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PARSHA INSIGHTS

My SON – THE RABBI

“You should sanctify him (the kohen), for he offers the food of your G-d...” (21:8)

After learning in a yeshiva for many years, a friend of mine finally decided that he would take *smicha* — a complex examination that would enable him to practice as a rabbi in a community.

When he passed the test and was awarded his *smicha* — a rather unimportant-looking document that looked more like a letter from the water company than a diploma — his rabbi suggested that he get it written out beautifully onto parchment by a scribe and present it to his parents so they would appreciate the significance of his achievement.

Outside the Torah community, the value of Torah learning is often not fully recognized. When told that a son is ‘learning Torah’ the question is often asked, “Well when is he going to finish learning and start working?”

Truth be told, there is no higher calling, no more important job than the learning of Torah for its own sake. Rabbi Chaim Volozhiner writes in *Nefesh*

HaChaim, that were there a split second where someone somewhere was not learning Torah, the entire creation would return to primordial chaos.

But it’s difficult to see that, and so Torah scholars are often looked at as Torah *schnorers*.

When our Holy Temple stood in Jerusalem, the *Kohen Gadol*, the High Priest, was supported totally by gifts from the community. Nevertheless it was forbidden to look down on him; rather “you should sanctify him” because “he is offering the food of your G-d.”

When the *kohen* ate from the offerings it was as though the offering was ascending from the Holy Altar to the Heavens for the benefit of the supplicant.

Similarly, “Anyone who wants to pour wine on the Holy Altar should fill the throats of Torah scholars with wine.”

(Yoma, 71a)

Funding Torah scholarship is the same as an offering to the Holy Temple. It brings forgiveness and holiness to its patron.

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PARSHA OVERVIEW

The *kohanim* are commanded to avoid contact with corpses in order to maintain a high standard of ritual purity. They may attend the funeral of only their seven closest relatives: father, mother, wife, son, daughter, brother, and unmarried sister. The *kohen gadol* (High Priest) may not attend the funeral of even his closest relatives. Certain marital restrictions are placed on the *kohanim*. The nation is required to honor the *kohanim*. The physical irregularities that invalidate a *kohen* from serving in the Temple are listed. *Terumah*, a produce tithe given to the *kohanim*, may be eaten only by *kohanim* and their household. An animal may be sacrificed in the Temple after it is eight days old and is free

from any physical defects. The nation is commanded to sanctify the Name of G-d by insuring that their behavior is always exemplary, and by being prepared to surrender their lives rather than murder, engage in licentious relations or worship idols. The special characteristics of the holidays are described, and the nation is reminded not to do certain types of creative work during these holidays. New grain may not be eaten until the *omer* of barley is offered in the Temple. The Parsha explains the laws of preparing the oil for the menorah and baking the *lechem hapanim* in the Temple. A man blasphemes G-d and is executed as prescribed in the Torah.

ISRAEL Forever

COUNTDOWN AND COUNTUP

Lag B'Omer marks the two-thirds point in the long, seven-week counting of days between the festivals of Pesach and Shavuot.

Our commentaries point out that the counting of days mandated by the Torah between the festival of freedom and that of receiving the Torah expresses the profound longing of the Jew to reconnect himself to Torah. While such longing in material matters finds expression in a "countdown" of days left to go before reaching a goal, the *sefirat ha'omer* counting between Pesach and Shavuot is

one of a "countup" of how many days have passed.

One reason for this is that a Jew must feel that he must grow each day from the stage of physical freedom which Pesach celebrates to the stage of spiritual freedom which the festival of the "Giving of the Torah" celebrates.

In the same manner it is crucial for Israel to grow from its material success in creating a Jewish state to the level of a spiritual success, the sort of "countup" which will secure 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

MERON – THE HOLY HAIRCUT

As Jews throughout Israel and the world gather on Lag B'Omer at the tomb of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai in Meron, many of them will be parents bringing their three-year old son for his *chalake* – the traditional first cutting of his hair.



