah.

Also, the Talmud teaches (Eruvin 65a), “When wine goes in, secrets come out”. On one level, one who is drunk loses control, and what’s revealed may not always be pleasant or appropriate. However, our Sages (Megillah 7) refer to a certain state of inebriation as being “perfumed”, or “pleasantly scented”, whereby one doesn’t lose control but rather sheds the restrictions of normal consciousness, enabling him to experience, reveal and express pleasant and profound spiritual concepts. According to whether one’s inner being is pure and holy or impure and unholy, wine literally brings out the best or the worst in a person.

Therefore, it is out of our desire that the spiritually best flow from our drinking that we toast *l’chaim*. It’s worth noting that many Jews merely raise the glasses, but don’t clink them together, unlike the non-Jews who believed the sound of the clinking glass wards off evil spirits. (Others explain that clinking the glasses fuses the senses of touch and hearing to enjoying the wine’s taste, smell and sight, thereby enhancing all of the senses in this elevating experience.)

Also, because in Judaism wine symbolizes bounty, blessing and joy, many have the custom of saying *l’chaim* only *after* making the appropriate blessing over the wine and drinking a bit, so that the toast of *l’chaim* should be infused with the holiness and blessing of G-d’s name and the inherent joy and bounty of the wine.

I’ll conclude with a beautiful idea I recently read: Although “*l’chaim*” is usually translated “to life”, it is plural and literally means “to *lives*”. This expresses the idea that no one can live life alone. We all need someone else. There’s no point in toasting to life alone, because life that is not shared is unlivable. Rather we toast “to lives” in which we share with others what is truly meaningful – Torah joyful experiences.

▪ Source: *Ta’amei haMinhagim* 291-293

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

Synonyms in the Hebrew Language
by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

Down by the River

Before bringing the Plague of Blood, G-d tells Aharon to stretch out his staff over the different bodies of water in Egypt. He tells Aharon, *inter alia*, to put his hand over the *naharot* and *yeorim* of Egypt. Rashi (to Ex. 7:19) explains that *nahar* refers to the type of river with which we are familiar, and *yeor* refers to a man-made irrigation canal that brings water to faraway fields. This implies that a *yeor* is a man-made river, while a *nahar* is a naturally-occurring river. However, this assumption is belied by the fact that the Nile River is called a *yeor*, yet the Nile River is one of the four original rivers that flowed from the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:11), and cannot possibly be a man-made river! So what's going on here? What is a *yeor* and what is a *nahar*? And, for that matter, where does the word *nachal* (which also means "river") fit into all of this?

In order to resolve this contradiction in terms, Rabbi Malkiel Tzvi Tannenbaum of Lomzha (1847-1910), author of the responsa *Divrei Malkiel*, proposes that the words *nahar* and *yeor* can be used in two different ways. When the words *nahar* or *yeor* appear on their own, both terms can mean both a man-made river and a natural river. However, if both terms are used together, then each term assumes one specific meaning that is not included in the other. In other words, whenever *nahar* and *yeor* appear side-by-side (like they do concerning the plague of blood), then *nahar* only refers to a natural river and *yeor* only refers to an artificial river. But when the terms appear independently, they are both synonyms for any type of river.

The Malbim (to Jer. 46:10) explains that a *yeor* is a river which tends to overflow, thus allowing water to flood the surrounding area. A *nahar* and *nachal*, on the other hand, are rivers which do not overflow, but simply push all its waters along a certain forward current, but not past its river banks.

In another discussion of these three terms, the Malbim (to Isa. 19:5) explains that a *nahar* is a river that is shallow, short, and narrow, while a *nachal* is a wider river, but it too is not deep. A *yeor* denotes an even smaller stream. In this discussion, Malbim again notes that a *yeor* differs from the other two types of rivers in that a *yeor* tends to overflow, while the other types of rivers do not. We will explain the etymological basis for this soon. Most instances of *yeor* in the Bible refer specifically to the Nile River in Egypt, which acted like this, although Malbim concedes that in two or three places the term *yeor* refers to a different river.

The word *nachal* refers to both a "river" and a "valley". Some explain the connection between these two meanings is that a *nachal* is the type of river that causes erosion, which thereby creates a valley *a la* the Grand Canyon. In English, we call this a *wadi* (a word borrowed from Arabic). Others explain that a *nachal* is a seasonal river caused by rainwater flowing down from the mountains, while a *nahar* is a river which continues to flow the entire year.

Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim of Breslau (1714-1814) explains in his work *Cheshek Shlomo* that the two-letter root *HEY-REISH* is used in different words that refer to something which "sticks out". For example, *har* is a "mountain", *herayon* is "pregnancy", and *yuharah* is "haughtiness". Based on this, he explains that the word *nahar* is also derived from this root, as a *nahar* is the type of river into which smaller streams flow, making the bigger river "stick out" vis-à-vis those tributaries.

