

O H R N E T

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PARSHA INSIGHTS

A MULTITUDE OF MITZVOT

“...and you shall not break a bone of it (the Pesach offering)” (12:46)

In 1940 during the Second World War, my mother and her whole family were evacuated from London to Henley-on-Thames because of the ‘blitz’.

They were lucky. Often families were divided, with some children being evacuated to places as far away as Canada; while other children stayed with their parents in the relative safety of the English countryside.

One can well imagine the tremendous outpouring of emotion that took place when the war ended and these families were reunited. But after the initial overwhelming emotion, it became clear that the bond between the parents who had stayed with their children was far closer than their relationship with those children from whom they had been separated for over four years.

We think that because we love our children, we give to them. The reverse, however, is also true. Because we give to our children, we love them.

Every time you get up in the middle of the night to get your child a glass of water or to change his diaper, you are giving, and that giving leads to love.

This is the reason that children rarely love their parents as much as the parents love them. The parents are usually the givers and the children, the takers

People often say to me, “I would love to have your faith! But I just don’t feel what you feel.”

A person doesn’t just give to that which he loves, he also loves that which he gives to.

When you give to G-d by doing what G-d wants you to do, it’s the spiritual equivalent of getting up in the middle of the night to give your child a glass of water. The action of giving evokes love in the giver.

That is the reason why G-d gave us so many *mitzvot*.

For surely if we just wanted a memorial of the Exodus, then it would suffice to eat a little matza, or read the story of the Exodus at the Seder.

But G-d gives us a multitude of *mitzvot* that so that we will be deeply affected emotionally, and our hearts will be drawn to a powerful love for the Creator.

• Sources: based on *The Sefer HaChinuch* and Rabbi E. Dessler, *zatzal*

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PARSHA OVERVIEW

G-d tells Moshe that He is hardening Pharaoh's heart so that through miraculous plagues the world will know for all time that He is the one true G-d. Pharaoh is warned about the plague of locusts and is told how severe it will be. Pharaoh agrees to release only the men, but Moshe insists that everyone must go. During the plague, Pharaoh calls for Moshe and Aharon to remove the locusts, and he admits he has sinned. G-d ends the plague but hardens Pharaoh's heart, and again Pharaoh fails to free the Jews. The country, except for the Jewish People, is then engulfed in a palpable darkness. Pharaoh calls for Moshe and tells him to take all the Jews out of Egypt, but to leave their flocks behind. Moshe tells him that not only will they take their own flocks, but Pharaoh must add his own too. Moshe tells Pharaoh that G-d is going to bring one more plague, the death of the first-born, and then the Jews will leave Egypt. G-d

again hardens Pharaoh's heart, and Pharaoh warns Moshe that if he sees him again, Moshe will be put to death. G-d tells Moshe that the month of Nissan will be the chief month. The Jewish people are commanded to take a sheep on the 10th of the month and guard it until the 14th. The sheep is then to be slaughtered as a Pesach offering, its blood put on their door-posts, and its roasted meat eaten. The blood on the door-post will be a sign that their homes will be passed-over when G-d strikes the first-born of Egypt. The Jewish People are told to memorialize this day as the Exodus from Egypt by never eating *chametz* on Pesach. Moshe relays G-d's commands, and the Jewish People fulfill them flawlessly. G-d sends the final plague, killing the first-born, and Pharaoh sends the Jews out of Egypt. G-d tells Moshe and Aharon the laws concerning the Pesach sacrifice, *pidyon haben* (redemption of the first-born son) and *tefillin*.

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PROMISE AND CONDITION

“When G-d will bring you to the land of the Canaanites, as He swore to you and your forefathers, and he will have given it to you, then you shall set apart every firstborn to G-d.” (*Shmot* 13:11)

This command mentioned in this week's Torah portion is seen by some of our Sages as a promise and a condition. Our ancestors were told that if they fulfill this command even

while they are in the wilderness en route to Eretz Yisrael, they would gain the merit of fulfilling it when they entered their promised land.

This relationship between promise and condition is something worth learning from in regard to our own generation's privilege of living in Eretz Yisrael. The promise of the Promised Land has a condition of fulfilling G-d's commands and thus insuring the security of Israel forever.

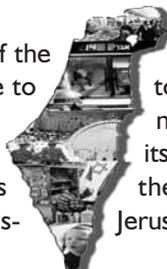
LOVE OF THE LAND - THE PLACES

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

DOME OF ACCOUNTS

Jerusalem is described by King David as “the joy of the world” and every effort was made in days of yore to preserve that atmosphere.

Outside of the holy city was a structure known as *kipah shel cheshbonot* – The Dome of Accounts. Its purpose was to provide a place for residents of and vis-



itors to Jerusalem to do their accounting in order to determine whether they had suffered any loss of money. If such a discovery took place in Jerusalem itself, it was felt that it would dampen the spirit of the loser and compromise his enjoyment of Jerusalem.

