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PARSHA INSIGHTS

PERMISSION TO HEAL

“I, the L-rd, am your Healer.” (15:26)

Samuel Goldwyn once remarked, *“A hospital is no place to be sick.”* According to the Talmud, doctors don’t have a very bright prospect ahead of them; *“...the best of doctors go to Gehinom...”* (*Kiddushin 82a*)

Why should doctors expect a ‘warm welcome’ when they exit this world? Either because they don’t exert themselves sufficiently on behalf of their patients, or considering themselves undoubted experts, sometimes they make mistaken diagnoses or prescribe incorrect treatment and end up killing the patient.

There are many recorded cases (and doubtless many more unrecorded ones) of misdiagnosis. Doctors aren’t perfect, but many behave as though they were. As John Webster put it, *“Physicians are like kings — they brook no contradiction.”* In other words — don’t argue with the doctor.

New studies show a high rate of misdiagnosis of the coma-like *persistent vegetative state*. Researchers say that the findings are grounds for “extreme caution” in decisions that might “limit the life chances” of patients.

The latest study conducted by Belgian researchers indicates that around a quarter of the patients in an acute vegetative state when first admitted to the hospital have a good chance of recovering a significant proportion of their faculties, and up to a half will regain some level of consciousness.

Another study shows that around 40% of the patients were wrongly diagnosed as in a vegetative state when they in fact registered the awareness levels of minimal

consciousness, and comparing past studies on this issue shows that the level of misdiagnosis has not decreased in the last 15 years.

And even when the diagnosis may be correct, doctors still don’t have the last word. In Parshat Mishpatim, the Torah repeats the phrase, *v’rapoh, yerapeh*, “And he will certainly heal...” (*Shmot 21:19*). This repetition teaches us the doctors are allowed to heal people. Why would I think in the first place that healing is forbidden? Because the Torah also says, “I, the L-rd, am your Healer.” Maybe only the L-rd is “your Healer;” maybe healing is from G-d, and no mortal has the right to interfere in this process? Thus the Torah has to tell us “he will surely heal...”

The lesson here seems needlessly convoluted. Why does the Torah set up a presumption that only G-d can heal, “I, the L-rd, am your Healer;” and then counter this presumption with another verse, “he will surely heal...” The answer is that another lesson is being taught here as well.

Doctors may have the right to heal, but they have no right to despair.

The word “incurable” has no place in the doctor’s lexicon. A doctor may say, “We have no cure for this at the present time,” or “This case is beyond my expertise,” or “There’s nothing more we can do,” but the word “incurable” should never escape a doctor’s mouth.

For “I, the L-rd, am your Healer.”

• Sources, Meiri, Medical News Net,
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PARSHA OVERVIEW

Pharaoh finally sends *Bnei Yisrael* out of Egypt. With pillars of cloud and fire, G-d leads them toward *Eretz Yisrael* on a circuitous route, avoiding the Pelishtim (Philistines). Pharaoh regrets the loss of so many slaves and chases the Jews with his army. The Jews are very afraid as the Egyptians draw close, but G-d protects them. Moshe raises his staff and G-d splits the sea, enabling the Jews to cross safely. Pharaoh, his heart hardened by G-d, commands his army to pursue, whereupon the waters crash down upon the Egyptian army. Moshe and Miriam lead the men and women, respectively, in a song of thanks. After three days' travel only to find bitter waters at Marah, the people complain. Moshe

miraculously produces potable water. In Marah they receive certain *mitzvot*. The people complain that they ate better food in Egypt. G-d sends quail for meat and provides manna, a miraculous bread that falls from the sky every day except Shabbat. On Friday a double portion descends to supply the Shabbat needs. No one is able to obtain more than his daily portion, but manna collected on Friday suffices for two days so the Jews can rest on Shabbat. Some manna is set aside as a memorial for future generations. When the Jews again complain about a lack of water, Moshe miraculously produces water from a rock. Then Amalek attacks. Joshua leads the Jews in battle while Moshe prays for their welfare.