Rabbi Pappenheim also writes in *Cheshek Shlomo* that the letter *REISH* itself denotes "throwing" or "shooting", and different roots that use the letter *REISH* are derived from that. To that effect, he understands that the word *yeor* is derived from the letter *REISH*. The waters of a *yeor* shoot downstream as though being "thrown" by the forces of nature. Rabbi Pappenheim explains that *yeor* differs from *nahar* in that it refers to a river whose waters flow with especially violent force, and in the Bible it is only used to refer to the Nile and the Tigris rivers. However, Rabbi Pappenheim admits that a borrowed meaning of *yeor* – which also appears in the Bible – is a manmade irrigation duct, which does not actually refer to a river *per se* but to its artificial tributaries. In light of what the Malbim wrote, we can explain that the word *yeor* recalls the fact that its waters tend to overflow past the river's banks – giving the illusion of the river itself "shooting" its waters outwards.

Rabbi Shlomo Aharon Wertheimer (1866-1935) explains that the term *nachal* only applies to a river which flows into a sea, as it says, "All the *nechalim* go to the sea" (Ecc. 1:7), but not to any type of river. Indeed, Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim in *Yeriot Shlomo* explains that the root of the word *nachal* is *CHET-LAMMED*, which refers to "circular motion" and aptly describes the cycle by which a *nachal* empties out into the ocean, and the waters of the ocean, in turn, flow back into the river.

For questions, comments, or to propose ideas for a future article, please contact the author at rcklein@ohr.edu

LETTER AND SPIRIT

Insights based on the writings of Rav S.R. Hirsch
by Rabbi Yosef Herman

Reverse Magic

When Moshe and Aharon first display their miraculous signs before Pharaoh, the Egyptian magicians try to show off their powers too. But Aharon's staff-turned-crocodile devours theirs. They try their luck again when each of the first three plagues strike, seemingly in an effort to disprove the divinity of Moshe and Aharon's mission.

For example, the Torah records, "and Aharon stretched out his hand over the waters of Egypt, and the frog[s] came up and covered the land of Egypt. The chartumim did likewise with their secret arts – and they brought frogs upon the land of Egypt."

This narrative is puzzling. If the meaning is that these magicians also attempted to bring frogs upon the land and did so, then this verse is hard to understand. If Aharon had already brought the frogs upon the land, what was there left for the magicians to do?

One might suggest that when Aharon stretched out his hand, these magicians quickly performed some hocus pocus, so that it would appear that *they* had caused the frogs to emerge. But if that were the case, then we would have expected the same action – with the same success of illusion – to have been recorded at the third plague, the plague of lice. There, the Torah records that the magicians tried to

copy the actions of Moshe and Aharon, but, due to their failure, were forced to declare the plagues directed by the Finger of G-d.

If there were some power to their magic, they should have used their powers to remove the frogs rather than increase them. The narrative sounds like they possessed madness more than magic! Rav Hirsch suggests, contrary to conventional interpretation, that their efforts in the case of each plague were aimed at eliminating the plague. Indeed, when the Torah records their efforts in the third plague, it says the chartumim also "did thus" with their secret arts to remove the lice, but they were unsuccessful.

The expression "and they did thus" does not mean that the magicians performed the same act designed to bring about the same result. Rather, they used the same *means*, but intended to *reverse* the effect of the plague. They mimicked the motions of Aharon, intending to nullify the result that Aharon brought about.

In the case of the frogs, their magical arts brought about the opposite results: instead of removing the frogs, they increased the frogs. Pharaoh, then, upon seeing the ridiculous helplessness of his magicians, sent immediately to Moshe and Aharon to end the plague.

▪ Source: Commentary, Shemot 8:3

OHRNET magazine is published by OHR SOMAYACH Tanenbaum College

POB 18103, Jerusalem 91180, Israel • Tel: +972-2-581-0315 • Email: info@ohr.edu • www.ohr.edu

Love of the Land, written by RAV MENDEL WEINBACH, zt"l • General Editor: RABBI MOSHE NEWMAN • Design: RABBI ELIEZER SHAPIRO / DANIEL FREEDMAN

© 1992 - 2018 Ohr Somayach Institutions - All rights reserved • This publication contains words of Torah. Please treat it with due respect. Editor's disclaimer: Ohrnet Magazine is not intended to be a source for halachic rulings. In any real and specific case one should consult a qualified halachic authority for a ruling.

