

# OHRNET

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## PARSHA INSIGHTS

### DON'T MOCK THE ROCK!

*"Listen now, you rebels, shall we now bring forth water from this rock?" (20:10)*

In this week's Torah portion, G-d tells Moshe to speak to a rock and it would give forth water. Moshe instead hits the rock twice.

This is very difficult to understand. Why did Moshe, G-d's most faithful follower, not do as he was instructed? G-d's communication with Moshe was on a higher, clearer level than any other prophet before or since; so it's impossible to say that Moshe just went ahead and "without reading the Maker's instructions" hit the rock instead of speaking to it.

When Miriam was alive, the Jewish People received water from the Well of Miriam as they traveled through the desert. This was a miraculous water-giving rock that traveled through the desert with the Jewish People and always rested opposite the entrance to the Tabernacle. Each of the princes of the Twelve Tribes would scratch a line with his staff from the well to his Tribe, and these scratches would turn into a river of such size that a woman who wished to visit her friend in a neighboring Tribe would need a boat if she didn't want to get her feet wet.

The water encircled a large part of the camp. Trees, grass, vines, figs, and pomegranates would suddenly grow at its edge. The vines produced seven differently flavored grapes. In this water and fruit, the Jewish People could savor the taste of the World to Come.

All this vanished with Miriam's passing.

The people complained bitterly at the lack of water. G-d had mercy on them and instructed Moshe to find the rock that was the Well of Miriam and command it to give forth water. G-d told Moshe to assemble all the righteous at the rock to witness a miracle that would sanctify the Name of G-d. Moshe was to learn a Torah passage or teach the people a

Torah law and then command the rock to give forth water. The merit of the communal Torah learning would cause the rock to produce water once again.

G-d had warned Moshe to bring only the righteous to the rock, but Moshe, wanting everyone to witness the Greatness of G-d's miracles, assembled everyone — including the mixed multitude of Egyptians who had strung along with the Jews after witnessing what had happened in Egypt. It was this same mixed multitude, the *eruv rav*, that had prompted the sin of the golden calf. These unsavory characters started to mock Moshe and say that if Moshe was only going to be able to bring forth water from one particular rock, it wasn't going to be a real miracle because Moshe, being a shepherd, knew that certain minerals could produce water. They demanded that the rock should be a rock of their choosing. As so often happens, the voice of disbelief is contagious and eventually the head of each Tribe picked up a rock and demanded that Moshe produce water from that rock, and that rock only.

There is a mystical concept that the Divine Presence would speak from the throat of Moshe. However, when Moshe became angry with the people, the Divine Presence left him, for prophecy forsakes a prophet who becomes angry.

Moshe sensed that the Divine Presence no longer rested on him and he did not want to risk desecrating the Divine Name instead of sanctifying it in with an unsuccessful miracle.

Thus he hit the rock.

Even though Moshe acted out of good intentions, seeing as he had changed G-d's word, he was punished greatly so that no subsequent prophet might assume that if Moshe, the most trusted of G-d's household could change what G-d had told him, so could he.

• Sources: *Kometz HaMincha in Iturei Torah, The Midrash*

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## DEALING WITH SERPENTS – THEN AND NOW

“Does the serpent kill or does the serpent heal?” Ask the Talmudic Sages in regard to an episode recorded in this week’s Torah portion.

As punishment for speaking out against G-d and Moshe for leading them into the wilderness, poisonous serpents were sent by Heaven to attack the people. After many died from their bites the people regretted their sin and begged Moshe to pray for relief. Moshe’s prayers were answered with a command to make a snake of brass and hang it on a high pole. Any Jew who would suffer a bite from one of the real serpents needed only to gaze at the brass serpent and would be healed.

The answer given by our Sages to their rhetorical question is spelled out in a *mishna* (*Mesechta Rosh Hashana*

29a):

“So long as Jews looked upwards and committed themselves to their Father in Heaven they were healed; and if not they succumbed.”

