

OHR NET

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PARSHA INSIGHTS

MEANS TO BE A MENSCH

“...and let them take for Me a portion, from every man whose heart motivates him, you shall take my portion.” (25:1)

“**B**eing a mensch” is one of those untranslatable Yiddish phrases which define what it means to be Jewish. A few years ago an El Al flight to London was carrying a young child in need of an urgent and critical operation. Apart from the child’s medical problem, there was another problem: money. The parents had barely enough to cover the cost of the flight to London, which involved the purchase of a whole row of seats to accommodate the stricken child and his medical support systems.

During the flight, a religious Jew who was traveling in first class came to the back of the plane to pray with a *minyan*. On his way back to his seat he went over to the father of the child and asked how the child was doing. In the course of the conversation the father mentioned he had no idea how he was going to be able to cover the cost of the operation. He was already way over his head in debt with the medical expenses that he had already incurred. He would need nothing short of a small miracle.

Without further ado the man took his leave, walked back to the first class cabin, pulled out his hat, and proceeded to tour the aisles of the first-class cabin collecting for the operation. In approximately ten minutes his hat contained checks to the value of some \$100,000, sufficient for both the operation and the flights and all the medical expenses to date.

If Jews excel at anything, it’s *tzedaka* — charity. “Charity,” however, really doesn’t translate the word *tzedaka*. *Tzedaka* means “righteousness.” Unfortunately as we live in a largely selfish and unrighteous world, the word righteousness usually finds itself being used with the reflexive pronoun “self” as in “self-righteous.” However, “righteousness” is no more than “rightness,” doing what is right. A Jew gives *tzedaka*, not because it’s charity, not because he is charitable, but because that’s what’s right. The definition of what is right is what G-d wants. Thus ultimately we give *tzedaka* not because our hearts reach out to the plight of others but because that’s what G-d wants from us.

“...and let them take for Me a portion, from every man whose heart motivates him, you shall take my portion.”

There are three kinds of *tzedaka*, and they are all hinted at in this verse.

The highest level is “...let them take for Me a portion...” Here the giving is “for Me” — because that’s what G-d wants us to do. The second level is when we give *tzedaka* out of the kindness of our hearts because we cannot bear to see the suffering of the poor, “...from every man whose heart motivates him.” Noble as it is, this is not the highest level of giving.

And the third level is the person who would really prefer not to give at all, but he is too embarrassed to say no. About him the verse says, “...you shall take my portion.”

No one will ever know from which of these groups were the passengers in that first-class El Al cabin, but one thing is clear: whatever a Jew’s motives, he knows what it means to be a *mensch*.

• Source: *Nachalat Chamisha in Iturei Torah*

PARSHA OVERVIEW

G-d commands Moshe to build a Mishkan (Sanctuary) and supplies him with detailed instructions. The Children of Israel are asked to contribute precious metals and stones, fabrics, skins, oil and spices. In the Mishkan’s outer courtyard are an altar for the burnt offerings and a laver for washing. The Tent of Meeting is divided by a curtain into two chambers. The outer chamber is accessible only to the *kohanim*, the descendants of Aharon. This contains

the table of showbreads, the *menorah*, and the golden altar for incense. The innermost chamber, the Holy of Holies, may be entered only by the *kohen gadol*, and only once a year, on Yom Kippur. Here is the ark that held the Ten Commandments inscribed on the two tablets of stone that G-d gave to the Jewish nation on Mount Sinai. All of the utensils and vessels, as well as the construction of the Mishkan, are described in great detail.

YOU CAN TAKE IT WITH YOU

With all due credit to the efforts of Finance Minister Binyamin Netanyahu to rescue Israel's economy with his austerity budget, there has been sharp criticism of this switch of government policy to a capitalistic orientation with less concern for the underprivileged.

Consideration of the needy is, however, not only to be expected from the government but from individuals as well. A budget which causes, as its critics say, "the rich to get richer and the poor to get poorer", creates a dangerous social gap which can only be alleviated by the rich doing more to help the poor.

In this week's Torah chapter there is mention of the table which stood in the Mishkan sanctuary. This table,

with the twelve showbreads displayed upon it, represented the sustenance which Heaven provided for the entire universe. It was also a model for the table in each home on which a prosperous host could provide for his needy guests. Rabbi Bachya, one of the great Torah commentators, mentions in this regard the custom of righteous Jews who ordered that the caskets in which they would be buried be made from the wood of the table on which they fed the needy. This, he notes, was an expression of their conviction that man takes nothing else with him when he leaves this world but the good deeds he performed.