One of the most touching sights on this day, which is the anniversary of the death of the great Sage, is that of little boys with long pre-haircut hair dancing on the shoulders of their fathers while all around them Jews are singing the praise of Rabbi Shimon.

לע"נ

הרה"ח ר' דוד בן הרה"ח ר' אהרון זצ"ל

ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

PARSHA Q&A ?

1. Which male descendants of Aharon are exempt from the prohibition against contacting a dead body?
2. Does a *kohen* have an option regarding becoming ritually defiled when his unmarried sister passes away?
3. How does one honor a *kohen*?
4. How does the Torah restrict the *kohen gadol* with regard to mourning?
5. The Torah states in verse 22:3 that one who “approaches holy objects” while in a state of *tumah* (impurity) is penalized with excision. What does the Torah mean by “approaches”?
6. What is the smallest piece of a corpse that is able to transmit *tumah*?
7. Who in the household of a *kohen* may eat *terumah*?
8. If the daughter of a *kohen* marries a “zar” she may no longer eat *terumah*. What is a *zar*?
9. What is the difference between a *neder* and a *nedavah*?
10. May a person slaughter an animal and its father on the same day?
11. How does the Torah define “profaning” the Name of G-d?
12. Apart from Shabbat, how many days are there during the year about which the Torah says that work is forbidden?
13. How big is an *omer*?
14. On what day do we begin to “count the *omer*”?
15. Why do we begin counting the *omer* at night?
16. How does the *omer* differ from other *minchah* offerings?
17. The blowing of the shofar on Rosh Hashanah is called a “*zichron teruah*” (sound of remembrance). For what is it a reminder?
18. What is unusual about the wood of the *etrog* tree?
19. Who was the father of the blasphemer?
20. What is the penalty for intentionally wounding one’s parent?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week’s Questions!

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

1. 21:1 - *Challalim* — those disqualified from the priesthood because they are descended from a relationship forbidden to a *kohen*.
2. 21:3 - No, he is required to do so.
3. 21:8 - He is first in all matters of holiness. For example, a *kohen* reads from the Torah first, and is usually the one to lead the blessings before and after meals.
4. 21:10-12 - He may not allow his hair to grow long, nor attend to his close relatives if they die, nor accompany a funeral procession.
5. 22:3 - Eats.
6. 22:5 - A piece the size of an olive.
7. 22:11 - He, his wife, his sons, his unmarried daughters and his non-Jewish slaves.
8. 22:12 - A non-*kohen*.
9. 22:18 - A *neder* is an obligation upon a person; a *nedavah* is an obligation placed upon an object.
10. 22:28 - Yes. The Torah only prohibits slaughtering an animal and its mother on the same day.
11. 22:32 - Willfully transgressing the commandments.
12. 23:7-36 - Seven.
13. 23:10 - One tenth of an *eipha*.
14. 23:15 - On the 16th of Nissan.
15. 23:15 - The Torah requires counting seven complete weeks. If we begin counting in the daytime, the seven weeks would not be complete, because according to the Torah a day starts at nightfall.
16. 23:16 - It was made from barley.
17. 23:24 - The *akeidat* (binding of) Yitzchak.
18. 23:40 - It has the same taste as the fruit.
19. 24:10 - The Egyptian killed by Moshe (*Shemot* 2:12).
20. 24:21 - Death.

