

OHRNET

SHABBAT PARSHAT KI TISA-PARAH · 20 ADAR 5764 · MAR. 13, 2004 · VOL. 11 NO. 21

PARSHA INSIGHTS

LIFE IN THE FAST LANE

“They have made themselves a molten calf, prostrated themselves and sacrificed to it, and said ‘This is your god, O Yisrael, which brought you up from the land of Egypt.’” (32:9)

Some stories make you want to laugh. Some make you want to cry. Some make you want to laugh *and* cry. And with some, you don’t know whether to laugh or to cry. This story is one from the last category.

A saddening trend of recent years has been the not-insubstantial number of boys and girls from religious families who have gone “off the *derech*” (path of observance) and, to a greater or lesser degree, abandoned the Torah.

I have a friend who works here in Ohr Somayach, who told me of one such kid who said to him:

“I know I’m going to do teshuva one day, ‘cos my dad works in Kiruv (outreach). He works incredibly hard trying to bring people back to Judaism. It can’t be that G-d would let him have a son who didn’t come back!”

Whether he knew it or not, this young fellow was a distant echo of a two thousand-year old story:

The Talmud (Bava Kama, 50a) tells of the daughter of Nechunia “the cistern excavator” who fell into a huge pit. They came and informed Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa, for everyone would come to him so that he would pray on their behalf.

They estimated that she could survive no longer than three hours in this pit. During the first hour he said, “All is well with her.” In the second hour despite their mounting anxiety he said, “All is well.” In the third hour, he said, “She has already come up out of the pit.”

After her ordeal, they asked her who brought her up. She said that she had seen a ram with an old man leading it. The ram was the ram that took the place of Yitzchak when he

was bound as a sacrifice, and the old man was Avraham Avinu.

They asked Rabbi Chanina how he could have known that she was safe. Was he a prophet? For how else could he have known that she had already emerged from the pit. He replied that he was neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet but since her father had put so much effort into digging cisterns for pilgrims to have water on the thrice-yearly pilgrimage to Jerusalem, it was inconceivable for him to be punished through a cistern.

“They have made themselves a molten calf, prostrated themselves and sacrificed to it, and said ‘This is your god, O Yisrael, which brought you up from the land of Egypt.’” (32:9)

The generation that received the Torah were very righteous. For this reason G-d chose them to be the receivers of the Torah. How could have G-d allowed them to stumble and sin with the golden calf? They were not fit to make such an error. Why didn’t He protect them from this disaster?

The Talmud (Rashi to Avoda Zara 4b) says that the only reason the Jewish People were allowed to sin was because it was the decree of the King. The Maharal explains that this decree was to bring into existence a reality very distant from this world called teshuva. Teshuva, a person returning to the status he once enjoyed before his transgression, is something that is above and beyond the world. Teshuva existed before the world (Pesachim 54b/Nedarim 39b). Teshuva is something above and essentially distant from the world and man. However, when the lead players in the history of man – the generation that left Egypt – stumbled with the golden calf, they opened the door of the world to teshuva. They hewed a spiritual “channel of return.” A fast lane back to G-d that would always be open.

A channel that is still open for a young man who is convinced, as was Rabbi Chanina that G-d is not going to let a father down.

OHRNET magazine is published by Ohr Somayach Tanenbaum College

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PARSHA OVERVIEW

Moshe conducts a census by counting each silver half-shekel donated by all men age twenty and over. Moshe is commanded to make a copper laver for the Mishkan. The women donate the necessary metal. The formula of the anointing oil is specified, and G-d instructs Moshe to use this oil only for dedicating the Mishkan, its vessels, Aharon and his sons. G-d selects Betzalel and Oholiav as master craftsmen for the Mishkan and its vessels. The Jewish People are commanded to keep the Sabbath as an eternal sign that G-d made the world. Moshe receives the two Tablets of Testimony on which are written the Ten Commandments. The mixed multitude who left Egypt with the Jewish People panic when Moshe's descent seems delayed, and force Aharon to make a golden calf for them to worship. Aharon stalls, trying to delay them. G-d tells Moshe to return to the people immediately, threatening to