BUSINESS ETHICS

by Rabbi Ari Wasserman

Ownership of Business Perquisites (Perks)

QUESTION

I work in the nursing home industry. A vendor – a large publicly traded company, looking to do business with the corporation which employs me – sent its representatives to our offices, and I spent some time with them. But, at the end of the day we decided not to pursue the relationship.

Several days later I received an email from the vendor, offering a \$15 Amazon gift card if I completed a short survey. I did so – it took me about a minute – and the gift card was sent to me.

Is this gift card company property or mine?

I asked this question of a colleague, who said that a \$15 gift card was inconsequential to the company and that everybody keeps such small perks. However, the employee manual states: “On occasion, an employee may receive a gift from a vendor as a solicitation for business or as a gesture of appreciation for an existing business relationship. Employees should notify their manager of any gift received and give the manager the opportunity to inspect the gift. The manager will determine if the employee is able to accept the gift or if it should be equitably distributed within the department or throughout the company.”

So am I am foolish to be asking this question?

HALACHIC BACKGROUND

No, you are not. Indeed, your question is very similar to who owns the frequent-flyer points when you fly on company business, and actually concerns quite a few professionals out there.

In deciding such questions, halacha considers “national custom” (*minhag hamedina*). But since in a large country like the United States there is no uniform “national custom” that applies to all types of business, the deciding factor would be “industry custom” or industry standard. For a certain practice to be considered the industry standard it must be very clear and well established. When it is, it has precedence.

The Code of Jewish Law, the *Shulchan Aruch*, states that an employer is obligated to provide terms consistent with national custom/industry standard. For example, if there was no specific prior agreement between the employer and employee for the employee to work unusual hours, the employer cannot compel his worker to do so if that is not the industry practice, even if he is willing to pay for the extra time. As well, if it is the custom to provide food or refreshments to his employees, it is the employer’s duty to comply. (In Talmudic times, this meant providing dried figs or dates. In our times, it generally means providing coffee, tea and the like.)

The *Aruch HaShulchan* adds that if there is no prior agreement between the employee and employer and also no established practice, the employer has no obligation to provide any benefits or perks beyond basic salary. Also, it is up to the employee to prove that the employer owes him something more than his wage. In other words, in the absence of an agreement between the parties, or unless the industry standard dictates otherwise, the employer does not owe the employee any extras.

RESPONSE

Based on the above, it is clear that the relationship between the employee and employer is defined by:

1. an agreement between them
2. in the absence of an agreement, the industry is not entitled to any extras
3. in the absence of either of the above, the employee is not entitled to any extras.

In your situation, there actually is an agreement between you and your employer in the form of the employee manual, so we don’t need to analyze the industry standard. The manual clearly states: “Employees should notify their manager of any gift received and give the manager the opportunity to inspect the gift.”

Accordingly, you should discuss the \$15 gift card with your employer and let him decide if he wants it for the company (per the manual) or if you can keep it. You do not need to speak with the owner of the company. You can speak with whoever is authorized to deal with these issues, probably your immediate superior.

It is worth mentioning that keeping the gift card because “everyone does it” does not make it right, and you are to be congratulated for asking the question!

POSTSCRIPT

My brother-in-law heard the following story at a weekly halacha class in Chicago:

After an Orthodox Jew attended a number of *shiurim* on the topic of workplace theft, he asked his boss how he felt about personal use of office supplies like paper clips, pens and paper: What bothered him, and what did not? At first the boss thought it was a joke. Once he realized that the employee was serious, they sat down together and had a very meaningful discussion, with the boss gaining new respect for his employee.

It may very well be that your boss will act like the boss in this story, but please know that, regardless of how he responds, you will be creating a tremendous *kiddush Hashem*. Indeed, you already have by asking the question.

- *L'iluy nishmas Yehudah ben Shmuel HaKohen Breslauer*

PARSHA OVERVIEW

G-d tells Moshe to inform the Jewish People that He is going to take them out of Egypt. However, the Jewish People do not listen. G-d commands Moshe to go to Pharaoh and ask him to free the Jewish People. Although Aharon shows Pharaoh a sign by turning a staff into a snake, Pharaoh's magicians copy the sign, emboldening Pharaoh to refuse the request.

G-d punishes the Egyptians and sends plagues of blood and frogs, but the magicians copy these miracles on a smaller scale, again encouraging Pharaoh to be obstinate. After the

plague of lice, Pharaoh's magicians concede that only G-d could be performing these miracles. Only the Egyptians, and not the Jews in Goshen, suffer during the plagues.

The onslaught continues with wild animals, pestilence, boils and fiery hail. However, despite Moshe's offers to end the plagues if Pharaoh will let the Jewish People leave, Pharaoh continues to harden his heart and refuses.

subscribe @ ohr.edu

to receive Ohrnet directly to your email each week