The message is a timely one. Jews in Eretz Yisrael suffer from two-legged serpents intent on murder with their terrorist venom. In such a situation we must reflect on the fact that the Heavenly response to Moshe’s prayer was not the simple elimination of the serpents but rather a prescription for relief based on the need to look to Heaven. Crushing the heads of terrorist serpents has not succeeded in ending terror. What is needed is a return to the method of our ancestors – looking upwards, committing ourselves to our Father in Heaven and thus gaining healing for Israel forever.

## THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

## THE ANONYMOUS HERO

The Israeli soldier heard the sound of shots coming from a lonely spot in Hebron and rushed to investigate what had happened. There he saw another soldier lying in a pool of blood, the victim of a terrorist attack. He quickly administered first aid, summoned help and accompanied the ambulance to the emergency room of the hospital. The doctors told him that the patient would live only because of the initial medical attention he had provided.

When the parents of the wounded man arrived at the hospital and heard the story of his rescue they wanted to thank his rescuer. But he was nowhere to be found and no one knew his identity. After a fruitless search for this anonymous savior they returned to their grocery store in Kiryat Malachi where they hung a big sign relating the story of their son’s miraculous rescue and asking for help in locating the

hero.

One day a year later a woman from Beersheba entered their shop, read the sign and cried out “That’s my son!” A quick telephone call to her son was followed by a heart-warming meeting of the two families. At one point the hero’s mother called aside the mother of the soldier he had saved and said to her:

“You don’t remember me but we met twenty years ago when I entered your shop and I struck up a nice conversation with you and your husband. In the course of our talk I mentioned that I was suffering from a difficult pregnancy and was planning an abortion. Both of you persuaded me to drop this idea, pointing out what a blessing children are. You succeeded in convincing me and the child to whom I gave birth was the one who saved your son!”

## PARSHA OVERVIEW

The laws of the *para aduma* — the red heifer — are detailed. These laws are for the ritual purification of one who comes into contact with death. After nearly 40 years in the desert, Miriam dies and is buried at Kadesh. The people complain about the loss of their water supply that until now has been provided miraculously in the merit of Miriam’s righteousness. Aharon and Moshe pray for the people’s welfare. G-d commands them to gather the nation at Merivah and speak to a designated rock so that water will flow forth. Distressed by the people’s lack of faith, Moshe hits the rock instead of speaking to it. He thus fails to produce the intended public demonstration of G-d’s mastery over the world, which would have resulted had the rock

produced water merely at Moshe’s word. Therefore, G-d tells Moshe and Aharon that they will not bring the people into the Land. *Bnei Yisrael* resume their travels, but because the King of Edom, a descendant of Esav, denies them passage through his country, they do not travel the most direct route to Eretz Yisrael. When they reach Mount Hor, Aharon dies and his son Elazar is invested with his priestly garments and responsibilities. Aharon was beloved by all, and the entire nation mourns him 30 days. Sichon the Amorite attacks *Bnei Yisrael* when they ask to pass through his land. As a result, *Bnei Yisrael* conquer the lands that Sichon had previously seized from the Amonites on the east bank of the Jordan River.

## PARSHA Q&A ?

1. "Take a perfect *para aduma* (red heifer)." What does the word "perfect" — *temima* — mean in this context?
2. How many non-red hairs disqualify a cow as a *para aduma*?
3. A man dies in a tent. What happens to the sealed metal and earthenware utensils in the tent?
4. What happens to the one who: a) sprinkles the water mixed with the ashes of the *para aduma*; b) touches the water; c) carries the water?
5. Why was the *mitzvah* of the *para aduma* entrusted to Elazar rather than to Aharon?
6. Why does the Torah stress that *all* of the congregation came to *Midbar Tzin*?
7. Why is Miriam's death taught after the law of *para aduma*?
8. During their journey in the *midbar*, in whose merit did the Jewish People receive water?
9. Why did Moshe need to strike the rock a second time?
10. When Moshe told the King of Edom that the Jewish People would not drink from the well-water, to which well did he refer? What do we learn from this?
11. The cloud that led the Jewish People leveled all mountains in their path except three. Which three and why?
12. Why did the *entire* congregation mourn Aharon's death?
13. What disappeared when Aharon died?
14. Which "inhabitant of the South" (21:1) attacked the Jews?
15. For what two reasons did G-d punish the people with snakes specifically?
16. Why did the Jewish People camp in Arnon, rather than pass through Moav to enter *Eretz Canaan*?
17. What miracle took place at the valley of Arnon?
18. What was the "strength" of Amon that prevented the Jewish People from entering into their land?
19. Why was Moshe afraid of Og?
20. Who killed Og?