ISRAEL Forever

SOMETHING TO SING ABOUT

“The horse and its rider were cast into the sea.” These are the opening words of the song that our ancestors sang when they were privileged to see their Egyptian pursuers drowning in Yam Suf. This is the sacred song that endows this Shabbat, when we hear it read in the Torah, with the title “Shabbat of Song”.

In his commentary on Chumash Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman (RaMBaN) writes that the greatest miracle of the Exodus was Pharaoh's insane determination to continue pursuing his liberated slaves even after he saw the sea miraculously split before them. This was perhaps the

most dramatic demonstration in history of what King Solomon said about royal decisions. “The heart of the king is in the hand of G-d” (*Mishlei 21:1*) said the wisest of men in painting a portrait of Divinely directed decisions made by rulers throughout the generations.

Pharaoh's decision to charge into the sea was programmed by Heaven, just as are all decisions made by rulers that affect their nations. This is something for us to truly sing about as we reflect upon the threats made by our enemies. The ultimate decisions will be made by our merciful G-d, and we pray that they will be for the benefit of Israel forever.

LOVE OF THE LAND - THE WISDOM

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

CHATZOR HA-GELILIT – TOMB OF THE CIRCLE MARKER

Near the northern community of Chatzor there is the tomb of one of the most colorful of the Talmudic Sages.

Choni Ha-Me'agel was famed for his ability to successfully pray for rain in a time of drought. It is



related in the Talmud that he drew a circle and stood in its center, refusing to leave that spot until his prayers were answered – hence the surname Ha-Me'agel (the circle marker).

PARSHA Q&A ?

1. What percentage of the Jewish People died during the plague of darkness?
2. Why did the oath that Yosef administered to his brothers apply to Moshe's generation?
3. Why did the Egyptians want to pursue the Jewish People?
4. Where did the Egyptians get animals to pull their chariots?
5. What does it mean that the Jewish People "took hold of their fathers' craft" (*tafsu umnut avotam*)?
6. How did G-d cause the wheels of the Egyptian chariots to fall off?
7. Why were the dead Egyptians cast out of the sea?
8. To what future time is the verse hinting when it uses the future tense of "Then Moshe and *Bnei Yisrael* will sing"?
9. Why are the Egyptians compared to stone, lead and straw?
10. The princes of Edom and Moav had nothing to fear from the Jewish People. Why, then, were they "confused and gripped with trembling?"
11. Moshe foretold that he would not enter the Land of Israel. Which word in the parsha indicates this?
12. Why is Miriam referred to as "Aharon's sister" and not as "Moshe's sister"?
13. The Jewish women trusted that G-d would grant the Jewish People a miraculous victory over the Egyptians. How do we see this?
14. Which sections of the Torah did the Jewish People receive at Marah?
15. When did *Bnei Yisrael* run out of food?
16. What lesson in *derech erez* concerning the eating of meat is taught in this week's Parsha?
17. How did non-Jews experience the taste of the manna?
18. The Prophet Yirmiyahu showed the Jewish People a jar of manna prepared in the time of Moshe. Why?
19. Which verse in this week's parsha alludes to the plague of blood?
20. Why did Moshe's hands become heavy during the war against Amalek?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

