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PARSHA INSIGHTS

Devarim

PLANTING SEEDS

“These are the words that Moshe spoke to all Israel, on the other side of the Jordan, concerning the Wilderness, concerning the Aravah, opposite the Sea of Reeds, between Paran and Tophel and Lavan, Chatzerot and Di Zahav...”

“**Y**ou know. You’re such an idiot. I don’t know why you did that. Didn’t you realize that you would hurt his feelings? Why aren’t you more sensitive to other people?”

It always surprises me how the most sensitive people to their own feelings are often the least sensitive to others.

Even when offering constructive advice to someone the worst way to do is by a direct confrontation, for immediately the listener will rise against the perceived attack with all manner of self-justification: “I couldn’t help it”; “You think you could have done better?” etc. etc.

Better by far is to *allude* to the matter at hand, subtly planting an inference into the mind of the listener. In this way his front-line early-warning defenses are not triggered, and the idea lodges in his subconscious to grow like a seed.

This is what Moshe does in the opening lines of the Book of Devarim. The place names that are mentioned here are locations of various sins and rebellions of the Jewish People: “...concerning the wilderness...” their lusting for the flesh pots of Egypt; “...concerning the Aravah...” their immorality with the daughters of Moav; “...opposite the Sea of Reeds...” their lack of trust in G-d at the crossing of the sea; “...between Paran and Tophel and Lavan...” their complaints about the miraculous food — the *Manna*; “...and Chatzerot...” the rebellion of Korach; “and Di Zahav” the golden calf.

Moshe is addressing the Bnei Yisrael in the last five weeks of his life. He wants to leave them a strong and lasting message: To beware of inherent tendencies that have already brought them into trouble.

Rather than tackle them directly and risk rejection, Moshe plants the seeds of self-examination into the collective psyche of the Jewish People so that long after his departure they will still bear fruit.

• Sources: Rashi; Chasam Sofer, heard from Rabbi Naftali Falk

Va'etchanan

PRAYERLINE

“And I beseeched G-d at that time, saying...” (3:23)

The phrase “At that time” hints to a prayer for generations unborn. Whenever the Jewish People will find themselves in times of anguish, unable to pray properly because of the oppression of exile, Moshe’s prayer will arise for them.

Even in the most numbing unhappiness, when the cord of prayer to the lips has disconnected from the heart and all they will be able to do is merely utter the words, Moshe’s prayer will arise for them. “At that time”, when all they will be able to do is “saying” and there will be no feeling in their words, this prayer of Moshe prayer will arise in front of G-d.

• Source: Hadmur MiAmshenov, zatzal

“With all your heart” (6:5)

A similar idea is hinted to in the phrase “With all your heart” in the Shema. Rashi explains the following phrase “With all your soul” to mean “even if He will take your soul.” So, similarly, even if He will take your heart. Even when doubts gnaw away at your heart, even when it is confused and you don’t see the Hand of G-d, even then, serve Him — “With all your heart.”

• Source: Chidushei HaRim

ZUSHIA’S LESSON

“And with all your resources” (6:5)

Reb Shmelke of Nicklesburg once asked his rebbe, The Maggid of Mezrich, “How can one possibly fulfill what our Sages teach us that we should bless G-d for the bad things that happen to us just as we bless Him for the good? How is such a thing possible?”

The Maggid replied to him, “If you wish to find the answer to your question, go to the *Beit Midrash* and there you will find my student, Reb Zushia. From him you will learn the meaning of the mishna’s teaching.”

Reb Zushia, it was known, was a man terribly beset with

continued on page fifteen

Devarim

This Parsha begins the last of the Five Books of The Torah, Sefer *Devarim*. This Book is also called *Mishneh Torah*, “Repetition of the Torah” (hence the Greek/English title Deuteronomy). Sefer *Devarim* relates what Moshe told *Bnei Yisrael* during the last five weeks of his life, as they prepared to cross the Jordan into *Eretz Yisrael*. Moshe reviews the *mitzvot*, stressing the change of lifestyle they are about to undergo: From the supernatural existence of the desert under Moshe’s guidance to the apparently natural life they will experience under Yehoshua’s leadership in the Land.

The central theme this week is the sin of the spies, the *meraglim*. The Parsha opens with Moshe alluding to the sins of the previous generation who died in the desert. He describes what would have happened if they hadn’t sinned by sending spies into *Eretz Yisrael*. G-d would have given them without a fight all the land from the Mediterranean to the Euphrates, including the lands of Ammon, Moav and Edom. He details the subtle sins that culminate in the sin of the spies, and reviews at length this incident and its results: The entire generation would die in the desert; Moshe would not enter *Eretz Yisrael*. He reminds them that their immediate reaction to G-d’s decree was to want to “go up and fight” to redress the sin; he recounts how they wouldn’t listen when he told them not to go, that they no longer merited vanquishing their enemies miraculously. They ignored him and suffered a massive defeat. They were not allowed to fight with the kingdoms of Esav, Moav or Ammon — these lands were not to be part of the map of *Eretz Yisrael* in the meantime. When the conquest of Canaan will begin with Sichon and Og, it will be via natural warfare.

Va’etchanan

Although Moshe is content that Yehoshua will lead the nation, Moshe nevertheless prays to enter the Land of Israel in order to fulfill its special *mitzvot*. G-d refuses. Moshe reminds *Bnei Yisrael* of the gathering at Sinai when they received the Torah — that they saw no visual representation of the Divine, but only the sound of words. Moshe impresses on *Bnei Yisrael* that the Sinai revelation took place before an entire nation, not to a select elite, and that only the Jews will ever claim that G-d spoke to their entire nation. Moshe specifically enjoins *Bnei Yisrael* to “pass over” the

Sinai event to their children throughout all generations.

Moshe predicts, accurately, that when *Bnei Yisrael* dwell in *Eretz Yisrael* they will sin and be scattered among all the peoples. They will stay few in number but will eventually return to G-d.

Moshe designates three “refuge cities” to which an inadvertent killer may flee. Moshe repeats the 10 Commandments and then teaches the *Shema*, the central credo of Judaism, that there is only One G-d. Moshe warns the people not to succumb to materialism and thus forget their purpose as a spiritual nation. The *parsha* ends with Moshe exhorting *Bnei Yisrael* not to intermarry when they enter *Eretz Yisrael*, as they cannot be a treasured and holy nation if they intermarry, and they will become indistinguishable from the other nations.

Ekev

If *Bnei Yisrael* carefully observe even those “minor” *mitzvot* that are usually “trampled” underfoot, Moshe promises them that they will be the most blessed of the nations of earth. Moshe tells *Bnei Yisrael* that they will conquer *Eretz Canaan* little by little, so that the land will not be overrun by wild animals in the hiatus before *Bnei Yisrael* are able to organize and settle the whole land. After again warning *Bnei Yisrael* to burn all carved idols of Canaanite gods, Moshe stresses that the Torah is indivisible and not open to partial observance. Moshe describes the Land of Israel as a land of wheat, barley, grapes, figs, and pomegranates, a land of oil-yielding olives and date-honey. Moshe cautions *Bnei Yisrael* not to become haughty and think that their success in *Eretz Yisrael* is a result of their own powers or vigor; rather, it was G-d who gave them wealth and success. Nor did G-d drive out the Canaanites because of *Bnei Yisrael*’s righteousness, but rather because of the sins of the Canaanites; for the road from Sinai had been a catalogue of large and small sins and rebellions against G-d and Moshe. Moshe details the events after G-d spoke the 10 Commandments at Sinai, culminating in his bringing down the second set of Tablets on Yom Kippur. Aharon’s passing is recorded as is the elevation of the *levi’im* to G-d’s ministers. Moshe points out that the 70 souls who went down to Egypt have now become like the stars of the heaven in abundance. After specifying the great virtues of the Land of Israel, Moshe speaks the second paragraph of the *Shema*, conceptualizing the blessings that accompa-

ny keeping *mitzvot* and the curse that results from non-observance.