destroy everyone and build a new nation from Moshe. When Moshe sees the camp of idol-worship he smashes the tablets and he destroys the golden calf. The sons of Levi volunteer to punish the transgressors, executing 3,000 men. Moshe ascends the mountain to pray for forgiveness for the people, and G-d accepts his prayer. Moshe sets up the Mishkan and G-d's cloud of glory returns. Moshe asks G-d to show him the rules by which he conducts the world, but is granted only a small portion of this request. G-d tells Moshe to hew new tablets and reveals to him the text of the prayer that will invoke Divine mercy. Idol worship, intermarriage and the combination of milk and meat are prohibited. The laws of Pesach, the first-born, the first-fruits, Shabbat, Shavuot and Succot are taught. When Moshe descends with the second set of tablets, his face is luminous as a result of contact with the Divine.

ISRAEL Forever

ARE WE STILL JEWISH?

How low can Jews sink? This week's Torah portion seems to supply the answer in its account of Jews dancing around a golden calf in the Sinai desert where they had received the Torah a little over a month before.

That party ended up with the smashing of the Holy Tablets, which Moshe brought down from Heaven. Last month there was another party in modern Israel which did not have such a dramatic climax but did leave at least one of its revelers wondering whether he and his friends were Jewish any more.

Hundreds of partygoers had gathered in the desert on Shabbat for a "trance party" which ended up with their dancing around a huge golden calf. "When I saw the calf standing on the stage," said 35-year old Elad, "I stopped dancing. I was simply stunned. I am admittedly not a traditionally religious person, but the organizers crossed a red line. The statue made us look like idol worshippers."

Despite the protest of Elad and some others, the organizers refused to remove the statue. "Of course we refuse to remove

it," said one of them, "because it seems absurd that people who go out partying on Friday nights and Saturdays are bothered by the Bible."

To the question raised by Elad about whether we are still Jewish, we submit the following story. Former Tel Aviv Mayor Shlomo ("Chich") Lahat recently told a friend of ours that back in 1946, two years before the founding of the State, there was a meeting of Zionist leaders in Nahalal at which Dr. Chaim Weizmann, the man who would become the first president of the Jewish State, made the following prediction:

"We are talking about a Jewish State but I am afraid that this is a contradiction in terms. If it will be really Jewish it won't be a State, and if it will really be a State it won't be Jewish."

We don't share that gloomy prediction. Despite all the golden calf worshippers, the fact that some Jews like Elad reacted the way they did offers a ray of hope for a truly Jewish State in Israel forever.

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

CHARITY SAVES FROM DEATH

"Could you please spare a chicken for me? I have hardly anything to eat!" This was the heartrending appeal a Jerusalem Torah scholar heard from the poor woman who had just knocked on his door. The trouble was that his financial situation was not much better than hers. With great difficulty he had somehow managed to secure two chickens for the sparse holiday meals for his very large family. After a momentary effort to explain his helpless situation, he quickly switched his mental gears and told the lady to wait while he went to fetch one of those chickens from his refrigerator.

The sight that greeted him when he opened the door of the fridge almost caused him to faint. There lay his three-year old son, unconscious and blue from the cold. He had playfully locked himself inside, and his cries were muffled by the locked door. Emergency medical help was immediately summoned and they were able to revive the boy. The attending doctor told the father that had the child been discovered a minute later he would have been beyond saving.

This was a timely reminder that "Charity saves from death" and that someone may give away a chicken and in return receive a child.

PARSHA Q&A?

1. How many “geira” are in a shekel?
2. What was the minimum age of military service in the Jewish army?
3. What were the three different types of *terumah* donated?
4. The Jews were counted after Yom Kippur and again after Pesach. Both times they numbered the same amount. How can this be? Didn't some 19-year olds turn 20 during that six month period?
5. How many ingredients comprise the incense of the *Mishkan*?
6. According to Rashi, why are sailors called “*malachim*?”
7. What is the difference between *chochma* (wisdom), *bina* (understanding), and *da'at* (knowledge)?
8. Shabbat is a “sign.” What does it signify?
9. When did the Jewish People begin to give contributions for the building of the *Mishkan*?
10. How many books are there in Tanach?
11. From where did the men take the earrings that they donated to make the calf?
12. Why did Aharon build the altar for the golden calf by himself?
13. Why did Moshe break the Tablets?
14. How can two brothers belong to two different tribes?
15. Why did Moshe ask that his name be erased from the Torah?
16. How has the sin of the golden calf affected the Jewish People throughout history?
17. In verse 33:2, G-d says that the inhabitants of *Eretz Canaan* would be driven out of the Land. In that verse, only six of the seven Canaanite nations are mentioned. What happened to the seventh?
18. How did G-d show that He forgave the Jewish People?
19. How did Moshe become wealthy?
20. How do the light rays shining from Moshe's face show us the powerful effect of sin?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