1. 13:18 - Eighty percent (four-fifths).
2. 13:19 - Yosef made his brothers swear that they would make their children swear.
3. 14:5 - To regain their wealth.
4. 14:7 - From those Egyptians who feared the word of G-d and kept their animals inside during the plagues.
5. 14:10 - They cried out to G-d.
6. 14:25 - He melted them with fire.
7. 14:30 - So that the Jewish People would see the destruction of the Egyptians and be assured of no further pursuit.
8. 15:1 - Resurrection of the dead during the time of *mashiach*.
9. 15:5 - The wickedest ones floated like straw, dying slowly. The average ones suffered less, sinking like stone. Those still more righteous sunk like lead, dying immediately.
10. 15:14 - They felt horrible seeing Israel in a state of glory.
11. 15:17 - "*T'vi-aimo...*" — "Bring them" (and not "bring us").
12. 15:20 - Aharon put himself at risk for her when she was struck with *tzara'at*. (See *Bamidbar 12:12*)
13. 15:20 - They brought musical instruments with them in preparation for the miraculous victory celebration.
14. 15:25 - Shabbat, Red Heifer, Judicial Laws.
15. 16:1 - 15th of Iyar.
16. 16:8 - One should not eat meat to the point of satiation.
17. 16:21 - The sun melted whatever manna remained in the fields. This flowed into streams from which animals drank. Whoever ate these animals tasted manna.
18. 16:32 - The people claimed they couldn't study Torah because they were too busy earning a livelihood. Yirmiyahu showed them the manna saying: "If you study Torah, G-d will provide for you just as he provided for your ancestors in the desert."
19. 17:5 - "And your staff with which you smote the river..."
20. 17:12 - Because he was remiss in his duty, since he, not Yehoshua, should have led the battle.

- Vows taken to abstain from seafarers, those upon whom the sun shines or those who cover their head
- The difference between vowing to abstain from those already born and those yet to be born
- Who are considered Shabbat observers, sons of Noach or seed of Avraham
- What commerce can be conducted with others if he has vowed not to give benefit to any Jew
- The difference between an uncircumcised Jew and a circumcised non-Jew
- The importance of the mitzvah of circumcision
- The drama of the circumcision of Moshe's second son
- The value of perfect faith in G-d and avoiding the occult
- Avraham's achievement of perfection through circumcision
- The difference between a vow to abstain from eating someone else's food and abstaining from any benefit
- Which benefits may be granted to one whom the vower has forbidden himself to help in any way
- The "fringe benefit" for one guarding a lost object
- If the ban on making personal use of a sacred object applies to a *konam*
- Are *kohanim* offering sacrifices our agents or agents of Heaven

WHEN DID JEWRY BEGIN?

When did our ancestors assume the national identity of Israelites as distinct from the rest of mankind? The answer seems to be found in our *gemara*.

"One who vows not to benefit from the 'Sons of Noach,' declares the *mishna*, "is permitted to benefit from his fellow Jews." Are Jews not descended from Noach as the rest of mankind?, asks the *gemara*. The answer given is that once Avraham was sanctified his descendants are called on his name.

This appears to be a support for the position taken by Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman (RaMBaN) in regard to the status of the Biblical blasphemer who is described (*Vayikra* 24:10) as "the son of an Israelite woman". This son of an Egyptian father is reported in the *midrash* as having "converted" to Judaism. But why would conversion be necessary

if his mother was Jewish?

The French Tosefist commentators answer this by pointing out that since he was born in Egypt before the Torah was given, his status was based on patrilineal descent as is the rule for all nations other than Jews. Ramban rejects this approach because once G-d made a covenant with Avraham his descendants were set apart from all other nations, and it was matrilineal descent which determined the status of the child.

The blasphemer, he concludes, was therefore a full-fledged Jew who had undergone all the forms of "conversion" undertaken by all Jews when making their covenant with G-d at Mount Sinai. The above-mentioned passage which describes him as "going forth from the midst of Israel" refers to the fact that he chose to be a member of his mother's faith rather than join his Egyptian father's people.

• *Nedarim 31a*

What the SAGES Say

"How important is Torah study for if not for the study of Torah Heaven and earth would not endure."

• *Rabbi Eliezer - Nedarim 32a*

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RATIONALE OF THE DIETARY LAWS

Guest Columnist: **Rabbi Mordechai Becher**

Debby in Houston, TX asked:

Dear Rabbi,

What is the rationale of the rules for keeping kosher?

