

OHRNET

THE OHR SOMAYACH TORAH MAGAZINE ON THE INTERNET

PARSHA INSIGHTS

A BRICK OF SAPPHIRE - A PLANK OF WOOD

“Moshe, Aaron, Nadav and Avihu and seventy of the elders of Israel ascended. They saw the G-d of Israel, and under His feet was the likeness of a brick of sapphire, and its purity was like the essence of the heavens.”
(24:9,10)

Dear Journal,

Something very strange happened to me yesterday.

Yesterday was *Simchat Torah* (the Festival of Rejoicing with the Torah). Somehow, I found myself celebrating the Festival in Tikvat Zion, a remarkably unremarkable Israeli town.

Graying stucco, peeling from grayer concrete, testify that this town isn't going to be another little New York, another Tel Aviv.

Anyway, yesterday I made my way to the town's municipal synagogue for *Simchat Torah*. There weren't a lot of people there. It's not a religious town. In fact the majority of those who were there were in their seventies and eighties. Most of them had all come to Israel after the war. Most of them had been in the camps.

The reason I'm writing all this is because something very strange happened there. They were all dancing around with the *Sifrei Torah* (Torah Scrolls), just like a normal *Simchat Torah*, singing and dancing and making a lot of noise. People making 'Lechaims.' Then all of a sudden, the singing and dancing stopped. A hush fell over the synagogue.

One of the old men went behind the holy Ark. He brought out a wooden plank about a meter and a half long and put it on the floor in the middle of the synagogue.

Slowly, as though summoned to some atavistic ritual, all the older members of the synagogue handed their Torah Scrolls to the youngsters, and

silently began to circle the plank on the floor. Round and round they went, round and round. In total silence.

It was all over in a couple of minutes. As perfunctorily as it had started, so it ended. The synagogue returned to a typical *Simchat Torah* scene just as though nothing had happened. Children on the shoulders of their fathers waving flags, singing, dancing...

As the man who had brought out the plank emerged from the back of the holy Ark after putting it away, I asked him about what I had just witnessed.

*“By reminding ourselves
of our suffering at the
height of our joy,
we experience an
entirely new dimension
to our rejoicing.”*

This is what he said to me:

“During the war, we were all in the same camp together. By a miracle, someone managed to smuggle in a *Sefer Torah*. It was just before *Simchat Torah*. We were very frightened, maybe the Nazis, *yemach shemam*, would find it. So we pulled up the wooden floor and hid it under the floorboards.

“When *Simchat Torah* came, the Nazis were everywhere; they must have known something was up. There was no way we could risk taking out the Torah from its hiding place, and we were afraid that the guard would hear us if we made a noise. So we just walked around and around the place on the floor under which the Torah was hidden. They came in once. We just pretended we were going to our bunks or out the door — until they left, and then we carried on circling.

“So now, every year, we celebrate that *Simchat Torah* in the camps the way you just saw.”

At the end of this week's *Parsha*, the Torah describes a brick of Sapphire. During the time when the Jewish People were slaves, this brick was before Hashem.

This brick was a memorial to the suffering they endured when they built the treasure cities of Egypt with bricks of mortar.

The 'essence of heavens' refers to the light and joy before Hashem when the people were redeemed.

Whenever the Torah describes the attributes of Hashem, it is so we may strive to emulate them.

Even when 'the essence of the heavens' was revealed — even in the light and joy of redemption — 'the brick of sapphire' of suffering was still there too.

By reminding ourselves of our suffering at the height of our joy, we experience an entirely new dimension to our rejoicing. Through this, we can understand on a deeper level the good that the Almighty bestows on us, and thank Him with a full heart.

UNDER THE EYE

“An eye for an eye...” (21:23)

The star of the movie '2001: A Space Odyssey' was a schizophrenic super-computer called HAL (Heuristically programmed Algorithmic computer). At the time, it was said that the name of the computer hinted to the computer giant IBM, because if you take the letters 'HAL' and substitute them with the letters which follow them in the alphabet, you get 'IBM'.

Actually, HAL is a pale plagiarism of the real thing.

Our Sages teach us that when the Torah says "An eye for an eye," it means that if a person blinds someone, he has to pay financial compensation. It does

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PARSHA OVERVIEW

The Jewish People receive a series of laws concerning social justice. Topics include: Proper treatment of Jewish servants; a husband's obligations to his wife; penalties for hitting people and cursing parents, judges, and leaders; financial responsibilities for physically damaging someone or his property, either by oneself or by one's animate or inanimate property, or by pitfalls that one created; payments for theft; not returning an object that one accepted responsibility to guard; the right to self-defense for a person being robbed.