1. 30:13 - Twenty.
2. 30:14 - Twenty.
3. 30:15 - For the *adanim* (sockets), for the purchase of communal sacrifices, and for the building of the *Mishkan*.
4. 30:16 - Their ages were calculated based on Rosh Hashana, not based on their individual birthdays.
5. 30:34 - Eleven ingredients were used making the incense.
6. 30:35 - Because they stir (*malach*) the water with their oars.
7. 31:3 - *Chochma* is knowledge acquired from others. *Bina* is the deduction of new knowledge from what one has already learned. *Da'at* is holy inspiration.
8. 31:13 - It is a sign between G-d and the Jewish People that He has chosen them and a sign to the nations of the world that He has sanctified the Jewish People.
9. 31:18 - The 11th of Tishrei.
10. 31:18 - 24.
11. 32:2,3 - From their ears.
12. 32:5 - He hoped that by building it by himself it would take longer and in the interim Moshe would return.
13. 32:19 - Moshe reasoned: If the Torah forbids those who have estranged themselves from the Torah to partake in even a single commandment (Pesach sacrifice), surely the entire Torah cannot be given to a whole nation which has estranged itself from G-d!
14. 32:27 - Half-brothers, sharing the same mother.
15. 32:32 - So people shouldn't say “Moshe was unworthy to plead for mercy on behalf of the Jewish people.”
16. 32:34 - Whenever G-d punishes the Jewish People, part of that punishment comes as payment for the sin of the golden calf.
17. 33:2 - The seventh nation, the Girgashites, voluntarily emigrated.
18. 33:14 - He agreed to let His *Shechina* dwell among them.
19. 34:1 - Moshe carved the Tablets out of precious stone. G-d commanded Moshe to keep the leftover fragments.
20. 34:35 - Before the sin of the golden calf, the people would not have been afraid to look at the light rays, but after the sin they were afraid.

LOVE OF THE LAND - THE NAMES

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

RECHOVOT – ROOM FOR ALL

The name Rechovot was originally given to a well dug by the servants of the Patriarch Yitzchak.

It was only after two bitter disputes between these servants and the Philistines in whose territory they dwelled over ownership of two other



wells that a third well was not contested. Yitzchak called it Rechovot (expanses) as an expression of gratitude to “G-d Who has made room for us” and Polish settlers in 1890 adopted it for the city that they founded.

THE “GLATT” PROPHET

“**P**igul flesh never enters my mouth” (Yechezkel 4:14) complained the Prophet when he heard the Divine command to eat some undignified matter.

Pigul is the flesh of a sacrifice which became forbidden for consumption because the *kohen* slaughtering the animal or performing any other of the vital services had in mind that its flesh would be consumed beyond the time allotted by the Torah. Yechezkel could hardly be priding himself in avoiding violation of a sin punishable by extirpation since this is a norm expected of every Jew. Our Sages therefore concluded that the *pigul* to which he is referring is something which is not prohibited by law and refraining from eating it was the higher standard of the Prophet.

One explanation is that he was referring to the flesh of an ordinary animal, not necessarily a sacrifice, about whose kosher status a doubt had arisen. Once a competent halachic authority ruled that it did not have an organic flaw that rendered it *treifa* the flesh of that animal could be consumed. Yechezkel, however, held back from eating such flesh for fear that an error in judgment had been made.

Maharsha explains the connection between such flesh and the flesh of *pigul*. Just as *pigul* is the product of an improper thought accompanying the sacrificial service, so too this animal was of doubtful *kashrut* in the mind of the one consulting the authority and therefore has an element of *pigul* attached to it.

This higher standard mentioned by the Prophet has been adopted by many observant Jews who insist on a “Glatt” level of *kashrut* in the meat they eat. The Yiddish word *glatt* means “smooth” and identifies the flesh of an animal which passed post-*shechita* inspection without raising any doubts

regarding its *kashrut* requiring an authoritative ruling.