Re’eh

Moshe presents to the nation the blessing of a spiritually oriented life, and the curse of becoming disconnected from G-d. When the nation enters *Eretz Yisrael* they must burn down any trees that had been used for idol-worship, and destroy all idolatrous statues. G-d will choose only one place where the Divine Presence will dwell. Offerings may be brought only there; not to a private altar. Moshe repeatedly warns against eating animal blood. In the desert, all meat was slaughtered in the Mishkan, but in *Eretz Yisrael* meat may be slaughtered anywhere. Moshe lists the categories of food that may only be eaten in Jerusalem. He warns the nation against copying ways of the other nations. Since the Torah is complete and perfect, nothing may be added or subtracted from it. If a “prophet” tells the people to permanently abandon a Torah law or indulge in idol worship, he is to be put to death. One who entices others to worship idols is to be put to death. A city of idolatry must be razed. It is prohibited to show excessive signs of mourning, such as marking the skin or making a bald spot. Moshe reiterates the classifications of kosher and non-kosher food and the prohibition of cooking meat and milk. Produce of the second tithe must be eaten in Jerusalem, and if the amount is too large to carry, it may be exchanged for money with which food is bought in Jerusalem. In certain years this tithe is given to the poor. *Bnei Yisrael* are instructed to always be open-hearted, and in the seventh year any loans must be discounted — G-d will bless the person in all ways. A Jewish bondsman is released after six years, and must be sent away with generous provisions. If he refuses to leave, his ear is pierced with an awl at the door post and he remains a bondsman until the Jubilee year. The Parsha ends with a description of the three pilgrimage festivals of Pesach, Shavuot and Succot.

Shoftim

Moshe tells *Bnei Yisrael* to appoint judges and officers in their cities. A bribe of even an insignificant sum is forbidden. Trees are not to be planted near G-d’s altar, as was the way of idolaters. Blemishes in animals designated for offerings and other points of disqualification are listed. The Great Sanhedrin is to

Gittin 29-36

- How final is a death sentence for assuming its execution
- An agent appointing an agent in his place
- Rabbi Safra and the three senior Sages
- Advancing money to a *kohen*, levite or poor man and collecting from gifts due to them
- Whether produce or money designated for tithing purpose can be assumed to still exist and what happens when their loss is discovered
- Ganeva, the scholarly dissenter
- Cancellation of a *get* sent with an agent
- Rabban Gamliel's ban on cancellation of a *get* before a rabbinical court
- The conditional clause in the marriage ceremony
- When ten people are instructed to write a *get*
- The blessing made for a delay in delivering of *get*
- If an indication is sufficient for cancellation
- Writing all the names of the man and wife in the *get*
- The oath or vow required of a widow collecting her *ketubah* payment from heirs
- Why a vow was instituted in place of oath
- The vow that cannot be nullified
- Why witnesses must sign on a *get*
- The concept of *pruzbul*

A BLESSING FOR BOTH

In the many halachic debates found throughout the Talmud between the Sages Rava and Abaye the general rule is to follow the position of Rava except for six cases. One of these exceptions is whether a mere indication by a husband that he does not wish to have a *get* delivered to his wife is sufficient to nullify that document.

The case in question dealt with a *get* sent by Gedul bar Reilai with an agent for delivery to his wife. The agent found her busily weaving and told her he wished to give her a *get* from her husband. Her response was to come back the next day. When the agent reported back to the husband that he did not yet manage to deliver the *get* his response was to proclaim the blessing "Blessed is He Who is good and beneficent." This could certainly be interpreted as an expression of relief that the *get* had not been delivered because the husband had changed his mind about ending the marriage. Whether such an indication constitutes actual cancellation is the issue of debate, with the ruling in favor of Abaye that it does not.

When a Jew is privileged to hear very good news he makes a blessing of *shechiyanu*. Only when the news benefits others besides himself does he make the blessing mentioned in the above account. Since the woman showed a

continued on page four

WHAT THE SAGES SAY

"It is forbidden for one who borrows an item to lend it to someone else and for one who rents something to rent it to another (without permission).

- Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish interpreting the Mishnah - Gittin 29a

PARSHA OVERVIEW

make binding decisions on new situations according to Torah criteria to prevent the fragmentation of the Torah. A very learned scholar who refuses to accept the Halachic decisions of the Sanhedrin incurs the death penalty. A Jewish king may only have possessions and symbols of power commensurate with the honor of his office, but not for self-aggrandizement. He is to write for himself two *sifrei Torah*, one to be kept with him wherever he goes, so that he doesn't become haughty. Neither the *kohanim* nor the *levi'im* are to inherit land in the Land of Israel, rather they are to be supported by the community by a system

of tithes. All divination is prohibited. G-d promises the Jewish People that He will send them prophets to guide them, and Moshe explains how a genuine prophet may be distinguished from a false one. Cities of refuge are to be provided an accidental killer to escape the blood-avenger from the deceased's family. However, someone who kills with malice is to be handed over to the blood-avenger. Moshe cautions *Bnei Yisrael* not to move boundary markers to increase their property. Two witnesses who conspire to "frame" a third party are to be punished with the very same punishment that they conspired to

bring upon the innocent party. A *kohen* is to be anointed specifically for when Israel goes to war, to instill trust in G-d. Among those disqualified from going to war is anyone who has built a new house but not lived in it yet, or anyone who is fearful or fainthearted. An enemy must be given the chance to make peace, but if they refuse, all the males are to be killed. Fruit trees are to be preserved and not cut down during the siege. If a corpse is found between cities, the elders of the nearest city must take a heifer, slaughter it, and wash their hands over it, saying that they are not guilty of the death.

reluctance to accept the get by asking the agent to come back the next day, the change of mind of her husband was definitely for her benefit as well and therefore mandated the more inclusive blessing.

• *Gittin 34a*

Gittin 37- 43

- The loans which the *Shmitah* year does not cancel
- Paying a *Shmita*-canceled loan
- Redeeming a slave taken prisoner by non-Jews
- Status of slave whose owner has relinquished ownership or who has donated him to the Sanctuary
- The problem of freeing a slave
- Comparison and contrast between woman and slave
- Indications of owner's intention to free his slave
- A mortgaged slave
- Responsibility for an indiscernible damage
- Freeing a half-slave
- Transferring estate to a slave
- Mix-up of a *kohen* child with that of a slave child
- Making *kiddushin* with a woman who is half-slave
- Definition of a *shifchah charufah*
- Sale of a slave to a non-Jew or to a Jew outside of Eretz Yisrael

THE BENEFIT OF ERROR

When the Sage Rabbah bar Rav Huna was corrected by his colleague Rabbi Chisda in regard to a ruling which he issued concerning the effectiveness of *kiddushin* with a woman who is half-free half-slave, he did a most remarkable thing. He made a public announcement that he had erred, and offered an explanation of an enigmatic passage in the prophecy of Yishayahu to show the benefit of erring and being corrected.