Dear Debby,

The first and most obvious idea behind the kosher laws is self-control and discipline. Let me illustrate this idea with a real-life example. Most parents are familiar with the horrors of going to the supermarket with young children. The worst part of this ordeal is waiting in line at the check-out counter. You have only five items (including two items that the child in the shopping cart swiped off the shelves without your knowledge), so you wait in the “eight-items or less” express line. The lady in front of you has 25 items at least. She is trying to pay with a third-party check from Paraguay in Thai baht, and is negotiating with the clerk over her expired coupons (and her mortgage). You are waiting with two children under the age of six, surrounded on both sides by four-foot high canyon walls of sugar-based products. The children are becoming increasingly impatient and begging for candies, and you are becoming more and more angry and frustrated as time goes on. Of course, most children will scream and beg and embarrass their parents into buying the candy. (For those who are not parents, be assured that this is standard practice). *Now for the true story.* I moved with my family from Israel to Toronto for a four-year stay, and in the first week was waiting in line at the supermarket (as described above, more or less) with one of my children. He asked me for a chocolate bar. I looked at the bar and told him that it was not kosher (really, it wasn't kosher) and he was silent, accepting the decision without tantrums, threats, tears or hysteria. It struck me then that my five year old, who has been brought up with the laws of *kashrut*, had more self-control than the millions of adults in the Western world. How many people accept “no” as an answer in denial of a pleasure that they want NOW? Dangerous? I will take precautions. Unhealthy? I will stop after a few. Addictive? Not to me. Not to indulge is simply not an option. So one clear benefit of the laws of *kashrut* is self-control and discipline.

I remember seeing an interview with a famous politician whose motto was “a kinder, gentler America.” The interview was conducted while he was engaged in hunting grouse on his estate. No one seemed to notice the contradiction between his recreational activity and his motto. How can one derive entertainment from pursuing and killing an animal and at the same time espouse a “kinder, gentler America”? In the words of one of our great Rabbis (Rabbi Yechezkel Landau, Responsa Nodah Biyehudah, Yoreh Deah 10) “I am amazed by this activity [hunting]; we have not found hunters in the Torah except for Nimrod and Esau. This is not the way

of the sons of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob ... One should not say ‘wear it out and renew out’ to someone who has bought clothing made of animal skin, since it is written ‘His mercy is upon all his creatures’. If so how can an Israelite kill living beings, without any other need than in order to pass his time by hunting?!... Therefore this matter contributes to a negative trait, cruelty, and is forbidden and dangerous, and also causes G-d to judge the person for his sins...” It is true that in Jewish tradition we are allowed to use animals as food and clothing. However we are not supposed to rejoice in this, and we are certainly not supposed to make a sport of it. I believe that some of laws of *kashrut* are designed to prevent us from becoming callous and cruel and to discourage hunting as a form of recreation or sustenance. For instance, the requirements of *shechita* and *treifot* virtually preclude the possibility of hunting an animal and then eating it. It must be still and under control when killed, it cannot be fatally injured, and it must be killed only by an expert.

The prohibition against meat and milk also serves to remind us where our food comes from. The meat is from a dead animal, the milk from a living animal. “Do not cook a kid in its mother’s milk” — be aware that obtaining meat necessitates death, obtaining milk requires life. These are foods that have their origin in living creatures and keeping them separate makes us aware of their source. This is similar to the law that allows us to wear clothing of leather, but suggests that we do not wish our friend to “wear it out”, because getting a new one involves the death of an animal. (Code of Jewish Law, Orach Chaim, 223:6 Ramah ad loc.)

In Hebrew the word for “charity” is “*tzedaka*”, which is more correctly translated as “justice.” We do not look at giving to the less fortunate as something beyond the call of duty; we perceive it as simple justice. Hence we can understand why the Torah prohibits a Jewish farmer from eating the produce of his own field until he has given tithes to those without land of their own. He is not being asked to be extra nice, he is being commanded to be just.

Even the types of animals we eat are chosen in part for their symbolism. The ruminants that have split hooves tend to be tranquil, domesticated animals that have no natural weapons. These are animals whose characteristics we may absorb through eating. We may not eat scavengers, carnivores or birds of prey — these are not characteristics that we want to absorb at all.