- Slaying an unintended victim of a murderous attack
- The condemned murderer who cannot be executed in the prescribed manner
- The condemned animal which gave birth
- Must the warning to a sinner mention exact penalty awaiting him
- A sinner condemned to be executed in one way who subsequently commits an even graver sin
- The Prophet Yechezkel's description of sinner and saint
- Special punishment of a serial sinner and a murderer who cannot be executed for lack of proper testimony or warning
- The seriousness of relations with a non-Jewess
- The skull of a sinful king
- The heroism of Pinchas in punishing such an offender
- Which violations of the sacred service by a *kohen* make him liable for early death
- Punishment of the non-*kohen* who performs the sacred service
- Which sins are punishable by strangulation
- When wounding or cursing a parent is a capital sin
- When kidnapping is punishable by death

THE LONG AND SHORT OF KNIVES

“He rose from among the congregation and took a spear in his hand.” (*Bamidbar* 24:7) Thus is described the heroic action of Pinchas ben Elazar in bringing an end to the plague suffered by his people as a result of the great public sin perpetrated by the head of the Tribe of Shimon with a Midianite woman. Only after clearing the issue with Moshe that the two deserved to die did Pinchas leave the Beit Midrash where this discussion took place and take the spear for his mission. From this the *gemara* deduces that it is forbidden to enter a Beit Midrash carrying a weapon.

In *Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim* (151:6) an opinion is cited that it is forbidden to enter a Beit Knesset carrying a long knife. The reason given is that prayer lengthens life, while a knife shortens it, so that it is improper for the instrument that shortens life to be found in the proximity of a life-prolonger.

The Turei Zahav (TaZ) commentary calls attention to what is written in *Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim* 180:5 that it is customary to cover a knife while saying *Birkat Hamazon*. The reason for this is that the table upon which we eat is compared to the sacrificial altar that prolongs life, so that it is improper for any sword-like life shortener to be visible above it once we finish eating.

But why is there a distinction made between a long knife and a short one in regard to the synagogue while even a short one should be covered while reciting *Birkat Hamazon*?

The resolution provided by TaZ is that since all that has to be done in regard to the table is to cover the knife, it makes sense that even a short one should be covered. In regard to the synagogue, however, the knife must be put aside before entering, thus denying its owner the ability to make any use of it. Since it is not common to use a long knife in such a place, it alone was banned, while no restriction was placed on a short knife.

• *Sanhedrin* 82a

What the SAGES Say

“Wherever there is a danger that the Holy Name will be desecrated (by flagrant sinning), there is no need to withhold preventive action out of respect for one’s teacher.”

• *The Sage Shmuel - Sanhedrin* 82a

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WHEEL OF FORTUNE

From: Shira

Dear Rabbi,

In high school there was a girl who was not particularly popular or successful who tried to become friendly with me but I pushed her off. Now, some years later, without going into too much detail, it turns out that we both have similar positions but she is much more “popular” and “successful” than me. I have tried to forge a working relationship with her, but, at most, she directs inferior, second-best material my way. I can’t help but think this is because she holds a grudge against me from our high school days – but if vengeance is forbidden, why is she having such a blessing whereas I am not? Can you help me see this in another light that might help me make sense of the situation?

Dear Shira,

I understand your frustration and also admire your willingness to see things from a different perspective. Of course, I can’t possibly know everything that’s going on behind the scenes here, but let’s give it a try.

The vengeance explanation is clearly the most obvious. However, since bearing a grudge, as you note, is forbidden and since you also have a Torah obligation to judge her favorably, let’s look for an explanation that leaves you both free of transgression – her because she harbors no grudge and you because you give her the benefit of the doubt.

It seems you’d admit that your treatment of her in high school was in fact wrong. Presumably, you were in a position to help her when she was behind, but you chose, as many

people would, particularly at that age, to ignore her need. In essence, this behavior stems from selfish self-interest.

Now, certainly she sees it that way. But rather than assume she bears a grudge, perhaps she feels your behavior at that time reveals something about your personality or character which makes her wary of you as a team player or partner. In which case, it’s not that she wouldn’t want a more beneficial relationship, but she may be justifiably concerned that she can’t rely on you to act in her interest as well.

And I must admit that your interest in her for a “working” relationship as opposed to a personal one, as well as your remarks about her having more than you, does ring of self-interest, and she may also perceive that through your interaction.