In his prophecy concerning the drastic decline of Torah knowledge that would afflict the Jews of Yerushalayim, the Prophet Yishayahu warns that in desperation "a man shall take hold of his brother... saying 'You have clothing, be our ruler, and let this obstacle be under your hand'." (*Yishayahu* 3:6) "You have clothing," he explained, means that matters of law which are asked of people who, from lack of knowledge, cover up their ignorance the way clothes cover the body, are well known to the one being approached for leadership. "This obstacle" refers to Torah subjects that one is not perfectly clear about until they present an obstacle for him, over which he stumbles and is corrected. These too, the case is made to the potential authority, are "under your

continued on page five

WHAT THE SAGES SAY

"The world was created so that people should be fruitful and multiply, as it is written 'He did not create it to be desolate but rather that it be inhabited.' (*Yishayahu* 45:18).

• *Beit Shammai - Gittin 41b*

LOVE OF THE LAND - THE PLACES

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

HAR HABAYT — A TISHA B'AV REMINDER

"The mountain of Zion is desolate; foxes prowl over it." These words from the Eicha lamentations of the Prophet Yirmiyahu are said and sung in a sad tone during the current nine days of mourning the destruction of the *Beit Hamikdash*.

What is a more powerful reminder of that great tragedy than seeing an Arab mosque on Temple Mount!

Halacha forbids Jews in their present ritually impure state from ascending Temple Mount because



they may unknowingly be treading on the site of the *Beit Hamikdash*, which is out of bounds for anyone who has come into contact with the dead. The closest we can get to this holy site is the Western Wall, which is why the "Kotel" is such a magnet for worshippers and visitors.

The closing words of Eicha are "Return us to You, O G-d, and we shall return; renew our days as of old."

When all of our people accept the outstretched hand of G-d and return to Him will we merit the return of the *Beit Hamikdash* to the Mountain of Zion in a renewed Israel forever.

hand” because the shame you suffered from being corrected forced you to be more careful in your study.

This introduction which Rabbah bar Rav Huna made to his public retraction of his previous ruling serves as a consolation for anyone who errs in his judgment and is corrected.

• *Gittin 43a*

Gittin 44-50

- Retrieving a slave from captivity
- If children are penalized for their father’s violation of a rabbinic ban
- A slave sold to an owner outside of Eretz Yisrael
- Whether money is returned in an invalid transaction
- Ransoming captives and helping them escape
- The “bird talk” of Rabbi Ilish
- Redeeming sacred objects from non-Jews
- Which cause of divorce prevents remarriage with the divorcee
- The vow which cannot be nullified
- Redeeming a Jew who sold himself as a slave to a non-Jew
- *Bikurim* from a field sold to a non-Jew or one in which he owns only the produce or two trees in the field
- The difference between sanctifying an inherited field or a purchased one
- Which properties can be confiscated for payment of obligations by Torah law or rabbinical ordinance
- Why a woman collects her *ketubah* from inferior property
- Collecting a debt from orphans
- Does receiver of a gift have the same power of collecting from giver’s property as does a creditor

WHAT PRICE RANSOM? - RANSOMING A JEW

Ransoming a Jew from captivity presents a painful challenge. The *mishnah* seems to offer a clear-cut ruling that an exorbitant ransom cannot be paid and the reason given in the *gemara* is that this might encourage non-Jews to kidnap other Jews in order to gain such a ransom.

Are there exceptions to the rule?

Two exceptions are mentioned by *Tosefot*.

One deals with the obligation of a man to ransom his wife from captivity. In *Mesechta Ketubot* (52a) we learn that if the captors demand ten times the woman’s value the husband is obligated to pay that sum if this was the first time he had to ransom her.

Another exception is found in our own *Mesechta Gittin* (58a) where we learn that Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananiah paid a very large sum of money to ransom an extraordinarily gifted and handsome youngster.

Regarding the first exception the explanation given is that of a man being allowed to spend all the money he wants in order to ransom himself, and his wife falls under the category of self-ransom.

Rabbi Yehoshua’s action could have been based on one of two considerations. There is the likelihood that the youngster’s life was in danger and there is no limit on how much the public must spend to save a life. The other consideration

continued on page six

WHAT THE Sages SAY

“The Jewish people are compared to a dove (Just as the wings of the dove protect it, so do the *mitzvot* of the Jewish People protect them — *Mesechta Shabbat* 130a), so that I can rely on the dove’s message that I will be saved by a miracle.”

• *Rabbi Ilish - Gittin 45a*

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

WHAT’S IN THAT NAME?

Did you ever wonder how a non-Jewish name like Alexander became so common among Jews? The story goes that the original Alexander, the king of Macedon who conquered almost the entire world including Eretz Yisrael, planned to install a statue of himself in the *Beit Hamikdash*. The *kohen gadol*, Shimon Hatzadik, suggested to him that there was a better way to immor-

talize himself than defiling the House of G-d with a graven image.

“Issue an order,” he counseled, “that all the male children born this year be named Alexander after you.”

The idea found favor in the eyes of Alexander who then donated gold for the upkeep of the *Beit Hamikdash*, bowed to G-d and departed.

is that the youngster had demonstrated an unusual potential to be a great Torah scholar and this justified spending more than a normal amount to gain his freedom.

• *Gittin 45a*

Gittin 51-56

- The rights of the daughters to support from deceased father's estate
- When the finder of a lost object is obligated to take an oath when challenged by the loser
- Why one who makes a partial admission must take an oath
- The responsibilities of a guardian of orphans appointed by the court or by the father
- Rabbi Meir's dream
- How property of orphans can be acquired
- Responsibility for damages which are not discernible
- Penalties imposed by the Sages for intentional and unintentional violations
- Are Jews more careful about Shabbat or about *Shmitah*
- Compensating the *kohen* for taking his *terumah*
- Responsibility of *kohen* who causes a sacrifice to be disqualified
- Credibility of scribe who confesses that he was derelict in writing a Sefer Torah which he sold
- The halachic testimonies of Rabbi Yochanan ben Gudgeda

- Stolen beams and stolen sacrificial animals
- Purchase of a property taken from a Jew by Roman aggressor
- The events leading up to the destruction of Yerushalayim
- Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai and the general turned emperor
- The rise and fall of Titus

FEARING FEAR ITSELF

“Fortunate is the man who is always afraid.” (*Mishlei* 28:13) “Those in Zion who were afraid were sinners.” (*Yishayahu* 33:14)

Opposing signals seem to emerge from these two passages, but *Tosefot* provides a resolution.