What a timely lesson for both government officials and individual Jews – a lesson beginning with the Mishkan and relevant to Israel forever.

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

WHAT ARE "PHYLACTERIES"?

"I haven't missed a day in the last six years." This was the proud boast of a recent visitor to Ohr Somayach in Jerusalem as he spoke of his dedication to the mitzvah of tefillin which he discovered in the middle years of his life in a most interesting way.

A professional musician for most of his adult life, he was overjoyed at receiving front row tickets to a Broadway musical from a close relative who was a member of the cast. It turned out that this production had a pronounced anti-Semitic and anti-religious flavor. As he watched a song and dance skit poking fun at Jews wearing phylacteries his blood began to boil. Although married out of his faith and even

unaware of what phylacteries were, his Jewish soul rebelled against this sacrilegious satire and he decided to do something about it. After the show he called a rabbi with whom he had been studying in his quest to return to his Jewish roots and asked him to purchase for him the most expensive set of phylacteries, whatever they were.

"You mean tefillin," explained the rabbi, adding that a male adult Jew is obliged to put them on every day except for Shabbat and Holidays.

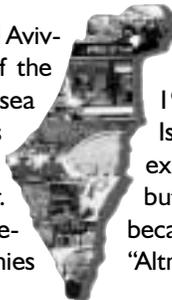
This did not weaken his resolve, and his commitment to tefillin eventually led him to a full Jewish life-style and marriage to a fine religious woman.

LOVE OF THE LAND - THE NAMES

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

TEL AVIV - THE GATEWAY TO ERETZ YISRAEL

The emblem of this city, officially known as Tel Aviv-Jaffa, is a lighthouse and a gate, symbols of the city's historic role as the gateway from the sea to Eretz Yisrael. Jaffa ("Yafeh" in Hebrew means "beautiful") is mentioned as a port in the Book of Yonah, which is read at Mincha on Yom Kippur. Jews began returning to this port in 1840 and subsequent immigration led to the development of colonies



in the area.

The climax of this growth was the establishment in 1908 of Tel Aviv, the major urban center of modern Israel. Tel Aviv was the name of a city in Babylon where exiles from Eretz Yisrael had gathered (*Yechezkel 3:15*) but its Zionist founders gave the new city this name because it was the title of the Hebrew translation of Herzl's "Altneuland".

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PARSHA Q&A ? _____

1. How many types of items were the Jews to donate?
2. The donation of silver for the Mishkan differed from the donation of the other items. How?
3. What property do *techelet* and *argaman* share that *orot eilim m'adamim* do not share?
4. What property do the above three share that *shesh* and *orot techashim* do not share?
5. Onkelos translates "*tachash*" as "*sasgona*." Why?
6. What kind of trees did Yaakov plant in Egypt?
7. Describe two uses of: 1) oil 2) spices 3) jewels.
8. The *aron* was made with three boxes, one inside the other. Exactly how tall was the outer box?
9. Why is the Torah referred to as "testimony"?
10. What did the faces of the *keruvim* resemble?
11. On what day of the week was the *lechem hapanim* baked?
12. What does *miksha* mean?
13. What was the purpose of the *menorah's* *gevi'im* (cups)?
14. How did Moshe know the shape of the *menorah*?
15. What designs were embroidered into the tapestries of the Mishkan?
16. What is meant by "standing wood"?
17. How long was the Mishkan?
18. How wide was the interior of the Mishkan?
19. Why was the altar coated with *nechoshet*?
20. Which function did the copper *yeteidot* serve?