There is no question that *kashrut* has contributed to our survival as a distinct nation as well. Jews all over the world have certain common dietary patterns. I can be confident that the curried *hamin* of the Jews of Calcutta has no mixture of milk and meat in its ingredients. When I eat French-Moroccan cuisine I know that the meat is not pork, the animals have been slaughtered according to law and the wine is produced by Jews. Jews meet each other at the local kosher bakery, they shop at the same stores and have their own butchers. These laws are a major force in maintaining unity, act as a social barrier against assimilation, and create a feeling of community amongst the Jewish people.

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LITERARY LITTERING

Question: On my way to the office I noticed a flyer on the ground, which I picked up out of curiosity to know its contents. After seeing that it was not relevant to me in any way my impulse was to drop it on the already littered sidewalk. What is the right thing to do?

Answer: It is easy to understand your rationalization that you are not making this public area any filthier than it was before you picked up the flyer. But let us consider at least two reasons for your taking the trouble to place that paper in the nearest trashcan.

First of all, once you have picked up that flyer to study its contents it is your property and you have no more moral right to litter the sidewalk with it than you do with any of your other possessions.

Secondly, the onlooker who saw you throw it away but didn't see you pick it up in the first place assumes that you are just an inconsiderate litterbug and is encouraged to follow your bad example.

By the way, don't worry about the loss suffered by the advertiser since he had no right to promote his cause by littering at the expense of the public.

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY _____

SACRED SILENCE

A severe shortage of etrogim in the European city of Zelotshov presented the great Chassidic leader Rabbi Michel with a problem. The only way he could afford to buy the one available high quality etrog was to sell a precious pair of tefillin that he had inherited.

When he brought it home and showed it to his wife, explaining how he paid for it, he was greeted by an angry response.

"You refused to sell your precious tefillin when we were faced by the severest financial difficulties," she complained

while looking at the etrog, "and now you sold them for this?"

In her anger she was careless in handling the etrog and it fell to the floor and became disqualified for use in the coming holiday.

Rabbi Michel, aware that everything that happens is decreed in Heaven, said nothing.

That night this righteous Jew was visited in a dream by his father who informed him that his silence made a greater impression in Heaven than the sale of his precious possession.

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Another aspect of the kosher laws is the encouragement of a certain degree of aesthetic sensitivity. Judaism prohibits the consumption of animals that have died of natural causes and animals that are deformed or diseased as well as prohibiting the consumption of insects and loathsome foods. It is possible that one idea behind this is to encourage us to view ourselves with dignity and to act with dignity. One of the best defenses against doing that which is immoral is a strong sense of self-esteem and dignity. Evil should be looked upon as beneath our dignity, stealing is stooping too low, gossip is petty and small-minded. In order to help us achieve and maintain this level of dignity the Torah prohibits foods like carcasses and diseased animals. Through this we hope to fulfill the verse that states "And you shall be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation... (Deuteronomy 4:20)"

In conclusion, some religions seek the path to spirituality through withdrawal from the physical world. A monastic life is glorified; celibacy and asceticism are seen as ideals. Some

view the human as essentially an animal that is incapable of elevating itself beyond the struggle for survival. Hence they encourage a life of hedonism and materialism. Judaism sees the human as an essentially spiritual being, clothed in a physical body. Judaism maintains that the physical is not evil; it is just not the complete view of reality. Judaism seeks to elevate the physical world, not to deny it, nor to glorify it. The laws of *kashrut* allow us to enjoy the pleasures of the physical world, but in such a way that we sanctify and elevate the pleasure through consciousness and sensitivity. *Kashrut* recognizes that the essential human need is not food, drink or comfort, but meaning. Judaism, through the dietary laws, injects meaning even into something as commonplace and instinctive as eating.

For related information see the article "Soul Food" by Rabbi Mordechai Becher at <http://ohr.edu/yhiy/article.php/993>