The basic principle is that there is a positive aspect of fear and a negative one. The difference is spelled out in the dialogue between Rabbi Yishmael ben Rabbi Yossi and his disciple as they walked through the streets of Yerushalayim (*Mesechta Berachot* 60a). Seeing the disciple shaking with fear for no discernible reason the master reprimanded him by quoting the passage from the Prophet Yishayahu. When the disciple countered with the passage in *Mishlei* he was told that the positive fear of which King Shlomo spoke was in regard to retaining Torah knowledge — a fear of forgetting which spurs a scholar to steadily review what he has

continued on page six

WHAT THE Sages SAY

“I never referred to my wife as my wife but rather as my household (because all the household affairs were taken care of by her so that she was the pillar of the home – Rashi).”

• *Rabbi Yossi - Gittin 52a*

ISRAEL Forever

A MULTILINGUAL MESSAGE

At the end of his long career as leader of his people, Moshe reviewed for them the history of their forty-year journey from Egypt to Eretz Yisrael. This review is called *Mishneh Torah* which is recorded in the *Chumash Devarim* which we begin reading in the synagogue this Shabbat.

The Torah tells us that Moshe delivered this message in the clearest fashion, which our Sages interpret as meaning that he broadcast it in seventy languages.

What was the purpose of such a multilingual message if

the only audience was made up of speakers of the Holy Tongue?

It has been suggested that since G-d knew that a time would come when the Jews who received His Torah would be dispersed in many lands and familiar only with foreign languages, it was necessary to implant in the Jewish psyche a subliminal familiarity with Torah in every language. This made it possible for Jews today to study Torah in so many languages and thus guarantee the learning of Torah in Israel forever.

learned. What Rabbi Yishmael condemned as sinful based on the words of Yishayahu was an exaggerated fear of danger that betrayed a lack of faith in G-d.

In our own *gemara* the passage in *Mishlei* is quoted as a criticism of the Jews under Roman rule who were not sufficiently afraid of the repercussions which would follow their actions. They were too confident in their security that they failed to consider that the Bar Kamtza whom they publicly embarrassed might turn into a treacherous enemy whose slander would lead to the destruction of Yerushalayim.

• *Gittin 55b*

Gittin 57-64

- The destruction of Tur Malka and Beitar in Eretz Yisrael and Kefar Sachnia in Egypt
- Nevuzraden and the blood of the Prophet Zechariah
- The voice and hands of destruction
- The heroism of 400 boys and girls and of a woman and her seven sons
- The tragedy not mentioned in the Torah's warning of disaster
- Ransoming of a prodigy and heroism of a brother and sister
- When the *mishnah's* rule about *sikrikin* applies
- The most learned and wealthy man among Jews
- Transactions of a deaf mute or minor
- Decrees for the sake of peaceful relations
- The order of *aliyot* to the Torah reading
- Writing the Oral Law
- Neighbors sharing water of a well
- Dealing with less observant neighbors and non-Jews during *Shmitah* year and regular year

- Relating to a Torah scholar who is a major dissenter
- Retracting appointment of an agent for delivery of a *get*
- Agency for delivering *get* and for receiving it
- Who can accept a *get* for a *na'arah ha'meurasah*

STATE OF THE DATE

On his way to the Babylonian city of Hutzel, Rabbi Cahana saw a man knocking dates off a tree that belonged to no one. When he picked some up to eat he was quickly warned by the man who had removed them from the tree that the dates rightfully belonged to him.

The claim was based on the ruling of the *mishnah* (59b) that the fruit which one knocks off an ownerless olive tree cannot be taken by someone else because of a rabbinical decree of *darkei shalom* — maintaining peaceful relations between people.

The explanation of Rashi that the fellow removed the dates by throwing some sticks at them is challenged by Tosefot because it leaves us with a question as to why Rabbi Cahana helped himself to the dates when he was aware of the rabbinical decree that they belonged to the remover.

The approach favored by Tosefot is that of Rabbeinu Chananel who states that the fellow was seemingly interested only in removing *branches* from the tree and dates fell merely as a result. Assuming that the fellow was interested only in the wood and not in the fruit Rabbi Cahana picked up the dates to eat them until he was informed by the fellow that his intention in removing the branches was to get to the dates which should therefore belong to him.

• *Gittin 61a*

WHAT THE Sages SAY

“How do we know that Torah scholars are called kings? Because of the passage (*Mishlei* 8:15) citing the Torah as saying ‘by me do kings reign.’”

• *The Sage Ganeiva - Gittin 62a*

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PARSHA Q&A ?

Devarim

1. How do we see from the beginning of *Parshat Devarim* that Moshe was concerned for the Jewish People's honor?
2. How much time elapsed between leaving Mt. Sinai and sending the spies?
3. Moshe rebuked the Jewish People shortly before his death. From whom did he learn this?
4. Why did Moshe wait until he had smitten the Amorite kings before rebuking the Jewish People?
5. What were some of the achievements that resulted from the Jewish People "dwelling" at Mt. Sinai?
6. Why does the Torah single out the names of the *avot* in connection with the giving of the Land?
7. What did Moshe convey to the Jewish People by saying: "You today are like the stars of the Heavens"?
8. "Apikorsim" (those who denigrate Talmud scholars) observed Moshe's every move in order to accuse him. What did they observe, and what did they accuse him of?
9. Moshe was looking for several qualities in the judges he chose. Which quality couldn't he find?
10. Moshe told the judges, "The case that is too hard for you, bring it to me." How was he punished for this statement?
11. Why did Moshe describe the desert as great and frightful?
12. Which tribe was not represented among the spies?
13. Which city did Calev inherit?
14. How many kingdoms was Avraham promised? How many were conquered by Yehoshua?
15. Why were the Jewish People forbidden to provoke Ammon?
16. Why were the Jewish People not permitted to conquer the Philistines?
17. How did G-d instill the dread of the Jewish People into the nations of the world?
18. Why did Moshe fear Og?
19. Who was instrumental in destroying the Refa'im?
20. What was the advantage of Reuven and Gad leading the way into battle?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to Devarim's Questions!

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

1. 1:1 – Moshe mentions only the names of the places where the Jewish People sinned, but does not mention the sins themselves.
2. 1:2 - 40 days.
3. 1:3 - From Yaakov, who rebuked his sons shortly before his death.
4. 1:4 – So that no one could say, "What right has he to rebuke us; has he brought us into any part of the land as he promised?"
5. 1:6 - They received the Torah, built the *mishkan* and all its vessels, appointed a Sanhedrin, and appointed officers.
6. 1:8 - Each of the *avot* possessed sufficient merit for the Jewish People to inherit the Land.
7. 1:10 - They are an eternal people, just as the sun, moon and stars are eternal.
8. 1:13 – They observed the time he left home in the morning. If Moshe left early, they accused him of having family problems (which drove him from his home). If he left late, they accused him of staying home in order to plot evil against them.
9. 1:15 - Men of understanding.
10. 1:17 - When the daughters of Tzlofchad asked him a *halachic* question, the law was concealed from him.
11. 1:19 - Because the Jewish People saw huge, frightening snakes and scorpions in the desert.
12. 1:23 - Levi.
13. 1:36 - Hebron.
14. 2:5 - Avraham was promised the land of ten kingdoms. Yehoshua conquered seven. The lands of Moav, Ammon and Esav will be received in the time of the *mashiach*.
15. 2:9 - This was a reward for Lot's younger daughter, the mother of Ammon, for concealing her father's improper conduct.
16. 2:23 - Because Avraham had made a peace treaty with Avimelech, King of the Philistines.
17. 2:25 - During the battle against Og, the sun stood still for the sake of the Jewish People, and the whole world saw this.
18. 3:2 - Og possessed merit for having once helped Avraham.
19. 3:11 - Amrafel.
20. 3:18 - They were mighty men, and the enemy would succumb to them.