Other topics include: Prohibitions against seduction; practicing witchcraft, bestiality and sacrifices to idols. The Torah warns us to treat the convert, widow and orphan with dignity, and to avoid lying. Lending and usury is forbidden, and the rights over collateral are limited. Payment of obligations to the

Temple should not be delayed, and the Jewish People must be holy, even concerning food.

The Torah teaches the proper conduct for judges in court proceedings. The commandments of Shabbos and the Sabbatical year are outlined. Three times a year — Pesach, Shavuos and Succos — we are told to come to the Temple. The Torah concludes this listing of Laws with a Law of kashrus—not to mix milk and meat.

Hashem promises that He will lead the Jewish People to Israel, helping them conquer the nations that live there, and tells them that by fulfilling His commandments they will bring blessings to their nation. The people promise to do and listen to everything that Hashem says. Moshe writes the Book of the Covenant, and reads it to the people. Moshe ascends the mountain for 40 days in order to receive the two Tablets of the Covenant.

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SING My SOUL INSIGHTS INTO THE SHABBOS ZEMIRO

YOM ZEH MECHUBAD "THIS DAY IS HONORED"

*"Therefore shall each man
say kiddush on his wine"*

There are two opinions in the Talmud as to which should be said first in the *kiddush* of Shabbos, the blessing on the wine or the blessing on the day. We follow the ruling of Beis Hillel and first make the blessing on the wine.

In addition to the explicit reasons

offered by Beis Hillel for this order it has been suggested that there is another unexpressed one. Before a person pronounces a blessing on food or drink, say our Sages (*Berachos* 35b), it is considered the property of Hashem. Only after a Jew makes the blessing on the wine does it become "his wine" with which he can properly sanctify the Shabbos with his *kiddush*.

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PARSHA Q&A ?

1. Did Rashi write "Shulchan Aruch"? (hint: a trick question)
2. What mitzva in this *parsha* involves a *mezuzah*? (hint: another trick question)
3. What special mitzva does the Torah give to the master of a Hebrew maidservant?
4. What is the penalty for striking one's father or mother and causing a wound?
5. 'A' intentionally hits 'B'. As a result, B is in critical condition, dangerously close to death. Besides any possible monetary payments, what happens to A?
6. What is the penalty for someone who wants to murder a particular person, but accidentally kills another person instead?
7. A slave goes free if his master knocks out one of the slave's teeth. What type of teeth do not qualify for this rule? Why?
8. An ox gores another ox. What is the maximum the owner of the damaging ox must pay, even if his animal had gored twice previously?
9. From where in this week's *parsha* can the importance of work be demonstrated?
10. What is meant by the words "If the sun shone on him"?
11. A person is given an object for safe-keeping. Later, he swears it was stolen. Witnesses come and say that, in fact, he is the one who stole it. How much must he pay?
12. While a person is borrowing his employee's car, the car is struck by lightning. How much must he pay his employee for the damage to the car?
13. Why is lending money at interest called 'biting'?
14. Non-kosher meat is preferentially fed to dogs. Why?
15. Which verse forbids listening to slander?
16. What constitutes a majority-ruling in a capital case?
17. How is the festival of *Shavuot* referred to in this week's *parsha*?
18. How many prohibitions are transgressed when cooking meat and milk together?
19. What was written in the *Sefer HaBris* which Moshe wrote prior to the giving of the Torah?
20. Who was 'Efras'? Who was her husband? Who was her son?

BONUS QUESTION?

Reuven and Shimon are standing in front of a Jewish court. Reuven says to Shimon: "You owe me 100 dollars." Shimon answers: "No, it was only 50 dollars." In this case, the Torah obligates Shimon to swear that he is telling the truth. But why must he swear? Isn't it obvious that Shimon is telling the truth? If he were a liar, he would have denied the *entire* claim! Then he would have paid zero, and been free of any Torah oath!

I DIDN'T KNOW THAT!

"The beginning of your land's fruits you shall bring to the house of Hashem your G-d; don't cook a kid in its mother's milk." (23:19) What's the connection between the first half of this verse and the second? A renowned Rabbi once explained as follows: Bring your 'fruits,' your children to the house of Hashem when they are young. That is to say, bring them to the *Beis Medrash* and teach them the Torah. And if you think, "My kid is too young to learn Torah. He needs more maternal pampering." To this the Torah says "Don't cook a *kid* in his mother's milk."