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PARSHA Q&A ?

1. What was Pharaoh's excuse for not releasing the Jewish children?
2. How did the locusts in the time of Moshe differ from those in the days of Yoel?
3. How did the first three days of darkness differ from the last three?
4. When the Jews asked the Egyptians for gold and silver vessels, the Egyptians were unable to deny ownership of such vessels. Why?
5. *Makat bechorot* took place at *exactly* midnight. Why did Moshe say it would take place at *approximately* midnight?
6. Why did the first-born of the animals die?
7. How did Moshe show respect to Pharaoh when he warned him about the aftermath of the plague of the first-born?
8. G-d told Moshe, "...so that My wonders will be multiplied" (11:9). What three wonders was G-d referring to?
9. Why did G-d command the mitzvah of Rosh Chodesh to Aharon, and not only to Moshe?
10. Up to what age is an animal fit to be a Pesach offering?
11. Prior to the Exodus from Egypt, what two *mitzvot* involving blood did G-d give to the Jewish People?
12. Rashi gives two explanations of the word "*Pasachti*." What are they?
13. Why were the Jews told to stay indoors during *makat bechorot*?
14. What was Pharaoh screaming as he ran from door to door the night of *makat bechorot*?
15. Why did Pharaoh ask Moshe to bless him?
16. Why did the Jewish People carry their matzah on their shoulders rather than have their animals carry it?
17. Who comprised the *erev rav* (mixed multitude)?
18. What three historical events occurred on the 15th of Nissan, prior to the event of the Exodus from Egypt?
19. What is the source of the "milk and honey" found in *Eretz Yisrael*?
20. The only non-kosher animal whose first-born is redeemed is the donkey. What did the donkeys do to "earn" this distinction?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

1. 10:11 - Since children don't bring sacrifices there was no need for them to go.
2. 10:14 - The plague brought by Moshe was composed of one species of locust, whereas the plague in the days of Yoel was composed of many species.
3. 10:22 - During the first three days the Egyptians couldn't see. During the last three days they couldn't move.
4. 10:22 - During the plague of darkness the Jews could see and they searched for and found the Egyptians' vessels.
5. 11:4 - If Moshe said the plague would begin exactly at midnight, the Egyptians might miscalculate and accuse Moshe of being a fake.
6. 11:5 - Because the Egyptians worshiped them as gods, and when G-d punishes a nation He also punishes its gods.
7. 11:8 - Moshe warned that "All these servants of yours will come down to me" when, in fact, it was Pharaoh himself who actually came running to Moshe.
8. 11:9 - The plague of the first-born, the splitting of the sea, the drowning of the Egyptian soldiers.
9. 12:1 - As reward for his efforts in bringing about the plagues.
10. 12:5 - One year.
11. 12:6 - Circumcision and *Korban Pesach*.
12. 12:13 - "I had mercy" and "I skipped."
13. 12:22 - Since it was a night of destruction, it was not safe for anyone to leave the protected premises of his home.
14. 12:31 - "Where does Moshe live? Where does Aharon live?"
15. 12:32 - So he wouldn't die, for he himself was a first-born.
16. 12:34 - Because the commandment of matzah was dear to them.
17. 12:38 - People from other nations who became converts.
18. 12:41 - The angels came to promise that Sarah would have a son, Yitzchak was born, and the exile of the "covenant between the parts" was decreed.
19. 13:5 - Goat milk, date and fig honey.
20. 13:13 - They helped the Jews by carrying silver and gold out of Egypt.

BAVA BATRA 156 - 162

- When a minor must be physically examined to determine whether he is an adult
- Rabbi Elazar's dissenting view re transaction of a dying man
- Three mysteries of who died first when the house caved in
- The paradox of a son confiscating property sold by his father
- A son-in-law's inability to certify his father-in-law's signature
- A son's inability to pass on to his half-brothers an inheritance from his mother when he is no longer alive
- The two kinds of documents
- The number of witnesses in a "tied document"
- How to avoid forgery of a document
- What constitutes adequate signature of a witness
- The "bottom line" of a document

THE AIR OF ERETZ YISRAEL

“I must conclude that the air of Eretz Yisrael makes one wise.” This was the explanation given by Rabbi Zeira for changing the halachic position he had maintained in Babylon when he reached Eretz Yisrael. That air caused him to reexamine his previous position and arrive at the truth.

What is there about the air of Eretz Yisrael that makes one wise?

Maharsha states that when G-d instructed Moshe to ascend the mountain and gaze upon the Promised Land

(*Devarim* 32:49), that gaze instilled in the air of Eretz Yisrael the power to increase wisdom.

In his commentary on *Chumash* Rabbi Ovadia Seforno writes that since the waters of the Great Deluge did not reach Eretz Yisrael, its air was not affected as were other lands.