PARSHA Q&A?

Va'etchanan

1. "And I prayed to Hashem at that time." Why "at that time"?
2. What characteristic trait is represented by Hashem's "strong hand"?
3. What is ha'levanon?
4. What did Hashem tell Yehoshua after the battle of Ai?
5. What will happen if the Jewish People fail to keep the mitzvot properly?
6. How did the decree that Moshe not enter the Land affect him even in death?
7. What is hinted by the word v'noshantem?
8. Why were the Jewish People exiled two years earlier than indicated by Moshe's prophecy?
9. "You'll serve man-made gods." Is this literal?
10. Why is east called mizrach?
11. "Keep the Shabbat day as I have commanded you." When had Hashem previously commanded us to keep Shabbat?
12. Where did the Jewish People first receive the command to honor parents?
13. What is meant by "Hashem, our G-d, Hashem is One"?
14. What are two meanings of loving Hashem "with all your might"?
15. How well-versed must one be in Torah?
16. Where does the word totafot come from?
17. Who is fit to swear in Hashem's name?
18. What does it mean that the Jews are the "smallest nation"?
19. When someone serves Hashem with love, how many generations receive reward?
20. Why are evil-doers rewarded in this world?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to Va'etchanan's Questions!

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

1. 3:23 - Defeating Sichon and Og, whose lands were part of Eretz Canaan, Moshe thought perhaps Hashem had annulled the vow against his entering the Land.
2. 3:24 - His willingness to forgive.
3. 3:25 - Ha'levanon means the Beit Hamikdash, which makes "white" (lavan), i.e., atones for, the Jewish People.
4. 3:28 - Yehoshua must lead the army into battle.
5. 4:9 - The non-Jewish world will regard them as foolish.
6. 4:22 - Even his remains weren't buried in the Land.
7. 4:25 - The gematria of v'noshantem, 852, hints at the number of years until the first exile.
8. 4:25 - So that the rest of the prophecy "that you shall utterly perish" would not be fulfilled.
9. 4:28 - No. It means you'll serve others who serve idols.
10. 4:41 - It's the direction from which the sun shines (mizrach means shining).
11. 5:13 - Before Matan Torah, at Marah. (Shmot 15:25)
12. 5:16 - At Marah. (Shmot 15:25).
13. 6:4 - Hashem, who is now our G-d, but not [accepted as] G-d of the other nations, will eventually be [accepted as] the one and only G-d.
14. 6:5 - 1) With everything you own. 2) Whether Hashem treats you with kindness or harshness.
15. 6:7 - If asked a Torah question, one should be able to reply quickly and clearly.
16. 6:8 - Tot means two in Caspi. Fot means two in Afriki. Together they allude to the four sections of tefillin.
17. 6:13 - One who serves Hashem and reveres His name.
- 7:7 - B'nei Yisrael are the humblest nation.
- 7:9 - 2,000.
- 7:10 - So that they get no reward in the next world.

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PARSHA Q&A ?

Ekev

1. What must the Jewish People do to ensure that Hashem will fulfill His promise to do good for us?
2. What were the: a. wonders b. strong hand c. outstretched arm that the Jewish People saw in Egypt?
3. When a group performs a *mitzvah*, whose name is attached to the *mitzvah*?
4. How did the Jewish People do their laundry in the *midbar*?
5. How did the Jewish People obtain clothing for their growing children in the *midbar*?
6. How many days did Moshe spend on Mt. Sinai altogether?
7. On what day did Moshe come down from Mt. Sinai having received complete forgiveness for the Jewish People?
8. How was Aharon punished for his role in the golden calf?
9. Who made the ark in which Moshe placed the second set of tablets? What special function did it later serve?
10. Which sin of the Jewish People was prompted by the death of Aharon?
11. Why were the *levi'im* chosen by Hashem?
12. Why do the *levi'im* have no portion in the land?
13. All aspects of man's life are in Hashem's "hands" except one. What is this?
14. What is the "added benefit" of observing the *mitzvot*?
15. What is meant by circumcising one's heart?
16. What are the sources of water for the fields of Egypt and *Eretz Yisrael*?
17. What path does the Torah prescribe for gaining new knowledge?
18. Which activity is "serving Hashem with the heart"?
19. When the Jewish People sin, why are they considered worse than the generation of the flood?
20. How does one "cleave to Hashem"?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to Ekev's Questions!

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

1. 7:12 - Guard even the "light" commandments.
2. 7:19 - The: a. Plagues; b. Pestilence; c. Slaying of the firstborn.
3. 8:1 - The person who finishes it.
4. 8:4 - The *ananei kavod* (clouds of glory) cleaned and bleached their clothes.
5. 8:4 - As their children grew, their clothing grew with them.
6. 9:18 - 120 days.
7. 9:18 - The tenth of Tishrei, Yom Kippur.
8. 9:20 - His two sons died.
9. 10:1 - Moshe. This ark would accompany the Jewish People into battle.
10. 10:6-7 - When Aharon died the *ananei kavod* departed, causing many Jews to fear war with the King of Arad and to retreat toward Egypt.
11. 10:8 - Because they did not participate in the sin of the golden calf.
12. 10:9 — Since they served in the Temple, thus they were not free to work the land.
13. 10:12 - Fear of Heaven, which is dependent upon the person.
14. 10:13 - There is reward.
15. 10:16 - To remove those things that block the words of Torah from entering.
16. 11:10 - Egypt is irrigated by manually carrying water up from the Nile. *Eretz Yisrael* is supplied by rainwater requiring no work on the part of its inhabitants.
17. 11:13 - By repeatedly reviewing what one knows, one more easily acquires new knowledge.
18. 11:13 - Prayer.
19. 11:17 - Because the generation of the flood had no one from whom to learn.
20. 11:22 - Attaching oneself to Torah scholars.

PARSHA Q&A ?

Re'eh

1. What were the sites designated for the “blessings and the curses” to be pronounced by the people?
2. On what condition will *Bnei Yisrael* receive the blessings from Hashem?
3. Why does the Torah use idolatry as an example when describing one who strays from the path that Hashem commanded?
4. What was to be the sign for the Jewish People that they would inherit the Land?
5. During the 14 years of the conquest and division of the Land, what types of offerings were permitted on private altars?
6. What must one do with consecrated animals that develop a blemish?
7. In what ways does a consecrated animal that develops a blemish retain a degree of *kedusha* (holiness) even after it has been redeemed?
8. Why was the tribe of Yehuda not permitted to conquer Jerusalem?
9. In consecutive verses, the Torah repeats the prohibition against eating blood. What two types of blood are referred to?
10. Why were the Jewish People allowed to see the extermination of the Canaanites?
11. What forms of idol worship are punishable by death?
12. If a person performs miracles in the name of Hashem and then says that the laws of the Torah have been revised, what is done to this person?
13. The Torah says, “to Him (Hashem) you shall cleave.” How does one fulfill this command?
14. The trial of a person accused of encouraging others to worship idols differs from the trial of other capital cases. How?
15. Who has the primary responsibility of inflicting the punishment on one who tried to entice others to worship idols?
16. What is the “source” of the Jewish People being an *am kadosh* (holy nation)?
17. How should the Jewish People maintain themselves as an *am kadosh*?
18. What is the order of priority regarding to whom one should give charity?
19. What *mitzvah* recalls the Exodus from Egypt?
20. Which four individuals are under Hashem’s “special protection”?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to Re'eh's Questions!