• Chullin 44b

WHO ARE THE BLESSERS?

The promise which G-d gave to the Patriarch Avraham “I shall bless those who bless you” (*Bereishet* 12:3) is not limited to the *kohanim* who bless the Jews as they are commanded. Tosefot cites a story in the Jerusalem Talmud of Rabbi Yismael who was greeted by a non-Jew with the traditional blessing of peace. The Sage responded by saying “The response has already been said”. What he meant was that there was really no need for him to return the blessing he had received because it is already written in the Torah that those who bless the descendants of Avraham will themselves be blessed.

An examination of the Torah source for this blessing for the blessers serves as a support for this extension to non-Jews as well. In his commentary on the Torah, Ramban points out that Avraham received this promise at the time he was commanded to leave his land and home and head for Eretz Yisrael. There is no mention made in the Torah as to why the Patriarch merited such a blessing simply because he was leaving one land for another. The answer, says Ramban, is that G-d was aware that Avraham had encountered violent opposition in his native Ur Kasdim to his efforts to preach monotheism and that he had fled from there with the thought of going to Eretz Yisrael. Circumstances stalled him in Charan but now G-d told him to carry out his original plan and go to the Chosen Land where he would not be persecuted and cursed as he was in Ur Kasdim but would be blessed by all, who would in turn receive the blessing of G-d.

• Chullin 49a

The Weekly Daf

by RABBI MENDEL WEINBACH

Published by Targum Press / Distributed by Feldheim

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BLESSED BY A RABBI

From: Joseph in Mexico City

Dear Rabbi,

Is there any basis in Torah for going to rabbis for blessings for health, children, livelihood or any similar such thing? Does Judaism believe that these blessings actually help? Thank you.

Dear Joseph,

The first thing to know and to remember about getting blessings from rabbis or anyone else is that the source of all blessing is G-d alone. Righteous people, who strive with great effort and holiness to do G-d's will, attach themselves to this source of blessing and serve as conduits through which the blessing is channeled. Furthermore, those who purify and elevate their "power" of speech by learning Torah, praying, and speaking kindly and encouragingly to others, while also refraining from slander, vulgarity and swearing, are more fit to pronounce G-d's blessing on others. Our sources teach that the blessings of the righteous actually do help, in the ways you asked about and more.

As mentioned above, G-d is the source of blessing. Thus we find among the earliest verses in the Torah G-d blessing the world's first newlyweds with children, "and G-d blessed them, and said to them, be fruitful and multiply" (Gen. 1:28). Later, G-d enjoins Abraham to depart from the ways of his idolatrous ancestors and rather go in the ways of G-d. In reward for cleaving to Him, G-d blesses Abraham, "I will make you a great nation [children], and I will bless you [wealth] and make your name great [honor], and you will be a blessing" (Gen. 11:2, Rashi). Not only is Abraham promised to bear G-d's blessing, though, but also to pass it on to others: "and in you shall all the families of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 11:3). G-d said, until now I alone decided who would be blessed, now you may also decide who I shall bless (Rashi).

Abraham's power to bless others was transmitted to his children. Therefore Isaac wished to bless his first-born, and Jacob rightfully received the blessing after having acquired the status of first-born from Esau. Isaac

said, "Behold now, I am old, I know not the day of my death...[come to me] that my soul should bless you before I die" (Gen. 27:4). Jacob later transferred this blessing to his twelve sons, who he blessed with wealth, bounty, children, physical vigor, leadership, and spiritual perfection: "And this is what their father spoke to them and blessed them, every one according to his blessing he blessed them" (Gen. 49:28). In particular, G-d bestowed blessing upon the High Priest Aaron and his descendants, and commanded them to perpetually bless the Jewish people (Num. 6:22-27).

The Talmud (Berachot 7a) teaches that the righteous may bless even G-d. Rabbi Ishmael ben Elisha, a High Priest, relates how "one Yom Kippur while offering incense in the Holy of Holies, I saw G-d sitting on a high and exalted throne. He told me, Ishmael my son, bless Me. I said, 'May it be Your will from before You that Your mercy overcome strict justice...and may You act mercifully with Your children'. He nodded His head in agreement [as if to answer amen to Rabbi Ishmael's blessing, Rashi]". Conversely, even though Rabbi Ishmael was a great Rabbi, since relative to G-d he was small, our Sages derived from this story that even the blessing of a simple Jew should not be insignificant in our eyes.

