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PARSHA INSIGHTS

THE PRICE OF TURNING SHABBAT INTO SATURDAY

“Six days shall you accomplish your activities, and on the seventh day you shall desist... and your maidservant’s son and the sojourner may be refreshed.” (23:12)

Possibly one of the least understood areas of Shabbat observance is *amira l’akum* — hinting to a non-Jew to do something for a Jew that the Jew him or herself cannot do because of Shabbat.

The basic premise of this prohibition is to preserve the other-worldly quality of Shabbat, for it would be all too easy to employ a non-Jew to continue one’s week-day activities without contravening a single Torah law. In other words, you could turn Shabbat into Saturday.

For example, many people assume that if the circuit breaker trips and the lights go out at the Shabbat night meal one could hint to a non-Jew to turn them on again. This is not true. Except in certain specific cases, a Jew on Shabbat may not receive any direct benefit from the *melacha* (forbidden Shabbat action) of a non-Jew.

There are many people who would never dream of allowing a cheeseburger to cross the portals of their dwelling (let alone the portals of their lips) but would cheerfully hint to the maid to turn the lights on on Shabbat.

Ignoring this prohibition, however, can lead to dire consequences — and not just in the world-to-come.

Around the year 1800, there was a large fire in the city of Maerkisch-Friedland. Much of the Jewish quarter was destroyed and many homes had to be rebuilt. Rabbi Akiva Eiger, the rabbi of the city, issued a proclamation advising those rebuilding their homes to stipulate in their contracts with the builders that no work should be done on Shabbat or Yom Tov.

The community was united in its observance of Rabbi Akiva Eiger’s degree, with one exception. The president of the community, who was extremely wealthy, wanted his house rebuilt as quickly as possible, and instructed his workers to work non-stop through Shabbat and Yom Tov.

The protestations of the community and even the Rabbi himself fell on deaf ears, and the work proceeded unabated. Shocked by this flagrant breach of Halacha, Rabbi Akiva Eiger was heard to say that he did not expect the house to last very long.

Not only was the president’s house the first to be completed; it was undoubtedly the finest of the new homes.

Not long afterwards, and without any previous warning, one of the beams of the president’s mansion suddenly crashed to the ground. A subsequent investigation revealed that the beam was riddled with timber decay. Not only this, but the wooden frame of the mansion was similarly affected and the entire structure had to be demolished.

A check was made of all the other re-built buildings, but not one of them showed the slightest inclination to dry rot. The engineers were at a loss to explain why only this particular house, built at the same time and from the same timber supply, was affected.

The Jews of Maerkisch-Friedland, however, were in no doubt about the answer to this puzzling enigma.

• Sources: *The 39 Melachos*, Rabbi Dovid Ribiat

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PARSHA OVERVIEW

The Jewish People receive a series of laws concerning social justice. Topics include: Proper treatment of Jewish servants; a husband's obligations to his wife; penalties for hitting people and for cursing parents, judges and leaders; financial responsibilities for damaging people or their property, either by oneself or by one's animate or inanimate property, or by pitfalls that one created; payments for theft; not returning an object that one accepted responsibility to guard; the right to self-defense of a person being robbed.

Other topics include: Prohibitions against seduction; witchcraft, bestiality and sacrifices to idols. The Torah warns us to treat the convert, widow and orphan with dignity, and to avoid lying. Usury is forbidden and the rights over collateral are limited. Payment of obligations to the

Temple should not be delayed, and the Jewish People must be holy, even concerning food. The Torah teaches the proper conduct for judges in court proceedings. The commandments of Shabbat and the Sabbatical year are outlined. Three times a year — Pesach, Shavuot and Succot — we are to come to the Temple. The Torah concludes this listing of laws with a law of kashrut — not to mix milk and meat.

G-d promises that He will lead the Jewish People to the Land of Israel, helping them conquer its inhabitants, and tells them that by fulfilling His commandments they will bring blessings to their nation. The people promise to do and listen to everything that G-d says. Moshe writes the Book of the Covenant, and reads it to the people. Moshe ascends the mountain to remain there for 40 days in order to receive the two Tablets of the Covenant.

ISRAEL Forever

THE SECRET LONG-RANGE WEAPON

Despite the efforts of U.S. President Bush to allay Israel's fears concerning Iran's nuclear thrust, there is still a sense in the Jewish state that the megalomaniac dictator in Teheran poses a serious problem for the country he has publicly declared should be removed from the map of the world.

