

OHRNET

SHABBAT PARSHAT YITRO • 20 SHVAT 5780 FEBRUARY 15, 2020 • VOL. 27 NO. 15

PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

Task Master

“And G-d spoke all these statements, saying...” (20:1)

One of the cleverest little buttons on my computer is called “Tasks.” Tasks allows you to jot down quickly a list of all the things you need to do: Check bank online; Send out resume for your daughter’s *shidduchim*; Renew driving license; Buy food; Visit parents; etc.” But it’s all too easy for life to become a list of tasks. Get this done. Get this done. Get that done – and then go to bed. (And spend a quarter-hour thinking about what you’ve got to do tomorrow.) If you look at life this way, it’s possible to go through life spending most of your waking hours thinking – and often worrying – about what’s left to do. If you live like that you will finally get to the end of your life and your last list will read: “Task – Leave this world (don’t forget to turn out the lights!)”

I noticed that “Tasks” has a feature called “add details,” and I thought to myself that for every task I have there, I could put an “add details” reason for why I have to do

this task. For example: “Check bank online...” Add details... I’m checking my bank account so I can make sure that I’m not charged *ribit* (interest), which might be an issue of a Torah prohibition. I’m checking my bank account to make sure that the money Hashem has entrusted me with is being put to good use. I’m renewing my driving license because the Torah teaches that the “law of the Land is the law” – if a Jew breaks the civil law of the state, he has also transgressed a Torah law. I’m buying food so that I and my family can be healthy to *daven* properly and do the mitzvahs. I’m visiting my parents to make them happy and to fulfill the Torah obligation to honor my parents...

Life doesn’t have to be dominated by the Task Master. You can turn your whole life from a series of tasks to a wealth of mitzvahs.

LOVE OF THE LAND

Kibbutz Kalyah

Near Yam Hamelach (the Dead Sea) is a kibbutz with a most interesting name.

Kalya is mentioned in the Talmud as the name of a plant growing in the Yam Hamelach area, which is used in the manufacture of soap. The kibbutz took on the name of this plant, but after the Six Day War this name became popular as an acronym for the revival of

the Dead Sea: *Kam Latchiya Yam Hamelach* (“the Dead Sea has come to life”).

As any visitor to that area can see, the once “dead” sea today brings life to the many people enjoying its therapeutic waters and luxurious hotels, not to mention the major medical and cosmetic industries that have been developed from its rich mineral content.

TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Yitro: Berachot 37-43

The Beracha Challenge

We learn in a beraita: “What beracha is said on bread? The Rabbanan say: ‘Hamotzi lechem min ha’aretz’; Rabbi Nechemia says: ‘Motzi lechem min ha’aretz.’”

Rava explains in the *gemara* that since the *beracha* needs to be in the past tense – Hashem *already took* bread out from the land – the dispute in the *beraita* involves understanding the tense of the verb. Everyone agrees that “*Motzi*” is past tense and therefore appropriate for the *beracha*. Regarding “*Hamotzi*,” however, there is a dispute. The Rabbanan say that it is also past tense and appropriate, but Rabbi Nechemia holds that it is future tense and not a suitable verb form for the *beracha*.

The *gemara* concludes that the halacha is to say “*Hamotzi*

lechem min ha’aretz,” and that this verb is indeed in the past tense, like the opinion of the Rabbanan. Tosefot points out that this ruling is made despite the objection of Rabbi Nechemia’s view. Tosefot cites the Talmud Yerushalmi’s teaching that the choice of “*Hamotzi*” is to help prevent a person who does not carefully enunciate the words from inadvertently “combining” two back-to-back letter *mem*-words in the *beracha* – “*Melech ha’olam*,” followed by “*Motzi lechem*.” However, although there is yet another place in the *beracha* where there are two juxtaposed *mem*-words – *lechem* and *min* – these words remain as they are since they are written in this manner in the Torah, in Tehillim 104:14. (The Aruch Hashulchan 167:8 discusses the text of the *beracha* in detail, offering new numerous insights.)

- *Berachot 38 a-b*

Sense for the Soul

Rav Zutra bar Tuvia said in the name of Rav, “From where do we learn that one should say a beracha when smelling a fragrance?”

He goes on to answer, “Because the verse states, ‘Every *neshama* praise G-d...’ (Tehillim 150:6) What is it that the *neshama* (soul) receives pleasure from, but the body does not? One must say that it is a *good fragrance*.”