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

1. 11:26 - Mt. Gerizim and Mt. Eval, respectively.
2. 11:27 - On condition that they listen to G-d's commandments.
3. 11:28 - Because those who worship idols are considered as if they have strayed from the entire Torah.
4. 11:31 - The miracles that would occur while crossing the Jordan River.
5. 12:8 - Vow offerings or free-will offerings.
6. 12:15 - They must be redeemed and may then be eaten.
7. 12:15 - Eating it is permitted, but use of its milk or fleece is forbidden.
8. 12:17 - When Avraham bought *ma'arat hamachpelah*, he made a covenant of peace with the Hittites who sold it; his descendants honored this pact regarding the Hittite descendants in Jerusalem.
9. 12:24-25 - Blood that seeps slowly from the incision as soon as the cut is made and again after it no longer gushes. Blood absorbed into the limbs of the animal.
10. 12:30 - To learn not to follow in their depraved ways.
11. 12:30 - Slaughtering or burning a sacrifice on an altar, pouring libations, prostrating oneself, and any normal manner of worshipping that idol.
12. 13:2-6 - He is put to death.
13. 13:5 - One should emulate Hashem's actions by performing good deeds, assisting in burying the dead and visiting the sick.
14. 13:10 - If he was acquitted and new information of a condemning nature arises, he is retried. If he was judged guilty, he is not returned to court to plead in his favor.
15. 13:10 - The person whom the guilty one attempted to entice.
16. 14:2 - The *kedusha* is inherited from the *avot*.
17. 14:21 - By avoiding excesses even in permitted matters.
18. 15:7 - The most needy, a brother from one's father, a brother from one's mother, the poor of one's city, the poor of another city.
19. 16:3 - Eating the *korban pesach* and the *matzah* on the night of Pesach.
20. 16:10 - A *levi*, convert, orphan, and widow.

PARSHA Q&A ?

Shoftim

1. What is the role of *shoftim*? What is the role of *shotrim*?
2. What qualifications should one look for when appointing a judge?
3. May a judge accept a bribe if only for the purpose of judging fairly?
4. What is the source for the concept “seek out a good *beit din*”?
5. Although the *avot* built *matzevot*, the Torah later forbade doing so. Why?
6. “You will come to...the judge who will be in those days.” It’s impossible to visit a judge living at a different time, so why must the Torah add these apparently extra words?
7. What does Hashem promise a king who doesn’t amass much gold, doesn’t raise many horses and doesn’t marry many wives?
8. How many Torah scrolls must the king have?
9. How was King Shaul punished for disobeying a minor command of the Prophet Shmuel?
10. Certain kosher animals are not included in the law of “*chazeh, shok and keiva*.” Which ones?
11. Families of *kohanim* served in the *Beit Hamikdash* on a rotational basis. When was this rotation system implemented?
12. Which three categories of false prophets are executed?
13. What does it mean to “prepare the way” to the cities of refuge?
14. How many witnesses are meant when the Torah writes the word *eid* (witness)?
15. “Through the mouth of two witnesses....” What types of testimony does this verse invalidate?
16. If witnesses in a capital case are proven to be *zomemim* (false-conspirators) before their intended victim is executed, how are they punished?
17. Why does the section about going to war follow the laws governing witnesses?
18. The Jewish army is warned of four “scare-tactics” the enemy might employ. What are they?
19. When a murder victim is found in a field, who determines which city is closest?
20. What happens if the murderer is found after the calf’s neck was broken?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to Shoftim’s Questions!

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

1. 16:18 - *Shoftim* are judges who pronounce judgment. *Shotrim* are officers who enforce it.
2. 16:18 - That he is expert in the law and that he is righteous.
3. 16:19 - No, because it will sway his judgment.
4. 16:20 - “*Tzedek tzedek tirdof...*”
5. 16:22 - Because the Canaanites used them for idolatry.
6. 17:9 - To teach that although a judge may not be as eminent as judges of previous generations, we must obey him nevertheless.
7. 17:18 - That his kingdom will endure.
8. 17:18 - Two. One stays in his treasury and one he keeps with him.
9. 17:20 - He lost his kingship.
10. 18:3 - *Chayot* (non-domestic-type animals).
11. 18:8 - During the time of David and Shmuel.
12. 18:20 - One who prophesies something he didn’t hear, something told to another prophet, or prophecies in the name of an idol.
13. 19:3 - To post direction signs saying “refuge” at the crossroads.
14. 19:15 - Two, unless otherwise specified.
15. 19:15 - Written testimony and testimony translated from a language which the judges don’t understand.
16. 19:19 - They are put to death.
17. 20:1 - To teach that if the Jewish People execute fair judgment they will be victorious in war.
18. 20:3 - a. Clanging their shields b. Making their horses stomp and whinny c. Shouting d. Blowing horns.
19. 21:2 - The Sanhedrin.
20. 21:9- He is tried and, if guilty, executed.

VACATION VALIDATION

From: Mathew in NY

Dear Rabbi,

I am planning a family vacation after Tisha b'Av and I would like some advice and guidance on how to make it worthwhile Jewishly speaking. On the one hand, the kids have a lot of Jewish education throughout the year and I don't want to overburden them with that type of thing on their vacation. On the other hand, I don't want it to be void of Judaism either. Can you offer some pointers?

Dear Mathew,

Everyone needs some kind of break, and you are fortunate to be able to take time off with your family in the summer to relax, enjoy yourselves and renew your relationships with your spouse and children, relationships that often become somewhat neglected or one-dimensional during the regular routine of life.

Getting away also enables you and your family to appreciate the lifestyle you've chosen by providing an opportunity to step back and consider from a distance what you are, what you do and what you stand for. This is part of a necessary rejuvenation process whereby you'll recharge your interest and commitment to Judaism both in terms of learning and practice.

Still, it is very important to take the necessary steps to ensure that your family's vacation time will be true to Judaism in content and in spirit, even if you are in places and doing things that you don't normally do. Of course, the *alef-bet* of Jewish vacationing is to be sure that you'll have access to kosher food and be able to keep Shabbat, and that your activities will not involve any prohibitions. But in addition to these basic guidelines, it is important to proactively introduce Judaism into your vacation time.

The best way to do this is with Torah study and prayer, and the only way to do it is by fixing a schedule.

Regarding Torah study, if you will be in a place where there is a shul and books, set up a realistic learning schedule with your boys at shul. Logistically speaking, it makes sense to do this around davening time. Either learn with all of them for an hour, or individually for at least 20-30 minutes each. Regarding daughters, vacation time is a wonderful opportunity to learn with them as well. Schedule times either after meals, when others are cleaning up, or before going to bed.