Long-range weaponry is nothing new as we can see from the Torah portion that will be read this Shabbat:

"And I will send the *tzirah* before you and it will drive out... from before you." (*Shmot* 23:28)

The *tzirah* which will drive out so many of Israel's ene-

mies from Eretz Yisrael, explains Rashi, was an unusual insect which shot its poison across the Jordan River at Israel's enemies and killed them, making it easier for the army led by Yehoshua to complete the conquest of the Land.

This was the promise given to our ancestors if they were faithful to the Creator Who promised them their Land. Perhaps the lesson to learn from this is that long-range weapons can be supplied to us by Heaven like in days of old so that we have no fear of hostile long-range weapons threatening the security of Israel forever.

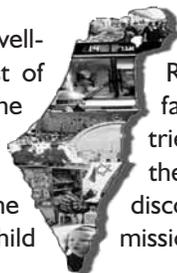
LOVE OF THE LAND - THE PLACES

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

THE FIRST JEWISH HOSPITALS IN JERUSALEM

Jerusalem today boasts a number of modern, well-equipped and staffed hospitals. One of the oldest of them, Bikur Cholim, has recently been much in the news as a result of its having been purchased by a Russian billionaire with political ambitions.

But Bikur Cholim, established in 1858, was not the city's first hospital. That title goes to the Meir Rothschild



Hospital founded a few years earlier by the Rothschild family of Paris and named for the father of Baron James Rothschild. Both hospitals tried their best to serve the Jews of Jerusalem with their modest facilities and thus save them the great discomfort of going to a third hospital run by British missionaries.

PARSHA Q&A ?

1. In what context is a *mezuzah* mentioned in this week's parsha?
2. What special mitzvah does the Torah give to the master of a Hebrew maidservant?
3. What is the penalty for wounding one's father or mother?
4. "A" intentionally hits "B." As a result, B is close to death. Besides any monetary payments, what happens to A?
5. What is the penalty for someone who tries to murder a particular person, but accidentally kills another person instead? Give two opinions.
6. A slave goes free if his master knocks out one of the slave's teeth. What teeth do not qualify for this rule and why?
7. An ox gores another ox. What is the maximum the owner of the damaging ox must pay, provided his animal had gored no more than twice previously?
8. From where in this week's parsha can the importance of work be demonstrated?
9. What is meant by the words "If the sun shone on him"?
10. A person is given an object for safe-keeping. Later, he swears it was stolen. Witnesses come and say that in fact he is the one who stole it. How much must he pay?
11. A person borrows his employee's car. The car is struck by lightning. How much must he pay?
12. Why is lending money at interest called "biting"?
13. Non-kosher meat, "*treifa*," is preferentially fed to dogs. Why?
14. Which verse forbids listening to slander?
15. What constitutes a majority-ruling in a capital case?
16. How is Shavuot referred to in this week's parsha?
17. How many prohibitions are transgressed when cooking meat and milk together?
18. What was written in the *Sefer Habrit* which Moshe wrote prior to the giving of the Torah?
19. What was the *livnat hasapir* a reminder of?
20. Who was Efrat? Who was her husband? Who was her son?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

1. 21:6 - If a Hebrew slave desires to remain enslaved, his owner brings him "to the doorpost *mezuzah*" to pierce his ear.
2. 21:8,9 - To marry her
3. 21:15 - Death by strangulation.
4. 21:19 - He is put in jail until "B" recovers or dies.
5. 21:23 - 1)The murderer deserves the death penalty. 2)The murderer is exempt from death but must compensate the heirs of his victim.
6. 21:26 - Baby teeth, which grow back.
7. 21:35 - The full value of his own animal.
8. 21:37 - From the "five-times" penalty for stealing an ox and slaughtering it. This fine is seen as punishment for preventing the owner from plowing with his ox.
9. 22:2 - If it's as clear as the sun that the thief has no intent to kill.
10. 22:8 - Double value of the object.
11. 22:14 - Nothing.
12. 22:24 - Interest is like a snake bite. Just as the poison is not noticed at first but soon overwhelms the person, so too interest is barely noticeable until it accumulates to an overwhelming sum.
13. 22:30 - As "reward" for their silence during the plague of the first-born.
14. 23:1 - Targum Onkelos translates "Don't bear a false report" as "Don't receive a false report".
15. 23:2 - A simple majority is needed for an acquittal. A majority of two is needed for a ruling of guilty.
16. 23:16 - *Chag Hakatzir* — Festival of Reaping.
17. 23:19 - One.
18. 24:4,7 - The Torah, starting from Bereishet until the giving of the Torah, and the *mitzvot* given at Mara.
19. 24:10 - That the Jews in Egypt were forced to toil by making bricks.
20. 24:14 - Miriam, wife of Calev, mother of Chur.