Although the word *neshama* in the verse is translated as “soul” in its fundamental meaning, the Maharsha explains why our *gemara* understands the word *neshama* to be a reference to the pleasure derived through one’s sense of smell. A person’s sense of smell, he explains, is closer to being soul-like than the other four human senses with which we perceive the world. Sight, taste, touch and sound are all “physical senses,” whereas smell is a more “spiritual” and non-physical sense. The sense of smell occurs when a person takes a breath – *neshima* – of the good fragrance that is outside of his body and brings it inside his body. In doing so, only the person’s soul derives

pleasure from the pleasant smell of the ingested air.

The Maharsha suggests another possible connection between the *neshama* and the pleasure derived when smelling a good fragrance. He conjectures that only a living being with a *neshama* receives pleasure from good smells. Accordingly, this would exclude animals, which, despite their acute sense of smell, would possess no capability of getting pleasure from pleasant fragrances. (Readers who are “animal-mavens” are invited to share with us their knowledge on the current understanding of this matter.)

As part of the *Havdala* service following Shabbat we are instructed to smell cloves or other fragrant plants or spices and say the blessing of “*borei minei besamim*.” A reason given for this practice is to cause pleasure to our souls as a type of comfort and consolation for the loss of the *neshama yeteira* – “extra soul” – that we possess each Shabbat and lose when Shabbat ends. This practice is a practical application of understanding the sense of smell as related to the soul.

- *Berachot 43b*

Q & A

Questions

1. Yitro had 7 names. Why was one of his names *Yeter*?
2. News of which two events motivated Yitro to come join the Jewish People?
3. What name of Yitro indicates his love for Torah?
4. Why was Tzipora with her father, Yitro, and not with Moshe when *Bnei Yisrael* left Egypt?
5. Why does verse 18:5 say that Yitro came to the desert – don't we already know that the *Bnei Yisrael* were in the desert?
6. Why did Moshe tell Yitro all that G-d had done for the Jewish People?
7. According to the *Midrash* quoted by Rashi, how did Yitro respond when he was told about the destruction of Egypt?
8. Who is considered as if he enjoys the splendor of the *Shechina*?
9. On what day did Moshe sit to judge the Jewish People?
10. Who is considered a co-partner in Creation?
11. "Moshe sat to judge the people, and the people stood before Moshe...." What bothered Yitro about this arrangement?
12. Why did Yitro return to his own land?
13. How did the encampment at Sinai differ from the other encampments?
14. To whom does the Torah refer when it uses the term "*Beit Yaakov*"?
15. How is G-d's protection of the Jewish People similar to an eagle's protection of its young?
16. What was G-d's original plan for *Matan Torah*? What was the response of the Jewish People?
17. How many times greater is the "measure of reward" than the "measure of punishment"?
18. How is it derived that "Don't steal" refers to kidnapping?
19. In response to hearing the Torah given at Sinai, how far backwards did the Jewish people retreat in fear?
20. Why does the use of iron tools profane the altar?

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

Answers

1. 18:1 - Because he caused a parsha to be added to the Torah. *Yeter* means addition.
2. 18:1 - The splitting of the sea and the war against Amalek.
3. 18:1 - Chovav.
4. 18:3 - When Aharon met Moshe with his family on their way down to Egypt, Aharon said to Moshe: "We're pained over the Jews already in Egypt, and you're bringing more Jews to Egypt?" Moshe, hearing this, sent his wife and children back to Midian.
5. 18:5 - To show Yitro's greatness. He was living in a luxurious place; yet he went to the desert in order to study the Torah.
6. 18:8 - To draw Yitro closer to the Torah way of life.
7. 18:9 - He grieved.
8. 18:12 - One who dines with Torah scholars.
9. 18:13 - The day after Yom Kippur.
10. 18:13 - A judge who renders a correct decision.
11. 18:14 - Yitro felt that the people weren't being treated with the proper respect.
12. 18:27 - To convert the members of his family to Judaism.
13. 19:2 - The Jewish People were united.
14. 19:3 - The Jewish women.
15. 19:4 - An eagle carries its young on top of its wings to protect them from human arrows. So too, G-d's cloud of glory separated between the Egyptians and the Jewish camp in order to absorb Egyptian missiles and arrows fired at the Jewish People.
16. 19:9 - G-d offered to appear to Moshe and to give the Torah through him. The Jewish People responded that they wished to hear the Torah directly from G-d.
17. 20:6 - 500 times.
18. 20:13 - Since it is written immediately after "Don't murder" and "Don't commit adultery," it is derived that "Don't steal" refers to a crime carrying the same penalty as the first two, namely, the death penalty.
19. 20:15 - They backed away from the mountain twelve *mil* (one *mil* is 2000 cubits, approximately a kilometer).
20. 20:22 - The altar was created to extend life; iron is sometimes used to make weapons which shorten life.