Even if you will be near a shul with books, and certain-

ly if you won't be, there's a great advantage to bringing your own books. You have a connection to them, you can take them with you wherever you go, you're guaranteed to have them when you want them and you don't have to worry about other people using them when you want them or having to waste time looking for what others haven't returned. Also, the fact that you schlepped them adds extra incentive to use them.

Don't be concerned about the extra weight and bulk; it's very educational for kids to see that Torah books are as important to pack as novels etc., sports equipment etc., hair blowers etc., electronics etc., etc. And just as the Ark of the Covenant carried its bearers through the journey, Torah books and the effort we expend to bring them stir Divine favor that ultimately eases the burden and lightens the trip.

Prayer is also an absolute must to schedule in regularly. Again, if you will be near a minyan you will naturally schedule in davening according to the times at shul. But even if you are not near a shul you must set fixed times for davening to be attended by as many people in the family as possible. This can be a very rewarding and binding family experience. In addition to expressing the importance and centrality of prayer, it is an opportunity to make your own "minyan." Even though not all parts of prayer may be recited, such a "mock" minyan adds import and enthusiasm to what might otherwise be solitary, abridged or distracted davening.

Finally, two additional considerations are a must to validate a Jewish vacation and they go hand in hand: "bring" G-d along wherever you go, and be aware of making a kid-dush Hashem.

Before setting out on trips, recite the traveler's prayer with intention and joy, recall the hand of G-d in all the wonderful and beautiful things you see and do, and thank G-d for guiding you, protecting you and providing for you. This should also be a family "activity".

And remember, you are probably recognizably Jewish to the people around you, and if you're leaving a Jewish area, these are probably not the type of people you normally come in contact with, nor may they usually come in contact with observant Jews. Emphasize to your children the importance of respecting and being polite to others including setting a personal example. Also, be aware of local customs and attitudes. In some places, people actually smile, say hi, drive slow, let you go before them in line, etc. This is an opportunity to teach your family how to relate to people different than yourselves, honor their sensibilities and sensitivities while simultaneously acting as ambassadors for Torah-true Judaism.

“CROSS ME THE STREET”

Question: It often happens that I see a child about to cross a busy street without an adult escort. Must I assume that he has his parents' permission to cross alone or is it my responsibility to prevent him from endangering his life? What is the right thing to do?

Answer: So many tragic traffic accidents could have been prevented if children under the age of nine would have asked an adult to help them cross the street. It may be true that some reckless parents fail to warn their children

against crossing alone but that does not free you or any adult at the scene from the responsibility of saving a life.

You may run into the problem of the youngster being offended by your suggestion that he is incapable of taking care of himself and therefore refusing your help. To solve this problem you can take a cue from what a renowned Torah scholar in Bnei Brak did in just such a case. He walked over to the eight-year old standing on the curb and asked him to do him a favor and help *him* cross the street.

PARSHA INSIGHTS

continued from page one

every kind of trouble and affliction. He was poverty stricken and chronically ill.

When Reb Shmelke asked Reb Zushia how we can bless G-d for bad things the same way we bless Him for good he replied, “I can’t understand why the Rebbe should have sent you too me. Only someone who has had to endure hardship and affliction could possibly give you an answer, and, Baruch Hashem, everything in my life is good! How am I supposed to teach you how a person can accept bad things with *simcha*?”

• Source: *Likutei Amaraim in Iturei Torah*

Eikev

THE INK OF ETERNITY

“Carve for yourself two stone Tablets like the first ones.” (10:1)

Michaelangelo may have known a thing or two about painting, but when it came to Jewish anatomy he was a bit off. When he painted Moses he gave him little horns. Michaelangelo’s problem came from a mistranslation of the Hebrew word *keren*. It’s true that *keren* does mean a ‘horn,’ but it also means a ray of light. The English word *corona*, meaning a glowing halo, is probably a derivation of *keren*.

How did Moshe get his ‘horns’?

After the Jewish People heard the Ten Commandments at Sinai, Moshe ascended the mountain on the 7th of Sivan to receive the rest of the Torah. He came down on the 17th of Tammuz and was greeted by the sight of the golden calf. Moshe smashed the two tablets of the Torah to the ground.

These first tablets were made by G-d and were engraved by G-d. They contained *all* of the Torah: the *gemaras* and the *agaditas* etc., everything that was necessary to carry out The Maker’s instructions. For example, the first tablets included all the details of how to make tefillin: they had to be perfectly square black boxes made from the hide of a kosher animal. Similarly, it was on these two tablets that G-d inscribed all the minutiae of the laws of Shabbat. However, when G-d gave Moshe the second tablets they only contained the Written Torah. The detailed instructions, the Oral Torah, was given to him verbally.

After G-d forgave the Jewish People their infidelity with the golden calf, Moshe ascended the mountain again on the first of Elul to receive the second tablets. He came down 40 days later, on Yom Kippur. When the Children of Israel saw Moshe, his face was shining with a radiant corona.

Why didn’t Moshe’s face shine before?

The Midrash says that when Moshe had finished writing the Torah, some of the ink that was left over in his pen touched his face, and that’s where the radiance came from. However, the Torah itself says the rays of light came from speaking to G-d. But Moshe spoke to G-d many times before. Why only now did his face become luminescent?

And which was the real cause of the aura? The ink in the pen or speaking to G-d?

One would think that the second giving of the Torah was a second-class affair. After all, the first tablets were written by G-d on rock hewn by G-d, whereas the second tablets were the work of man, and only the writing was Divine.

It sounds like the first giving was on higher level, doesn’t it?

continued on page fifteen

continued from page fourteen

Really the reverse is true. When G-d first gave the Torah, the Jewish People were to be the vessel that would contain the Torah. Like the Holy Ark, we would hold the Torah but we would not *be part* of the Torah, just as a box only contains what is inside it. It's not the thing itself.

But with the second tablets, the Jewish People became part of the Torah itself.

The beams that came from the ink that was left in the pen of Moshe was the Oral Torah. G-d put into the mind of Moshe Rabeinu — the rabbi, the teacher of Israel — the Oral Torah. All the verbal instructions that were originally written on the first Tablets were now engraved in the mind of Moshe. Everything that is possible for a mortal understanding to attain was written in the mind of Moshe. The ink of eternity in the pen of Moshe was one and the same as G-d talking to him.

Thus, the Jewish People became *partners* in the Torah. We became the parchment on which G-d wrote with the ink of eternity.

Re'eh

LOOK AT ME!

“See! I am putting in front of you today a blessing and curse....”
(11:26)

When you hear a Rabbi exhorting his flock to lead more spiritual lives and spurn the “flesh-pots,” you might think: “What does *he* know about flesh-pots! Maybe if he had a Rolls Royce, he wouldn't be so quick to reject materialism!”

If anyone knew the fleshpots, it was Moshe. Moshe grew up with an Egyptian ‘gold spoon’ in his mouth. Moshe was one of the richest men in the world; a prince of Egypt. He knew what materialism was. He knew what luxury was.

On the other hand, he didn't encourage the Jewish People to embrace the spiritual path just because he hated materialism. Moshe knew better than any man that ever lived what the spiritual world has to offer. He had been up to heaven three times, a total of 120 days — 4 months amongst the angels! Moshe knew both sides of the coin as no one before or since.