PARSHA Q&A! _____

Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

1. 25:2 - 13.
2. 25:3 - No fixed amount of the other items was required. The silver was given as a fixed amount: A half shekel.
3. 25:4,5 - They are wool, *orot eilim* are not.
4. 25:4,5 - They are dyed; *shesh* and *orot techashim* are not.
5. 25:5 - The *tachash* delights (*sas*) in its multi-colors (*g'vanim*).
6. 25:5 - *Arazim* — cedars.
7. 25:6-7: 1) The oil was lit in the *menorah* and used for anointing. 2) The spices were used in the anointing oil and for the incense. 3) The precious stones were for the *ephod* and the *choshen*.
8. 25:11 - The outer box was one and a half *amot* plus a *tefach* plus a little bit, because it rose a little bit above the *kaporet*. (The *kaporet* was a *tefach* thick — see 25:17).
9. 25:16 - It testifies that Hashem commanded us to keep the *mitzvot*.
10. 25:18 - The faces of children.
11. 25:29 - Friday.
12. 25:31 - Hammered.
13. 25:31 - Purely ornamental.
14. 25:40 - G-d showed Moshe a *menorah* of fire.
15. 26:1 - On one side a lion; on the other side an eagle.
16. 26:15 - The wooden beams were to be upright and not stacked one upon the other.
17. 26:16 - 30 *amot*.
18. 26:23 - 10 *amot*.
19. 27:2 - To atone for brazenness.
20. 27:19 - They secured the curtains against the wind.

BONUS QUESTION ? _____

"... And they shall take for Me *terumah*." (25:2) Why does the Torah say 'take' *terumah* and not 'give' *terumah*?

BONUS ANSWER ! _____

If the Torah had said 'give' *terumah*, each individual would have been **duty-bound** to give. But for the Mishkan Hashem wanted only heartfelt donations, not dutiful ones. Therefore, the Torah commanded that collectors be appointed to 'take' *terumah* only from willing donors. No one, however, was required to give.

• Malbim

SHECHITA, ARROWS AND AN EVIL TONGUE

What is the connection between the process of *shechita* – the ritual slaughtering of animals, which is the subject of the *perek* we are now studying – and an arrow and an evil tongue?

In his explanation of the *mishna's* ruling that chopping off the head of the animal or fowl is considered an invalid *shechita*, the Sage Shmuel finds in the words of the Prophet Yirmiyahu a clue to the definition of *shechita* as a process of drawing a knife across the throat rather than chopping at it. The Prophet criticizes the slanderers among his people describing them as “their tongues are like drawn arrows and their speech is deceit” (*Yirmiyahu* 9:7).

The word used for “drawn” in this passage is *shachut* which is similar to the word for something which has been slaughtered. This similarity suggests a comparison between the drawing motion of an arrow on the bow which will propel it to its target and the drawing motion required in the *shechita* process.

But why does the Prophet compare the impact of an arrow shot from a bow to that of the evil tongue?

The commentaries explain that this is a reference to the long range effect of slander. Just as *shechita* kills the animal and an arrow its target, so too does the evil tongue slay the victim of the slander it perpetrates. And just as the arrow is capable of causing death to a distant target, so too can the gossip and the slanderer cause fatal damage with his evil tongue to a victim at any distance.

• *Chullin* 30b

A PREVIEW ON COVERED BLOOD

A preview of the sixth *perek* dealing with the Torah requirement to cover the blood of a slaughtered fowl or beast is offered in our *gemara* in tangential fashion.

• *Chullin* 31a

We are told of an incident in which the Sage Rava examined an arrow to determine that it had no flaws to disqualify it as an instrument for *shechita*. He then handed it to Rabbi Yonah bar Tachlifa who used it to slaughter a bird in flight.

After detailing how the subsequent inspection of the slain bird ascertained that the *shechita* had been properly executed, the *gemara* raises the question as to how the mitzvah of covering the blood was fulfilled. If all that was required was to place some dust or loose earth on the blood that was shed, this would have presented no problem. But, as Rabbi Zeira pointed out in the name of the Sage Rav, the Torah's instruction is not to simply cover the blood, but to see that the blood be “covered inside the dust” (*Vayikra* 17:13), which means that there must be dust or loose earth both beneath and atop the blood. In normal *shechita* such a bottom layer is prepared in advance, but how did Rabbi Yonah know exactly where the blood of his flying target would fall?

Two solutions are offered. One is that he spread loose earth over the entire area where the bird was flying so that its blood was certain to land on a qualified surface. The other is that he deliberately chose for his hunting ground a field which had such a layer of loose earth on it and verbally prepared it to serve as his bottom layer.

The ability of man to properly slaughter with bow and arrow described in this incident helps us understand the commentary of Rashi on the passage (*Bereishet* 27:3) relating Yitzchak's instructions to his son Esav as he went to hunt game for serving him a pre-blessing meal. He told him, writes Rashi, to sharpen his knife so that he would perform a kosher *shechita*. This passage includes, however, a reference to his bow and arrow which hardly seemed to be the instruments for *shechita*. Our conclusion must be that Esav, described by the Torah (*ibid.* 25:27) as a master hunter, was no less a marksman than Rabbi Yonah.