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

Synonyms in the Hebrew Language
by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

Heat with the In-Laws

In Biblical Hebrew, there are two sets of words for one's parents-in-law: in one set of words, *cham* is "father-in-law" and *chamot* is "mother-in-law," while in the other set of words, *choten* means "father-in-law" and *chotenet* means "mother-in-law." For example, in Exodus 18:1-27, Moshe's father-in-law Yitro is called his *choten* (thirteen times!), and the curse against a man who commits incest with his mother-in-law states "lying with his *chotenet*" (Deut. 27:23). Yet, on the other hand, in the story of Yehuda and his daughter-in-law Tamar, Yehuda is called her *cham* (Gen. 38:13, 38:25), and Ruth's mother-in-law Naomi is called her *chamot* (Ruth 2:11-3:17). In short, this essay will address how the meanings of these two terms differ from one another, and when one term would be used over the other.

Rabbi David Kimchi (1160-1235), also known as Radak, writes in his *Sefer HaShorashim* that there is a major difference between *cham/chamot* and *choten/chotenet*: *cham* always refer to a woman's parents-in-law, while *choten* always refer to a man's parents-in-law. In other words, the Hebrew language uses different words depending on whose parents-in-law are being discussed. This distinction is indeed borne out and well-supported if one analyzes all instances of *cham/chamot* and *choten/chotenet* in the Bible.

In traditional patriarchal societies, marriage is viewed as a woman leaving her parents' family and joining her husband's. Based on this, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808-1888) explains that when a woman enters this new family, her husband's relatives surround her like a "wall" (*chomah*), so she calls her parents-in-law *cham* and *chamot*. By contrast, from the husband's perspective, he does not join a new family. Rather, his family creates a matrimonial connection with another family, but he remains as part of his parents' family. For this reason in Biblical Hebrew a husband does not call his in-laws *cham/chamot*. He calls them *choten/chotenet*, which, like *chatan* ("groom"), are words related to "connection." (Interestingly, in Hebrew/Yiddish, two people whose children have married each other are called *mehutanim*, but in English there is no word to convey such a relationship.)

Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim of Breslau (1740-1814) traces the Hebrew words *cham/chamot* to the Hebrew biliteral root CHET-MEM, which means "hot." He explains that when a woman joins her husband's family she must stress the warm

love that she receives from her newfound relatives in order to honor her husband. Given that the Bible metaphorically refers to "love" as though it were a fire (see Song of Songs 8:7), it makes sense that a bride's warm love for her new family would be expressed by a cognate of the Hebrew root for "heat," so she calls her husband's parents *cham* and *chamot*, respectively. In contrast to the bride's experience, the groom does not join a new family, but rather branches off from his own family to create a new subdivision. Because of this, Rabbi Pappenheim explains, a groom is called a *chatan* – a word derived from the two-letter root CHET-TAV that means "descending" or "putting down" – an allusion to his setting up a new branch of the family. A husband's parents-in-law are called *choten/chotenet* because by allowing him to marry their daughter they afforded him the opportunity to open this new branch of his family. (Radak writes that the core meaning of the word *chatan* is "he who experiences a new happiness," which is why it applies to a baby undergoing circumcision, just like it applies to a groom getting married.)

The great Kabbalist Rabbi Menachem Azariah of Fano (1548-1620) offers another way of explaining the difference between these terms. When soul-mates get married, their souls' spiritual lineage are on par and level with one another, such that a "husband and wife" can also be called "brother and sister." Based on this, he writes that *choten* is a portmanteau of the phrase *achot noten* ("a sister, he gives"), and refers specifically to a man's father-in-law, who, by virtue of his giving his daughter to this man, has given this man his "sister." For this reason, *choten/chotenet* always refer to a man's parents-in-law. On the other hand, when a woman marries her husband, she calls his parents *cham/chamot*, which is derived from *yechematni* ("birth", see Ps. 51:7). This is because the husband's parents do not "give" their son in the same way that the wife's parents "give" their daughter, so their contribution to this union is simply that they gave birth to this man who married her.