## PARSHA Q&A!

### Answers to This Week's Questions!

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

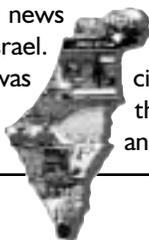
1. 19:2 - Perfectly red.
2. 19:2 - Two.
3. 19:14,15 - The metal utensils are impure for seven days, even if they are sealed. The sealed earthenware vessels are unaffected.
4. 19:21 - a) Remains *tahor*; b) He, but not his clothing, contracts *tumah*; c) He and his clothing contract *tumah*.
5. 19:22 - Because Aharon was involved in the sin of the golden calf.
6. 20:1 - To teach that they were *all* fit to enter the Land; everyone involved in the sin of the spies already died.
7. 20:1 - To teach that just as sacrifices bring atonement, so too does the death of the righteous.
8. 20:2 - Miriam's.
9. 20:11 - After he hit it the first time, only a few drops came out since he was commanded to *speak* to the rock.
10. 20:17 - To the well that traveled with the nation in the *midbar*. This teaches that one who has adequate provisions should nevertheless purchase goods from his host in order to benefit the host.
11. 20:22 - *Har Sinai* for receiving the Torah, *Har Nevo* for Moshe's burial, and *Hor Hahar* for Aharon's burial.
12. 20:29 - Aharon made peace between contending parties and between spouses. Thus, everybody mourned him.
13. 20:29 - The clouds of glory disappeared, since they sheltered the Jews in Aharon's merit.
14. 21:1 - Amalek.
15. 21:6 - The original snake, who was punished for speaking evil, is fitting to punish those who spoke evil about G-d and about Moshe. And the snake, for whom everything tastes like dust, is fitting to punish those who complained about the manna which changed to any desired taste.
16. 21:13 - Moav refused them passage.
17. 21:15 - The Amorites hid in caves in the mountain on the Moabite side of the valley in order to ambush the Jews. When the Jews approached, the mountain on the *Eretz Canaan* side of the valley moved close to the other mountain and the Amorites were crushed.
18. 21:24 - G-d's command, "Do not harass them" (*Devarim* 2:19).
19. 21:34 - Og had once been of service to Avraham. Moshe was afraid that this merit would assist Og in battle.
20. 21:35 - Moshe.

## LOVE OF THE LAND - THE NAMES

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

### SHOMRON — THE MOUNTAIN OF SHEMER

The *sh* in the acronym *Yesha* so much in the news stands for Shomron, a historic part of Eretz Yisrael. Now used as a title for an entire region, this was the name of the capital of the Kingdom of Yisrael. It was named after the original owner of the mountain



on which a great city was built. Omri purchased this mountain from Shemer and as a reward for adding a city to Eretz Yisrael he was the only one of the rulers of the Kingdom of Yisrael who was privileged to have a son and grandson sit on this throne.

## MUST IT BE A LAMB?

When the Torah commanded “Every firstborn of a donkey shall you redeem with a lamb” (*Shmot 13:13*), was there an insistence on a lamb, and if the owner did not have a lamb would he have to behead this firstborn as is required when redemption does not take place?

This issue is raised in two places in this week’s section. There was an approach that the position of Rabbi Yehuda that it is forbidden to derive any benefit from a yet-unredeemed firstborn donkey is predicated on the fact that its sanctity can be removed only through redemption with a lamb and nothing else.