• Heard from Rabbi Betzalel Rudinsky

HAFTORAH: YISHAYAHU 66:1-24

SHABBOS-ROSH CHODESH

When Rosh Chodesh fall on Shabbos, the regular Haftorah is replaced by a special Haftorah — the last chapter of the Book of Yishayahu (Isaiah).

This chapter was chosen because of its penultimate verse which links Shabbos and Rosh Chodesh: "And it shall be that, from New Moon to New Moon, and from Shabbos to Shabbos, all flesh shall come and prostrate themselves before Me, said Hashem." (66:23) This verse is also repeated after the end of the reading.

HAPPY BIRTH DAY

"Shall I bring (a woman) to the birth stool and not have her give birth?" (66:9)

When we look at the situation today, it's easy to despair.

The strident metallic clang of materialism and selfishness seem to swamp out the message of the Torah and its People. The sensuous siren call of the media surrounds us all with a CD world of illusion. Virtual Reality masquerades as the real thing.

The world seems to be deaf to morality, to modesty, to the values that are rooted in the Torah. The motto of the time is "Let it all hang out." In a world where there is nothing to be ashamed of, nothing brings shame, and thus anything is possible. And what is possible — happens.

Those who stand for the eternal values of our People are despised as fundamentalists and primitive barbarians. Everything has been turned upside down.

The prophets speak in many places about the coming of *Mashiach* in terms of childbirth.

Someone who is ignorant of the process of childbirth and sees for the first time a woman in labor would be convinced that she is about to die. And the closer the actual moment of the birth, the stronger that impression would become.

And then, within a couple of minutes, seeming tragedy has turned into the greatest joy. A new life has entered the world.

This is the way *Mashiach* will come. The worse things become, the more painful the birth pangs, the nearer is his coming. Until, like a mother who has delivered, all the tears and pain will be forgotten in the great joy of a new life.

WEEKLY DAF

BECHOROS 25 - 31

ABOVE SUSPICION

The male first born of a kosher animal is a *bechor* which must be given to the *kohen* who offers it as a sacrifice and eats its flesh. If this *bechor* has a blemish which disqualifies it from being a sacrifice, the *kohen* is relieved from the responsibility of sacrifice, and can slaughter it and eat its flesh as he would any other non-sacrificial animal.

In order to determine whether the *bechor* indeed has such a blemish, the *kohen* would have to submit it for examination to a rabbinical expert, who would rule whether the condition was just a temporary one and non-disqualifying, or a permanent, disqualifying one.

This expert was not permitted to receive payment for his inspection, lest he be influenced to rule in the *kohen's* behalf, and if he did accept such payment the *kohen* could not slaughter it as a non-sacrificial animal because of this suspicion.

The only exception made was in the case of an expert who was on the same spiritual level as Eyla of Yavneh, who was considered too saintly to be suspect of such influence. The Sages permitted him to accept a fee for his inspection, but insisted that it be paid to him whether he ruled the animal to be qualified as a sacrifice or disqualified.

Although the *kohen* paying the fee

benefited only from a ruling of disqualification, the Sages insisted that the fee be paid in all cases, so that people should not suspect Eyla of ruling in favor of the *kohen* in order to collect his fee. But even Eyla was not entitled to a fee if the *kohen* brought the same animal to him another time for an inspection, because it might arouse suspicion that his initial ruling that the animal was still qualified to be a sacrifice was motivated by an interest in collecting a fee on a subsequent visit. Tosefos adds that there was also no suspicion that a ruling disqualifying the animal was influenced by his desire to avoid subsequent unprofitable inspections, because no one would suspect him of permitting something forbidden for such a reason.

• *Bechoros 29a*

THE LIPS THAT MOVE

When Rabbi Sheshes learned that his attendant, Rabbi Eidi, stated in the Yeshiva some words of Torah he had heard from him, without quoting them in his name, he was upset.

The reason for Rabbi Sheshes's desire to be quoted is based on an explanation offered by Rabbi Yehuda in the name of Rav of the request made by King David (*Tehillim* 61:5) "May I dwell in Your tent in the worlds."

Can a man simultaneously live in both this world and the World to

Come? David's prayer was that words of Torah should be repeated in his name after his death, for when the teachings of a deceased Torah sage are repeated in his name, his lips move in the grave.