However, as Radak points out, in Mishnaic Hebrew the word *cham* is used to describe a husband's "father-in-law" (*Kesuvos* 1:5), not just a wife's father-in-law, and *chamot* is used to describe a husband's "mother-in-law" (*Yevamos* 1:1), not just a wife's mother-in-law. Meaning, while in Biblical Hebrew the terms *cham/chamot* refer exclusively to a woman's parents-in-law, in Mishnaic Hebrew the meanings

of those terms were expanded to also include a man's parents-in-law.

Nonetheless, Rabbi Yosef Teomim-Frankel (1727-1792), author of the *Pri Megadim*, writes in one of his letters on Hebrew grammar that the converse is not true: the terms *choten/chotenet* which refer to a man's parents-in-law in the Bible were *not* later expanded in Mishanic Hebrew to also apply to a woman's parents-in-law. Rabbi Teomim suggests accounting for this difference in usage by appealing to a hyper-literal meaning of the terms in question. He explains that the etymological basis for *chamot* is the Aramaic root CHET-MEM, which means "to see." Indeed, the Targumim on the Bible always translate the Hebrew terms *choten/chotenet* into Aramaic cognates of *cham/chamot*. The word *chamot* recalls the fact that a woman's mother-in-law is always "looking" at her daughter-in-law – whether for beneficial or malevolent purposes (see *Yevamos* 15:4 which says that a mother-in-law and daughter-in-law are always presumed to hate each other). Accordingly, since a woman's mother-in-law is called *chamot*, a cognate of that word was also adopted to refer to a woman's father-in-law (*cham*), and then eventually to a husband's parents-in-law as well.

On the other hand, *choten* is related to the word *chatan* ("groom"), and refers to a man's father-in-law as the person who made him into a *chatan* (because he married off his

daughter to the groom), and a cognate of *choten* (*chotenet*) was adopted to also refer to a man's mother-in-law. Since the term *chatan* exclusively refers to the husband's point of view as the bridegroom, it could not be re-appropriated to refer to the wife's point of view. For this reason, the term *choten/chotenet* refers only to a man's parents-in-law, even in Mishnaic Hebrew.

In responsa *Shem MiShimon*, Rabbi Shimon Pollack (1858-1930) was asked why one traditionally refers to his father as *avi mori* ("my father, my teacher"), mentioning "teacher" after "father," but refers to his father-in-law as *mori v'chami* ("my teacher, my father-in-law"), mentioning "teacher" before "father-in-law." In one of his brilliant suggestions, Rabbi Pollack argues that since the word *chami* in the sense of a man's father-in-law is only a Mishanic Hebrew usage based on Aramaic, then the word *chami* is preceded by the Hebrew word *mori* in order to honor the Hebrew language before Aramaic. However, when it comes to the traditional term for father, since both words are Hebrew, one should say *avi* before *mori*. Rabbi Pollack supports this understanding by mentioning that even in the traditional nomenclature, if a man uses the term *chotni* to refer to his father-in-law, then he will usually say *chotni mori* ("my father-in-law, my teacher"), mentioning *mori* after *chotni* because both words are Hebrew.

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

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Hearing of the miracles G-d performed for *Bnei Yisrael*, Moshe's father-in-law Yitro arrives with Moshe's wife and sons, reuniting the family in the wilderness. Yitro is so impressed by Moshe's detailing of the Exodus from Egypt that he converts to Judaism. Seeing that the only judicial authority for the entire Jewish nation is Moshe himself, Yitro suggests that subsidiary judges be appointed to adjudicate smaller matters, leaving Moshe free to attend to larger issues. Moshe accepts his advice.

Bnei Yisrael arrive at Mount Sinai, where G-d offers them the Torah. After they accept, G-d charges Moshe to instruct the people not to approach the mountain and to prepare for three days. On the third day, amidst thunder and lightning, G-d's voice emanates from the smoke-enshrouded mountain and He speaks to the Jewish People, giving them the Ten Commandments:

1. Believe in G-d
2. Don't worship other "gods"
3. Don't use G-d's name in vain
4. Observe Shabbat
5. Honor your parents
6. Don't murder
7. Don't commit adultery
8. Don't kidnap
9. Don't testify falsely
10. Don't covet.

After receiving the first two commandments, the Jewish People, overwhelmed by this experience of the Divine, request that Moshe relay G-d's word to them. G-d instructs Moshe to caution the Jewish People regarding their responsibility to be faithful to the One who spoke to them.

ASK!

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Next Year in Jerusalem

Dov from 1000 Oaks, California wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

Why is it that we are still saying "Shana Haba B'yerushalayim – Next Year in Jerusalem," since any Jew can now go there and live there of his own free will? Thanks for your answer.