The spiritual impact of Eretz Yisrael on everyone received testimony from Rudolph, crown prince of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, who reported that when he reached the gates of Jerusalem he was overcome by a powerful superhuman feeling of holiness.

• *Bava Batra 158b*

What the SAGES Say

“The air of Eretz Yisrael makes one wise.”

• *Rabbi Zeira - Bava Batra 158b*

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THE CROWNS OF TORAH

From: Stuart

Dear Rabbi,

Is it possible nowadays to gain understanding in Torah as the Jews did when they received the Torah at Sinai? Or is that something particular to that generation alone?

Dear Stuart,

It is nearly impossible for most people to attain the level of Torah understanding as those of the generation in which the Torah was given.

Remember that the generation of the Exodus was miraculously elevated from physical and spiritual oppression to liberation. In addition, they subsisted on the most potent “soul food” there ever was – the manna. And they were surrounded by clouds that permeated their daily lives with G-d’s glory. Concurrently, they prepared themselves intensively during the seven weeks between leaving Egypt and receiving the Torah with unparalleled religious passion and fervor.

So as far as G-d’s influence and their own readiness are concerned, those were very special and unique times.

The Midrash explains that when G-d decided to give the Torah, He approached all the nations with the proposition: “Do you want to receive the Torah?” Each nation effectively replied, “It depends. What’s written in it?” When G-d enumerated the obligations of the Torah, each nation in turn declined by replying, “If that’s what’s in it, it’s not for us”. Then G-d approached the Jews: “Would you like to receive the Torah?” The Jews replied, “We shall observe and we shall listen!” – “*na’aseh v’nishma*”. No questions asked.

The Talmud (Shabbat 88a) asserts that when the Jews unconditionally agreed to accept the Torah, preceding their commitment to observe before hearing the reasons and

explanations for the commandments, G-d exclaimed, “Who revealed this secret to them, which only the ministering angels know?” And in the merit of this two-phrased, unconditional commitment, 600,000 angels descended from Heaven and conferred two crowns on the head of each Jew – one on account of “we shall observe” and one on account of “we shall hear”.

Of course, these were not literal crowns, but special “spheres” of influence that enlightened their minds and enabled them to perceive the depths of the Torah.

Unfortunately, the Talmud describes, when the Jews transgressed, twice as many angels were sent to dislodge these crowns and the Jews were left dejected and spiritually bareheaded: “So the children of Israel divested themselves of their crowns from Mount Horeb [Sinai]” (Ex. 33:6).

The Zohar discusses what happened to these crowns, seeing as once the Torah was given and brought into the world, it cannot be returned. The answer given is that all the crowns were given to Moses, enabling him to attain the highest possible understanding of the Torah.

Is there any hope that the Jews will ever regain these crowns? Interestingly enough, the Zohar states that Moses, in his great love for the Jewish people, returned the crowns to them “behind the back” as it were, and they’re there for the taking to whomever wholeheartedly and unconditionally accepts the Torah from Moses our Teacher. Every person in every generation, then, according to his or her degree of “*na’aseh v’nishma*”, is privy to regaining a certain degree of Torah understanding as those who received it at Sinai.

This is true regarding the righteous of each generation in general, and especially applicable to us on Shabbat, which is the actual day on which the Torah was originally given! It’s for this reason that even if a person has little opportunity to learn Torah during the week, he should make a special effort to learn on Shabbat – and the value of Torah study during the week, as great as it is, does not compare to that on Shabbat.

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RETURN OF THE LONG WAIT

Question: As a regular reader of your column in Ohrnet I was very pleased with your piece in the Shmot edition entitled "The Long Wait" which dealt with the discomfort caused to wedding guests by the long time spent by the chatan and kallah in the *yichud* room before giving them an opportunity to dance in their honor. Some of my friends have criticized me, however, for approving of your attitude because, they argue, the wedding is for the sake of the newlyweds and they are entitled to take their time. What is the

right thing to do in responding to them?

Answer: Tell them that it is heartening to know that there are people with such sensitivity. But point out that you think it would be a wonderful way to start a marriage by showing consideration for the guests – a sense of caring for others which will hopefully carry over into properly caring for each other.

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY _____

PERFECT TIMING

What perfect timing! This was the reaction of the doctor in the hospital who had just received a unique gift from one of his longtime patients.

The gift was a beautiful wooden plaque upon which was inscribed in Hebrew and English the "Physician's Prayer" attributed to Maimonides. This seemed to be the ideal gift to a beloved doctor, something he could proudly display in

his office.

But the doctor had other ideas.

"I appreciate your gift," he said, "but I already have one like it. With your permission I would like to present it to a young fellow who is finishing his internship this very day."

The patient also appreciated the perfect timing and gladly consented to the gesture.

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