It is for this reason that even simple, every-day Jews bless one another. For example, the phrase "Shabbat Shalom" is not only a special Shabbat greeting, but also a blessing that the person should have a truly peaceful Sabbath. Indeed, upon being greeted "Shabbat Shalom", some have the custom to increase the blessing by responding "Shabbat Shalom U'Mevorach": May you in turn have a peaceful and blessed Shabbat. The same idea applies to the traditional greetings on the holidays, such as "Chag Sameach" – this is a blessing that others should have a truly joyous holiday. On Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur we explicitly bless one another to be inscribed and sealed in the Book of Life. This is also the reason why parents bless their children on the Sabbath and Holidays with the priestly blessing mentioned above, since a sincere, heartfelt blessing of even average Jews has great power. This is true all the more so regarding the blessings of holy rabbis and Torah scholars, may they be blessed, and may we be blessed in their merit. Amen.

THE NOISY NEIGHBOR

Question: I have a neighbor who seems to enjoy listening to loud music at an hour when I am trying to get to sleep. While I am interested in maintaining friendly relations with him, I do want to enjoy some peace and quiet as much as he enjoys the noise. What can I do?

Answer: You certainly have a case since neighbors should be sensitive to any irritation they may be causing to those living near them. Since your situation is one that can cause you to harbor a grudge against your noisy neighbor, you should follow the advice of Rambam (*Hilchot De'ot 6:6*) who writes:

“When one man commits an injustice to the other, the victim should not remain silent and feel hatred for that is the way of the wicked. It is rather a mitzvah for him to inform the other of his hurt and ask him why he did what he did.”

By thus fulfilling the Torah's command to “reprove your neighbor” you offer the neighbor an opportunity to either explain that he was unaware that you were being hurt or at least to apologize and thus eliminate the disturbance and restore friendly relations.

A neighbor of mine, living directly above my apartment, used to disturb my efforts to get to sleep by making thumping noise (probably an exercise machine) above my bedroom. After writing him a note about this disturbance, I received a note from him promising to stop the noise but also calling to my attention the noise made by our washing machine on the porch in the early hours of the morning which disturbed his sleep.

The noise from both of us came to an end as a result of our “good neighbor policy”.

PUBLIC DOMAIN

Comments, quibbles and reactions concerning previous Ohrnet features

Parsha Q&A Goes to France

B”H, my son will celebrate his Bar Mitzva this year. Some months ago we decided to translate all your Q&A (Rashi quiz) in French in order to maximize the benefits (in terms of learning) attached to this event. Since we are starting translation of your Q&A on Sefer Devarim, I am wondering if you could be kind enough to give us the authorization to distribute a kind of booklet containing all this Q&A in French to our guests and friends? Please feel free to suggest a copyright/restriction statement that we include in the booklet. Merci (Thank You).

• R. B.

Ohrnet replies affirmatively and wishes the entire family a memorable Bar Mitzva celebration – we'll be there too!

Re: Eastern Jewish Time (Ohrnet Mishpatim)

To say nothing of Middle Eastern Jewish time!

I would have expected you to add to bring a book to study (or at least some other work that needs to be done).

Stories of Rabbis using spare moments are endless. Here's one from another source (I heard it from Rabbi David Ebner):

One time when Albert Einstein was a guest lecturer, there was a mix-up, and he was brought to the lecture hall a long time before the audience would arrive. His host apologized for the wasted time. “Wasted time?” asked Einstein (rhetorically). He took some chalk, went to the chalk board, and started working.

• Haim Roman

I think you could have added something to the questioner about the things he might miss at the wedding if he didn't arrive until the time for the chupah, such as the chasan's tish with the breaking-of-the-plate, not to mention the smorgasbord in the bride's room. *Shavua Tov and Chodesh Tov! Mishenichnas Adar, marbin b'simcha!*

• Stanley Nachamie
JLE Israel Summer '88

Texas Torah Thanks

I wish to thank you for the Torah and commentaries that you send. I make full use of them and forward to my several e-mail forums as well as some of my private e-mail correspondents...they are a great blessing.

• Shalom from T. in Texas