Dear Dov,

The story is told of a poor man, Shmelke, who lived in a small village. The town folks wanted to support him, but wanted to do so without his feeling like he was accepting charity. So they came up with a plan. They hired him to sit all day at the city gates and wait for Mashiach.

One day, a traveler approached the city and asked Shmelke what he was doing. "This is my job," Shmelke said. "My job is to wait here to greet Mashiach."

"Does it pay well?" asked the traveler.

"Not really," said Shmelke, "but it's steady work."

When we say, "Next year in Jerusalem," we mean that all Jews should actually be dwelling in Israel and in Jerusalem (not just as tourists). And we mean Jerusalem as it is ideally meant to be – with the Temple, the Sanhedrin and a Jewish monarch. We're still waiting. Even we here in Jerusalem say "Next year in Jerusalem!"

YIDDLE RIDDLE

Here's a Yiddle Riddle my son Dovid told me 22 years ago: Which person in Tanach was born before his mother ever was, died before his father, and is buried in his grandmother?"

• Rabbi Chaim Salenger

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 z"l / DANIEL FREEDMAN
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YIDDLE RIDDLE ANSWER

Hevel (Abel):

Born before his mother ever was – his mother, Eve, was never "born." Died before his father Adam – Hevel was killed by his brother. Buried in his grandmother – his father, Adam, came from the earth, so the earth is his "grandmother."

LETTER AND SPIRIT

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

Way to Go

Moshe's father-in-law, Yitro, shares with Moshe his observations of the untenable burden Moshe was carrying in single-handedly resolving all of the disputes the people brought before him. In response, Moshe conveys the responsibility he carries – the people come to him because they seek G-d! He must act as arbiter of disputes, and, more generally, educate the people about G-d's laws and teachings. Before unveiling his hierarchical judicial system, Yitro instructs Moshe, “*You must also clarify to them the statutes and the teachings, and make known to them the way in which they are to go and the deeds they are to do.*” Once this is in place, delegation of judicial function will not impair the messages Moshe intended to impart when serving as the single arbiter. What are these foundational principles which will guide all of dispute resolution for those who seek to live in accordance with G-d's Will?

First, Yitro tells Moshe “*v'hizharta.*” This term is normally translated as “warn.” In the reflexive form it means to be careful (to let oneself be warned.) However, the root of the word – *z.h.r.* – denotes brightness, shining light. In the verb form it means to radiate light, or to shed light. Here, Moshe is instructed to illuminate the laws so that they shine in the eyes of the people – both in the sense of highlighting their prominence, and in the sense of revealing their true purpose. This guidance will lead them in the *way* of G-d's Will.

Our Rabbis interpreted the various phrases in Yitro's guidance as follows: “*Make known*” – their livelihood; “*the way*” – acts of loving-kindness...“*and the deeds*” – acting according to strict justice; “*they are to do*” – acting beyond the letter of the law. (*Bava Metzia* 30b)

“Way” (*derech*) always denotes movement towards a goal. This is why a person's livelihood is referred to as *derech erez* – his activity for the sake of earning a livelihood and meeting one's needs. Moshe is to teach them *the way in which they are to go* in securing their livelihood and well-being. Ordinarily, people seek their own welfare. The people of Israel, however, are to act with loving-kindness. More, this loving-kindness is not *in addition* to seeking one's own welfare; it is *the purpose of* or *the way in which one must seek* his own welfare. A Jew is to consider his own existence and livelihood as being for the sake of others. This is the light that Moshe is to shine upon the laws – lighting the “way” in which one is to live. Indeed the word that has come to represent the corpus of Jewish law is called *halacha* – the way a Jew is to go.

Certainly, a Jew must ensure that his dealings with his fellow man meet an objective standard of justice (“*the deeds*”). But, conducting one's affairs in the enlightened *way* requires more. Even if one's actions may be strictly fair and correct, and the other party may have no right to demand anything from him, for one's own sake – for one's own moral development towards the goal of love and self-sacrifice – he will go beyond the strict requirements of the law, and act in loving-kindness (“*they are to do*”). While a judge may never demand this of a person, every seeker of justice should demand it of himself. In Jewish jurisprudence, going beyond the call of duty is not mere supererogation. It is the fundamental goal of the system. It is the light that Moshe himself shone on the law, revealing the noble moral and social obligations which are its aim. Only when this teaching is in place may the wheels of justice be set in motion.

Source: Commentary, Shemot 18:20

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