- Relinquishing ownership of a field for a defined period
- Whether formal relinquishing of ownership must be done before three people
- Partners in a property who have made vows prohibiting one another to benefit from them
- Does a vow forbidding another to enter his home remain in effect even after the owner dies or sells
- When are the foods exchanged for the foods prohibited through a vow also forbidden
- In which communal properties of a city is everyone considered a partner
- When it is necessary to gift the *nassi* with one's share of communal property
- The incident in Beit Choron which led to a ruling regarding what is considered an outright gift
- Giving away property conditional on recipient transferring ownership to someone else
- What foods become forbidden when one makes a vow to abstain from cooked foods
- For which sick people do we daily pray
- Babylonians and other cereal eaters
- Sages with glowing faces
- The saga of Rabbi Akiva

TORAH IN SIMPLE CONTAINERS

“Such glorious Torah wisdom in such an ugly container!” Thus chided the Roman princess the sage Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chanania.

“Take a lesson from your father’s house,” replied the sage. “In what does your father store his wine?”

“In clay vessels,” was her reply.

When he chided her that if commoners placed their wine in clay vessels it was only fitting for royalty to use gold and silver urns, she went ahead and transferred the wine to such vessels. Of course the wine soon spoiled, giving Rabbi Yehoshua an opportunity to make his point that Torah too is best stored in simple looking vessels.

“But there are handsome scholars as well,” protested the

princess.

“Were they hateful looking,” countered the sage, “they would be even greater scholars.”

A simple reading of Rabbi Yehoshua’s statement gives the impression that some connection exists between the physical appearance of a scholar and his level of learning. Maharsha, however, calls attention to the fact that while the princess used the term “ugly” in regard to him, Rabbi Yehoshua used the term “hateful”. The sage was not making any connection between looks and wisdom but rather stressing the importance of a scholar having a hateful attitude to physical beauty (a point made by Tosefot in *Mesechta Ta’anit 7a*), for one who is obsessed with appearances will find this attitude an obstacle to his development as a Torah scholar.

• *Nedarim 50b*

What the SAGES Say

“Let her approach — all that I possess and all that you possess is because of her.”

Rabbi Akiva to his 24,000 disciples in regard to his wife Rachel who waited 24 years for his return home - Nedarim 50a

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FASTING

From: David Rose in Calgary

*Dear Rabbi,
I practice Chinese medicine which includes fasting as one of the many methods of healing. I am wondering what the Jewish perspective on fasting is. Thank you.*

Dear David,

Judaism posits that spiritual forces are at the root of everything physical. On a cosmic scale, this means that the One Transcendental G-d is simultaneously above and within everything that exists. On a human scale this is paralleled by the presence of the Divine soul above and within the body.

Just as harmony, balance and tranquility in the spiritual realm benefit Creation in general, so too a healthy soul-state benefits the body in particular. Conversely, spiritual imbalance manifests itself in physical disharmony.

It is for this reason that when we bless someone for health we say, "May G-d heal the soul and heal the body", where health of the soul precedes that of the body not only in terms of importance but also causally/sequentially.

Therefore, insofar as fasting is viewed by Judaism as a venue for re-aligning one's spiritual orientation and balance, as well as its potential benefit for the body, fasting has always been an important tool in Judaism for spiritual and physical well-being.

When Moses physically and spiritually ascended the experience called Sinai, he emptied his self by fasting 40 days and nights, becoming the conduit through which the Torah flowed from Heaven to earth.

Also, the Torah commands Jews to fast for what amounts to about 26 hours on Yom Kippur, Day of Atonement. Here, fasting reminds us of our human frailty and dependence on G-d, weans us from an over-emphasis on the physical toward the spiritual, and catalyzes a spiritual reckoning intended to bring us back in line with G-d, our purpose and life. This process culminates with the joyous festivities of Succot in which we celebrate our regained purity in closeness to G-d and His bounty. Other public fast days were instituted throughout the year that are similarly intended to stir return to G-d and ultimately result in the rejoicing of His return to

us and to the Holy Temple.