Rashi explains that this movement of the lips is considered as a virtual experience of life, and thus achieves the goal of living in both worlds at the same time. Some of the classical commentators are reluctant to explain this movement of a bodily part in the grave in a literal fashion and prefer to relate to it as a purely spiritual experience of the soul.

Maharsha, however, offers an approach allowing for literal interpretation of this statement. Human speech is soul energy generated by bodily organs. Virtuous speech, such as words of Torah, creates a spiritual energy. When those words are repeated in the name of their originator, this energy activates its creators in both worlds — the soul in the World to Come and the organs of speech in this world, even through they are in the grave.

A passage in *Shir Hashirim* (7:10) is cited, which compares the Torah scholar to a pit of ripened grapes about to be pressed for wine. Just as placing a finger on such grapes immediately causes wine to flow from them, so do the lips of the Torah scholar lying in his grave begin to move when the words of Torah quoted in his name activate them.

• *Bechoros 31b*

continued from page one

PARSHA INSIGHTS

not mean that they are punished by having his own eyesight removed.

This is hinted to in the Torah. The literal Hebrew translation of the phrase "An eye for an eye" is "An eye **under** an eye." Why does the Torah use such an unusual expression here?

In the Hebrew *alefbet*, the letters which follow the letters of the word 'ayin' (eye) spell 'kesef' (money).

In other words, if you take the Hebrew letters which are **under** the word 'eye' you get 'money'.

Therefore, the 'eye' which is '**under**' the 'eye' is 'money.' Financial reimbursement is the eye which is 'under' the eye.

RING AROUND THE COLLAR

"When a man will steal..." (21:37)

Jews aren't perfect. But their crime statistics are very low.

And when Jews commit crimes, they are usually in secret rather than openly. Mugging is statistically insignificant amongst Jews, whereas 'white-collar' crimes such as embezzlement and tax fraud occur with more frequency.

Why should that be?

The Torah states that a burglar who steals covertly is '*sold in his thievery*,' whereas a thief who comes brazenly to steal is not sold.

The essence of the Jewish People is that they are not only the *Eternal* People, but they are also the *Internal* People.

The Jews belong to the World of the Inside, the World of Freedom. It was for this reason that they *had* to be

redeemed from Egypt, because on the mystical level, they are not part of the World of Captivity, the World of the Outside.

A thief who goes about his trade openly is indeed performing a crime, but he is not using and distorting this unique quality of the Jewish People.

However, someone who steals in secret, who burgles or cheats on his tax, is employing and distorting that elevated quality which is the essence of the Jewish People — the World of Freedom, the World of the Inside.

Sources:

• "A Brick of Sapphire - A Plank of Wood": Rashi, Rabbi Yerucham Levovitz, Zale Newman, Moshe Averick

• "Under The Eye": *The Gaon of Vilna*

• "Ring Around The Collar": *Shem MiShmuel*

GUILTY OF JILTING?

L wrote via the Internet:

What does Orthodox Judaism say about how one is supposed to treat their future in-laws when the in-laws are not religious and have stated that they dislike you?

How is their son supposed to act when they tell him to either cancel the wedding or be disowned. Isn't the groom supposed to go against his parents and marry the girl?

In this case, the guy called and said his father says the wedding is off. He never said "I want to call the wedding off" just that "My father forbids me." His parents were upset that their son was becoming religious, and for a while they tried to get him to stop being religious. So how should he have responded to his parents when he became engaged? What about his obligation to me? Thanks.

Dear L,

The fact that someone dislikes you can certainly be uncomfortable, especially if they are your future in-laws. The best thing is to tactfully avoid contact whenever possible.

However, you must treat everyone, whether they like you or not,

and whether they are religious or not, with dignity and respect.

This is even more true for in-laws. Before the wedding, in-laws deserve respect as anyone does. But after the wedding, they are entitled to even more respect, similar to the respect which you show to your very own parents.

If, by some chance, he changes his mind and decides to marry you, it should be with the understanding that you will live far away from his parents, and that he will show his first loyalty to you. As the Torah says, "Therefore a man should leave his father and his mother, and cleave to his wife..."

You asked: "Isn't the groom supposed to go against his parents and marry the girl?" A child doesn't need to obey his parents if they protest against his choice of marriage partner. However, it's not forbidden for him to do so.

Let me ask you a question: Does this guy really want to marry you? Or is he just using his parents as an excuse? And if he really does want to marry you but is so weak and spineless that he lets himself be intimidated by his father, are you sure he's the type of guy that you want for a husband?