The Weekly Daf

by RABBI MENDEL WEINBACH

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BARGAINING WITH TERRORISTS

From: Adam Blumenthal

Dear Rabbi,

I was wondering if you could discuss the laws pertaining to Pidyon Shevuyim (redeeming captives). I know it is cited as a great mitzvah. However I was wondering if there is a point where it should not be allowed under the grounds of either inequitable exchange or in the event that it could encourage more enemies to take captives, since our enemies consequently know the value that Jews hold for the redemption of their captives. Basically, I was wondering if there is a point at which we should not redeem our captives because it may in the long run do more harm than good. Thanks and Shabbat Shalom, Adam.

Dear Adam,

While it is beyond the scope of this column to evaluate any general policy or specific case of redeeming Jewish captives, I will present to you what our sources say about the subject.

Redeeming captives is included in the Torah commandment of charity. In fact, the Rambam writes, “the mitzvah to ransom captives takes precedence over supporting and clothing the poor. Indeed, no commandment, be it ever so important, can compare with [it], since the captive is in the category of those who suffer hunger, thirst, nakedness, and are ever in mortal danger. One who is willfully slack in aiding to ransom a captive transgresses the commandments: ‘You shall not harden your heart, nor shut your hand from your needy brother’ (Deut. 15:7); ‘That your brother may live with you’ (Lev. 25:36); ‘Deliver them that are drawn unto death’ (Prov. 24:11) – besides many other similar commandments. Truly, no commandment, be it ever so important, can compare with the ransom of captives.”

Given the great importance of this mitzvah, it would seem that there should be no limit to the amount of money to be spent to redeem captives. It is interesting, then, that our Sages asserted, “Captives are not to be redeemed for more than their monetary value, as an enactment for the good of society”. Two reasons for this restriction are offered in the Talmud: to prevent the impoverishment of society and to discourage kidnapping. This is precisely the reason that you suggest. If Jews are willing to pay any sum to redeem their captives, there will be no end to kidnapping Jews. However, a Jew who is taken captive, G-d forbid, must not be left to suffer captivity. Therefore his monetary value (generally accepted as his productivity worth, or alternatively the “going rate” for captives) was fixed.

There are some exceptions to the limit imposed upon redeeming captives. An individual may redeem himself for any price because the Rabbis did not expect one to be able to uphold this enactment regarding oneself. Similarly, one is permitted to redeem his wife at any price, because the Torah view is that one’s wife is considered “as oneself.” Another exception

is in ransoming or trading prisoners of war. In such a case, a much more flexible approach may be taken because redeeming POWs at an unfavorable exchange rate will not give the enemy an incentive to start another war – countries don’t go to war because of an anticipated favorable POW exchange rate.

The issue of exchanging Jewish captives for terrorists is more complicated. Here, there is no formal war such that inequitable exchange wouldn’t be considered the cause of a new war. On the contrary, terrorists are interested in a prolonged conflict, and unequal exchange gives them more incentive to kidnap and obtain more concessions. And even an “equitable” exchange is not necessarily acceptable here because releasing terrorists creates an additional potential threat to the public.

However, based on the writings of Rabbi Yosef Karo (author of the *Shulchan Aruch*, the authoritative code of Jewish law) this may be a tolerable risk. He writes, “The Jerusalem Talmud concludes that one is obligated to place oneself in possible danger in order to save someone who is in definite danger. It appears that the reason for this ruling is that one is in definite danger, while the other is only a doubt, and he who saves the life of a fellow Jew is as though he has saved an entire world”. On the other hand, since a released terrorist is not exactly interested in buying Israel Bonds or planting trees for the JNF, the danger may be more definite than doubt, in which case the exchange should perhaps not be made.

I’ll conclude with a true, documented story. Rabbi Meir of Rotenburg (1222-1293), one of the greatest Torah scholars of his time, was captured while trying to flee the harsh edicts of Emperor Rudolf I of Hapsburg. The Emperor imprisoned him in the Tower of Ensisheim, and demanded an exorbitant ransom from the Jewish community for his release. Fearing other despots might pursue a similarly lucrative practice by kidnapping other rabbis, Rabbi Meir refused to allow the community to pay the 23,000 talents of silver ransom they were willing to pay. Despite the community’s appeals, Rabbi Meir languished in prison for seven years until his death.