Such spiritual fasting is not limited to public fast days. Historically, individuals also used this tool for spiritual re-alignment. And as far as the physical benefits of fasting, Rambam writes in his code for healthy living that it is desirable that a person fast at least one day of each week.

That all being said, nowadays, un-required fasting is not common and is somewhat discouraged. The reason is that mankind is considered spiritually and physically weaker and more pampered than in days of old. Since fasting is viewed as a tool for growth, if it breaks more than builds, it loses its value. Given our spiritual frailty, excessive or regular fasting usually breaks our spirit and can cause depression. Given our physical pamperedness, doing so can detract from our potential to fully realize our purpose in life.

What is still acceptable nowadays is partial fasting. This can be done not only with eating, but with sleeping, talking and other activities as well. Eating, sleeping or talking less frequently or in smaller quantities is something that no one else has to know about, can increase one's self control and enhance one's spiritual orientation without detracting from his normal functioning or routine. In fact, the Chida, one of the great Sephardic rabbis of recent times, wrote that taking smaller portions of food and then leaving some on the plate while still hungry is even more meritorious than a full day of fasting, because while fasting a person can divert his attention entirely from eating, but here he withdraws while steeped in desire.

I'll conclude with a true story:

There was once a rabbi who for many years fasted during the daytime and ate only sparingly at night. One day, he and his study partner were learning a very complex commentary that they could not understand. Shortly before sunset, he got up, ate a bit, returned and solved the question. Surprised, his partner asked what he did to figure out the problem. He revealed his years-long practice, attributing his inability to crack the case to his fasting, and explained that he broke the fast in order to understand what they were learning. His partner objected that he should have just waited until nightfall. The rabbi exclaimed, "The whole purpose of my personal fast is to serve G-d better. If I can't comprehend His Torah because of the fasting, even for just a very short while, I'm no longer serving G-d!"

THE RABBI AND THE CABBIE

Reuven is one of those Jerusalem taxi drivers who is always listening, while driving, to cassettes of lectures on Torah subjects. His favorite is the renowned Sephardic sage, Rabbi Benzion Mutzafi.

One day he got a call to pick up a passenger in the Sanhedria Murchevet neighborhood. When he asked his distinguished-looking passenger what his destination was, he was told to head for Mosayeff Synagogue in the Bucharim neighborhood. "That's where my favorite lecturer Rabbi Mutzafi speaks," said Reuven and he asked the passenger if he personally knew the rabbi.

When the surprising reply came that he himself was Rabbi Mutzafi, another surprise soon followed.

"You cost me many fares," Reuven jokingly told the rabbi. "Because I want to be able to listen to your talks I refuse to stop for any passenger who seems to be one who will object to my doing so."

The rabbi assured him that his reward will be greater than his loss.

Just before the High Holidays our cabbie called the rabbi for a blessing, identifying himself as just a cab driver that the rabbi probably doesn't remember. To his pleasant surprise the rabbi cried out:

"Reuven, is that you! How can I ever forget a cab driver who spends nine hours a day listening to Torah tapes, including mine!"

WHAT'S THE RIGHT THING TO DO?

REAL-LIFE QUESTIONS OF SOCIAL AND BUSINESS ETHICS

PRAY TOGETHER — STAY TOGETHER

Question: In the synagogue where I pray daily there are "shtiblech" — prayer rooms — where services begin a quarter of an hour apart from one another. The temptation of joining a minyan whenever it is convenient clashes with my sense of discipline. What is the right thing to do?

Answer: The "shtibel" system makes sense for people whose daily schedules differ. But it is not right to alternate where you pray daily according to how late you sleep on any particular morning.

First of all, our Talmudic Sages have pointed out the

importance of having a fixed place for your prayers, a concept that seems to include the need for a fixed time and fixed minyan.

In addition to the quality of prayer in a fixed frame of time and place, there is the social aspect. Praying together creates a valuable bond of friendship and missing out on your regular company may even raise suspicion regarding your seriousness towards prayer.

In conclusion, make it a habit to pray together and stay together with your fellow worshippers.

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