Depending on how 'official' the engagement was, he may have certain financial obligations to you. Did you have an engagement party? Send out invitations? Who paid? In some cases, the party who cancels the engagement is required to pay expenses to the wronged party, plus a fine for embarrassment caused.

The following incident shows the seriousness of keeping one's word in such matters. Once a young man and woman swore to marry each other. "Who will bear witness to our oath?" they asked. Just then, they noticed a weasel passing a nearby hole in the ground. "This weasel and this hole will be our witnesses," they said.

Years passed, and the woman was faithful to the oath. The man, however, married someone else and had a son. Along came a weasel and bit the son, and he died. They had another son who fell into a hole and died. "Why are these strange things happening to us?" said his wife. Suddenly, he remembered his oath and he told the whole story to his wife. "If so, divorce me and go marry her." And so he did.

Sources:

- Rema Yoreh Deah 240:25
- Bereishit 2:24
- Tosefot in Ta'anit 8a

YIDDLE RIDDLE

Halachically, what do the following dates have in common?

- 22 Cheshvan
- 3 January
- 15 Iyar

Answer next week...

• Thanks to Saul Behr
<SBEHR@MCKQ.CO.ZA>

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PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

1. 21:1 - Yes! Rashi writes that Moshe was commanded to present the Torah clearly to the Jewish People, like a 'shulchan' (table) which is 'aruch' (set) and ready for the meal.
2. 21:6 - If a Hebrew slave desires to remain enslaved, it is a mitzva to pierce his ear next to a door post *mezuzah*.
3. 21:8,9 - The Torah mandates a special mitzva to marry her.
4. 21:15 - Death by strangulation.
5. 21:19 - He is put in jail until 'B' recovers or dies.
6. 21:23 - One opinion: The murderer deserves the death penalty. Another opinion: The murderer is exempt from capital punishment, but must compensate the heirs of his victim.
7. 21:26 - Baby teeth, because they grow back.
8. 21:35 - The full value of his own animal.
9. 21:37 - From the 'five-times' penalty for stealing an ox and then selling it or slaughtering it. This heavy fine can be seen as a punishment for preventing the owner from using his ox to plow his field.
10. 22:2 - If it's as clear as the sun that the thief has no intent to kill.
11. 22:8 - Double value of the object denied.
12. 22:14 - Nothing.
13. 22:24 - Interest on a loan is like a poisonous snake bite. Just as the poison is not noticeable at first, but soon overwhelms the person, so too interest is barely noticeable until suddenly it accumulates to an overwhelming sum.
14. 22:30 - As 'reward' for their silence during the plague of the first born (*Shmos* 11:7).
15. 23:1 - Targum Onkelos translates "Don't bear a false report" as "Don't receive a false report."
16. 23:2 - A simple majority is needed for an acquittal. A majority of two is needed for a ruling of guilty.
17. 23:16 - *Chag HaKatzir*, Festival of Reaping.
18. 23:19 - One. There are three prohibitions involving the combining of milk and meat. One is violated by cooking.
19. 24:4,7 - The Torah starting from *Bereshis* until the giving of the Torah, and the commandment given at *Mara*.
20. 24:14 - Miriam, wife of Calev, mother of Chur.

BONUS ANSWER!

Most people aren't brazen enough to lie straight into their creditor's face. Therefore, even a liar will find it difficult to deny the entire claim. But by admitting to part of the claim, the liar can salve his conscience, thinking, "I don't have enough money to pay right now. I'll admit to part of the claim now, and later when I'm able, I'll pay the rest." To prevent this evasive tactic, the Torah obligates him to swear.

• *Bava Metzia* 3

RECOMMENDED READING LIST

RAMBAN

21:1-2 Parallel with Ten Commandments
21:6 (first part) Divine Role in Human Justice

21:15 The Severity of Cursing One's Parents
21:29-30 Death Penalty and Ransom
22:6 (first part) Two kinds of *Shomrim*
22:20-22 Prosecutor of the Helpless

22:30 Holiness of Kashrus
23:25 Blessings and Destruction
24:1 Matan Torah Chronology

SEFER HACHINUCH

42 Human Kindness
43 Divine Kindness
47 Capital Punishment
50 Penalty for Anger

52 Despising Destruction
62 The Danger of Sorcery
66 Why Hashem Creates the Poor
70 Blasphemy
71 Respect for Authority
73 *Kashrus*
78 Antidote to Anarchy
84 *Shemita*
93 Relations with Heathens

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