This approach was abandoned, however, when it was cited that Rabbi Nechemiah, the son of Rabbi Yosef, redeemed a firstborn donkey by providing a *kohen* with some cooked dish. The conclusion then is that even Rabbi Yehuda agrees that one can redeem that firstborn donkey by giving the *kohen* anything which is of value equal to the animal. This is based on the fact that the sanctity of this animal cannot be greater than the property of the Sanctuary, which can be redeemed with anything of equal value. When the Torah stipulated the use of a lamb for redemption, it did so to make it easier for the owner to fulfill his obligation by giving the *kohen* a lamb of any size, even if its value is nowhere near that of the firstborn donkey. It is only when he has no lamb to offer that he is required to give him something of equal value as in the case of redeeming Sanctuary property.

• *Bechorot 9b*

## A COMPROMISING COMPARISON

When the Torah awarded the firstborn of man and animal to the *kohen*, it stipulated “But redeem shall you surely redeem the firstborn of man, and the

firstborn of the impure animal shall you redeem” (*Bamidbar 18:15*).

While the firstborn of a cow, sheep or goat was to be given to the *kohen* by its owner, the firstborn of man was to be redeemed by giving the *kohen* five *shekalim*, and the firstborn of a donkey by giving him a lamb.

The pairing in one passage of the redemption of human firstborn and that of donkey firstborn led Rabbi Eliezer to draw an interesting conclusion. Should a man set aside five *shekalim* for the redemption of his firstborn son and the money is lost, the father bears the responsibility to give other money to the *kohen* in order to achieve redemption. This is the ruling of the *mishna* (*Bechorot 51a*) based on the above-mentioned passage. Rabbi Eliezer extends this principle to the firstborn donkey as well, and rules that if a man has set aside a lamb for the redemption of a firstborn donkey and the lamb dies he bears the responsibility for providing a substitute lamb.

Rabbi Eliezer’s position is contested by the Sages who compare the redemption of a firstborn donkey to the redemption of *ma’aser sheini* (second tithe) which a man performs in order to have the right to eat that produce outside of Yerushalayim. In the case of *ma’aser sheini* the redemption is valid even if the silver coins used for redemption which were to have been spent in Yerushalayim are lost and the redeemer bears no responsibility for replacing them.

But there is another challenge to Rabbi Eliezer’s equation of the redemption of the firstborn donkey and the firstborn human. The Sage Abaye raised the question why it is then forbidden to have any benefit from an unredeemed firstborn donkey while one may derive such benefit from a firstborn human. The resolution for this was provided by the Sage Rava who pointed out that the wording of the passage “But redeem shall you surely redeem” is a signal that the comparison between firstborn donkey and man is strictly limited to the rules of redemption and to nothing else.

• *Bechorot 12b*

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by RABBI MENDEL WEINBACH

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## RAISING THE GLASS - L'CHAIM

From: Sam in Portland

Dear Rabbi,

When Jews drink alcohol together, especially wine, they say "l'chaim" ("to life"). What is the source of the custom to say l'chaim? Thank you.

Dear Sam,

Despite the spiritually elevating potential of wine (or perhaps because of this great potential) mankind hasn't fared well with the vine.

According to one opinion in our sources, the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil was the grape vine. (None of our sources, by the way, consider the forbidden fruit an apple). Mortality, therefore, was brought upon Adam, Eve and all humanity through the vine.

Not only immortality, but also immorality, passed through the grape vine: "And [Noah] drank of the wine and became drunk, and he uncovered himself within his tent...And Noah awoke from his wine, and he knew what his youngest son had done to him. [Our sages assert that Cham abused and/or castrated his father, Rashi]. And Noah said, 'Cursed be Canaan; he shall be a slave among slaves to his brethren' " (Bereishes 9:21-24).

Lot similarly suffered wine's blush through his own seed: "Our father is old, and there is no man on earth to come upon us, as is the custom of all the earth. Come, let us give our father wine to drink, and let us lie with him...And Lot's two daughters conceived from their father...And the elder bore a son, and she named him Moab [from father]...and the younger also bore a son, and she named him Ben-ami [from my people]" (Bereishes 19:31-38).