In Hebrew you can read the first lines of this week's parsha two ways. “Look, I am placing before you...” or “Look at me — I am placing before you the blessing and the curse”. In other words, Moshe when was saying “When you come to make your life-decisions, when you choose your path — Look at me! I've been in both places, and I can tell you. Choose the spiritual path!”

KNIFE EDGE

“See! I am putting in front of you today a blessing and curse....”
(11:26)

Our Sages teach us that a person should constantly imagine that the whole world is in a state of precise balance — half meritorious and half culpable. He should consider that if he does just one mitzvah he will tip the world's scales of judgment to the side of credit, but if he does one *aveirah* (transgression) he will tip the scales to the negative side (Kiddushin 40).

Consequently, the Torah tells each individual here “See!” Every single action that you do “I am putting in front of you a blessing and a curse” that *you* have the power to tip the scales in either direction.

RAGS AND RICHES

“See! I am putting in front of you today a blessing and curse....”
(11:26)

Wealth and poverty do not always have the same effect on a person. There are those whose wealth influences them for the good and through the blessing of their wealth they come to a greater appreciation of G-d. However, had they been poor they would have been so occupied trying to find food that they would have forgotten their Creator. This was the case in Egypt where the Bnei Yisrael were so exhausted by the hard labor that they didn't listen to Moshe.

On the other hand, there are those whom wealth removes from the path of righteousness as we see so often in our history that the Jewish people become successful and self-satisfied and forget Who gave them what they have. However, when a person is poor and “broken,” G-d never ignores his supplications.

That's what the verse is saying here: “See — I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse” — and don't think that the blessing is wealth and the curse is poverty; rather everything depends on how a person deals with his riches or poverty. And whether he be rich or poor, if he turns his focus to the Torah and *mitzvot*, then, whatever his status is in life, he receives the blessing.

Sources:

- **Look At Me!** - Kli Yakar
- **Knife Edge** - Toras Moshe
- **Rags And Riches** - Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Zevin in *L'Torah U'Moadim*

continued on page sixteen

continued from page fifteen

Shoftim

ULTIMATE PAYOLA

"...for the bribe will blind the eyes of the wise" (16:19)

There are a few ways to make a hit record. You could write a great song and make it into a terrific record. But there are a lot of good records out there. How can you make sure that whenever someone turns on their radio they're going to hear your record?

In 1960 a famous New York disc jockey's reputation and career were destroyed when he was indicted on commercial bribery charges and accused of taking money to play records.

While the '50s investigations and the congressional payola hearings of 1960 focused on disc jockeys, the 1972 "Project Sound" investigation by the U.S. Attorney's Office in Newark, N.J., went after a larger target. That investigation looked into claims that a major record label had bribed radio stations to play records. As a result of those investigations 19 people were indicted in 1975.

The specter of payola continued to haunt the music industry. In late 1976 Congress and the FCC once again investigated the business, including concert promoters. And the issue came up yet again in 1986 when the practices of independent record promoters were called into question.

The music industry is certainly not the sole domain of payola. Wherever there is money and power, there will be people prepared to exploit the weakness of others for their own ends.

But don't think that payola rules only amongst the seedy and the unscrupulous. All of us are susceptible to bribery.

In this week's parsha the Torah prohibits taking bribes. The Torah doesn't define the lower limit of what is called a bribe, and thus, implicitly, a bribe could even be a few pennies.

Similarly, since the Torah gives this commandment without any qualification, it follows that there is no ceiling as to

who might be affected by a bribe. *Thus even as lofty a soul as Moshe Rabeinu could be influenced by a bribe.*

The Torah is teaching us that *even the greatest people can be influenced by the smallest amounts.* Naturally, there will be a sliding scale: a small bribe will affect a great person very little, a large bribe more so; a small bribe will influence a lowly person somewhat, and a great bribe — considerably. In other words, the more elevated the person the less will be the effect of even a large bribe, and smaller the person the greater will be the effect of even a small bribe.

However, what emerges clearly from the Torah's blanket statement *'the bribe will blind the eyes of the wise'* is that *everyone is susceptible to bribery. It's impossible not to be affected at all.*

It should come as no surprise, therefore, why people are reluctant to become religious.

When it comes to being religious, we are looking at a payola scandal that dwarfs anything the music business could come up with.

And what's the bribe?

If the Torah required us to eat in all the best *treif* restaurants in the world, if indulgence in the 'flesh pots' were a mitzvah, a lot more people would be observant.

The ultimate barrier to faith in G-d is not *logical* but *psychological*.

Subconsciously, we know that if we accept the Torah, it's going to 'cost us'. We're going to have to stop driving to the golf club on Saturday morning.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch once said, "Belief is not the *knowledge* that there is a G-d, but rather the *acknowledgment*."

If the smallest of bribes could affect even Moshe, then how much more are we, who are light-years from Moshe's level, susceptible to the greatest bribe of all — to do exactly what we want, when we want. That's the ultimate payola.

• Sources: Rabbi Elchonon Wasserman, Rabbi Nota Schiller

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Some are Here and Summer There

Reflections on Summer Vacations

BY RABBI MENDEL WEINBACH

“Those hazy, lazy, crazy days of summer...”

Thus goes the chorus of a once-popular song that reflects the summer culture of the United States that has infected most of the world.

How did it all begin?

There is no doubt that the single most important factor is the fact that schools, from elementary to university level, close their doors for three months. Add to this the oppressive heat in urban centers and you have a cause for escaping to the mountains and the beaches.

Do these considerations truly justify such a radical change of locale and routine?

Historians make the case that the long summer vacation from school was instituted in the USA when it was an agricultural society and pupils were essential to help out on the farms during the summer months. Critics of the American educational system argue that the long summer break was maintained even when this reason no longer applied because the schools did not have enough of a meaningful curriculum to fill up a full year of classes.

The one bright, lively and sane spot in this leisure society’s “hazy, lazy, crazy days of summer” is the *bein hazmanim* of the yeshiva world. Three weeks rather than three months are deemed sufficient for “recharging the batteries” of students in advanced *yeshivot* and *kollelim*.

Even on the lower levels in the USA whose schedules are influenced by the high school summer break and urban humidity, there are summer learning camps that allow for regular studies to continue in more comfortable surroundings.

“*Bein hazmanim*” – the term used to describe the brief break mentioned above – literally translates as intersession, but has a much deeper meaning. *Zman* is the Hebrew word for “time”, and it has developed into a name for a “session” or “semester”. The two meanings are intertwined. If time is looked upon as a Heavenly gift of life to be utilized in pursuit of eternal values, then the interlude between one session and another is not regarded as an opportunity to “get away from it all” but as a filling station to acquire the energy for the next session.

When our ancestors hurriedly left Mount Sinai after receiving the Torah they were criticized for the spirit in which they departed – “like a child running away from school”. It is the challenge to our society, and especially its educational system, to ensure that we do not repeat this error. Educators and leaders must strive to bring about a change of attitude towards the summer that will make the entire year more meaningful.

לע"נ

ר' מנחם אריה בן ר' מרדכי ז"ל

ת.ג.צ.ב.ה.