But since he forbid his ransom even after death, his remains were not released for burial until fourteen years later, when a wealthy Jew could no longer bear the disgrace, and paid the much lowered ransom. So ended one of the most remarkable acts of martyrdom and sanctification of G-d’s name recorded in the annals of Jewish history. Rabbi Meir’s selfless dedication to his people’s welfare and his utter self-denial in their behalf ensured that Torah luminaries were never again held hostage for the extortion of huge ransoms from the Jewish people.

Sources:

- Rambam, *Mishna Torah, Zeraim, Hilchot Matanot Ani'im, 8:10*
- *Gittin 45a, Mishna*
- *Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 252:4*
- *Ketuvot 52a, Tur, Shulchan Aruch, Even HaEzer 78*
- *Tosafot, Gittin 58a*
- *Beit Yosef, Choshen Mishpat 426*
- *Masters of the Mesorah, Rabbi Zechariah Fendel, p110*
- *Maharshal, Yam shel Shlomo, Gittin 4:66*

WHERE THERE'S A WILL...

Question: Is there any way, according to Torah law, to determine during my lifetime who should inherit what I leave behind and is it proper to do so?

Answer: Torah law is very specific about the rules of inheritance and the priorities it assigns differ in many ways from that of civil law. The only way one can determine his own priorities according to Torah law is to make a gift during his lifetime of what he wishes to bequeath to a particular recipient. The Talmudic Sages provided a formula for doing so while retaining the use of the bequeathed property. A will is written in which the ownership of the property is transferred to the beneficiary but use of it remains with the benefactor until his death, at which time it also reverts to the beneficiary. One should consult a rabbi or a religious lawyer familiar with halachic preparation of wills if this is what he intends to do.

In regard to the propriety of making any such arrangement a few considerations must be borne in mind.

Disinheriting a son, even if he fails to live up to the spiritual standard expected of him, is frowned upon by our Sages

because there is always the possibility that the offspring of that wayward son may be righteous Jews who will benefit from the inheritance.

Favoring one son over another in distributing the inheritance carries with it the seed of fraternal discord, as we learn from the hatred Yosef suffered from his brothers because of the favoritism to him shown by their father.

Finally, there is the issue of leaving money to charitable causes. While there is halachic restriction on a Jew giving away so much money that he risks impoverishment, this does not apply to what one gives to charity at the time of his death. There is a difference of opinion amongst the halachic authorities as to whether this means that he can give away everything or whether to leave half or two-thirds to his heirs.

If one is inclined to giving charity in order to gain great merit for the World to Come and wishes to avoid any problems, he should make such contributions during his lifetime, thus not only gaining credit for his afterlife but extending and enriching his life in this world.

PUBLIC DOMAIN _____

Comments, quibbles and reactions concerning previous Ohrnet features

Re: The Long Wait (Ohrnet Yitro)

I really enjoy reading the **Ohrnet** publication and appreciate the effort it must take to put it together.

In response to the ethics question in regard to Chassanim and Kallahs who take long in the Yichud room, I'd like to remind the public of one thing.

If you are coming to the Chassana to be *mesameach* (bring happiness to) the Chassan and Kallah, don't make your happiness and convenience the issue, but rather those of the Chassan and Kallah.

The Chassan and Kallah have generally not seen each other in over a week, and very often haven't spoken to each other in that long too. They both have generally fasted on the day of their wedding as it is a Yom Kippur - day of atonement - for them. Besides that, there are a lot of emotional issues involved with getting married and being in the yichud room together.

If you are really at the chassanah to be *mesameach* the Chassan and Kallah, you would be happy for them that they are having a few minutes to spend together on this most special night of their lives, and overlook the minor inconvenience

of waiting for them to come out of the yichud room. You would also be happy for them that they are having a chance to take pictures together with their families, so that they will always have special memories from this most special night.

To conclude, I think people should lighten up at weddings, relax, enjoy the fine food, good company and pleasant music. If you don't have all night to spend there, don't blame the Chassan and Kallah, but try to come back at a time that's convenient for them and not necessarily for you.

As a side point, there are many people who prefer that the wedding feast be served before the dancing starts, meaning before the Chassan and Kallah come out. This is due to the fact that many people come to chassanahs from further away, and don't have a chance to eat anything before they leave, and would rather not have to wait until ten o'clock when the dancing is over to start eating.

Thanks for giving people the opportunity to send in their opinions. I hope I didn't offend anyone with my comment.

• S.T., NY