No less licentious is an account of the first recorded "toast" given at a Saxony feast in the year 450. British King Vortigern was so moved by the simple sentiment, "Lord King, be of health," offered by Rowena, daughter of the Saxony leader Hengist, that he proceeded to seduce her. Intoxicated by drink, lust and greed, he then bargained with her father Hengist for her hand.

In truth, this was not the first toast. A distinctly Jewish

toast far preceded it in time and exceeded it quality. The Talmud relates that Rabbi Akiva (15-135 C.E.) blessed the guests at his son's wedding with the toast, "Wine and Life to mouths of the rabbis and to the mouths of their students!" On a purely simple level, this is a beautiful toast. However, it has a deeper meaning as well. The numerical value of the Hebrew word for "wine" is the same as that for "secret", and "Life" is interchangeable with "Torah". Rabbi Akiva toasted that the mouths of the Sages should always be full with both revealed and esoteric Torah.

Also, the Talmud teaches, "when wine goes in, secrets come out". On one level, one who is drunk loses control and what's revealed may not always be pleasant or appropriate. However, our Sages refer to a certain state of inebriation as "being perfumed", or "pleasantly scented", whereby one doesn't lose control but rather sheds the restrictions of normal consciousness, enabling him to experience, reveal and express pleasant and profound spiritual concepts. According to whether one's inner being is pure and holy or impure and unholy, wine literally "brings out" the best or the worst in a person. It is our desire for the spiritually best that we toast l'chaim.

It's worth noting that the Jewish custom is to merely raise the glasses, but not to clink them together, unlike the non-Jews who believed the sound of the clinking glass warded off evil spirits. Also, because in Judaism wine symbolizes bounty, blessing and joy, many have the custom of saying l'chaim only after making the appropriate blessing over the wine and drinking a bit, so that the toast of l'chaim should be infused with the holiness and blessing of G-d's name and the inherent joy and bounty of the wine.

I'll conclude with a beautiful idea I recently heard: Although "l'chaim" is usually translated "to life", it is plural and literally means "to lives". This expresses the idea that no one can live life alone. We all need someone else. There's no point in toasting to life alone, because life that is not shared is unlivable. Rather we toast "to lives" in which we share with others what is truly meaningful in life.

Sources:

- Ta'amei HaMinhagim 291-293
- Sanhedrin 70a
- Shabbat 67a
- Eruvin 65a, Megilla 7

## After the Return

BY RABBI MORDECHAI BECHER AND RABBI MOSHE NEWMAN  
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## A LESSON FROM A FOOTBALL HERO

**Question:** I am a young American college graduate studying in a yeshiva in Israel. Missing the opportunity to study Torah in my earlier years I feel an urgent need to spend another year at yeshiva before entering law school in order to gain the degree of self-sufficiency in studying Talmudic texts which will enable me to successfully continue my Torah studies on a part-time basis while I am practicing law. My parents, however, argue that I am sacrificing a valuable year of career preparation. What is the right thing to do?

**Answer:** The opportunity to start your career preparation in law school will be available even a year later, while the opportunity to achieve your long-awaited breakthrough in your Torah learning skills may never return.

As regards sacrifices for ideals, try drawing your parents' attention to the publicity recently given to the death of football star Pat Tillman while serving his country in Afghanistan in the battle against terrorism.

A pro football star playing in the important position of opening safety man, he was offered a 3.6 million dollar contract by the Arizona Cardinals. Then came the catastrophe of 9/11. Pat was so inspired by the patriotic need to defend his country against those who wished to destroy it that he passed up this lucrative offer and joined the Army Rangers with whom he served until he fell in battle.

If someone like Pat is capable of sacrificing a career of stardom and riches for the sake of his ideals, why should it be so unthinkable for a young man to sacrifice one year of preparation for a career as a lawyer in order to fulfill his ideals of development as a knowledgeable Jew?

The right thing to do is make it clear to your parents that you appreciate their genuine concern for your future but expect them to appreciate that you are an adult who must make the decisions which will shape your life and that you are old enough to know the difference between a sacrifice and an investment.

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