I suggest you make an effort to show a genuine interest in her as a person, independent of position. Invite her for lunch or some other casual setting. Talk about old times, finding a way to bring up what transpired between you in high school. Sincerely apologize, explain that you were young and lacking sensitivity and tell her you feel bad about the possibility that it damaged your relationship. Let her see that you’ve changed since then, and that in fact you are someone who can be trusted and relied upon.

If you are sincere with this approach you can’t lose. If she really does bear some resentment, your apology will almost certainly appease her and your relationship will improve over time. If she is not being vengeful, but rather protecting herself by preventing you from being in a position to “hurt” her again, your honest confession will almost certainly assuage her fears and concerns.

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Question: How do I control my anger when I am gravely insulted publicly? What is the right thing to do?

Answer: Keep in mind what happened when King David, in flight from the rebellion of his son Avshalom, was publicly insulted by Shimmi ben Gera who cried, "Out with you, you worthless bloody man!" In response to the

intention of one of his aides to slay the offender, David said, "Let him insult for it must be that G-d has certainly commanded him to curse David." (*Shmuel II 16:10*)

If you always keep in mind that anything which happens to you is Heavenly decreed, you will succeed in restraining your anger and leave it to Heaven to settle the account with your insulter.

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

DOUBLE STRENGTH

When the previous Slonimer Rebbe encouraged a relative of his from America to study in Cracow, Poland under the founder of the Beit Yaakov movement, Sara Schenirer, he sent along a letter with this important message:

"When the Prophet Eliyahu before his passing gave his disciple Elisha an opportunity to make a request, the latter asked for double the spiritual power of his master. The rationale for such a seemingly exorbitant request was that while Eliyahu was alive his extraordinary saintliness was

sufficient to influence his generation. His departure would leave the world at a lower level, which would make it necessary for Elisha to have double his strength.

You are teaching girls in Cracow how to deal with what Poland has to offer. The girl bringing this letter needs to be armed with much more in order to stand up to what America 'has to offer'."

That girl eventually returned to America, married a distinguished educator and gave birth to Rabbi Shimshon Pincus, *zatzal*, who influenced a whole generation.

What is LAG B'OMER?

We are commanded by the Torah to count forty-nine days starting from the second day of Passover. On the fiftieth day we celebrate the festival of Shavuot, commemorating the Giving of the Torah. This 50-day period is called "Counting the Omer." The Omer was a barley offering that was brought in the Temple on the day we start counting, the second day of Passover.

"Lag B'Omer" is the thirty-third day of counting the Omer. The word "Lag" means 33 because it is comprised of the letters "*lamud*" and "*gimmel*," corresponding to the numerical values of "30" and "3."

The Omer period is a time of heightened spiritual sensitivity and growth. The closer Shavuot draws, the greater our anticipation grows for the climactic celebration of the Giving of the Torah, the watershed event of Jewish history.

However, the greater the potential there is for growth and building, the greater the potential there is for destruction. Consequently, in eras when the Jewish People have not lived up to their potential, the Omer period has become one of tragedy.

In the time of Rabbi Akiva, who witnessed the destruction of the Second Temple and who was the greatest Torah Sage of his generation, twenty four thousand of his disciples died in an epidemic. The underlying spiritual cause of the epidemic was the students' lack of respect for each other. This sad event and others took place during the Counting of the Omer. As a result, the Omer period has become one of semi-mourning in which we don't hold weddings or festivities, nor do we shave or get haircuts. But because the epidemic was suspended on the 33rd day — Lag B'Omer — Lag B'Omer has become a joyous day of celebration.

After all his students died, Rabbi Akiva "started over" and began teaching other students. One of his foremost students was Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, the author of the Zohar. The Zohar, which means "The Shining Light," is the basis of the secret teachings of the Torah. Some people light bonfires on Lag B'Omer (in accordance with local fire department regulations) and sing songs in honor of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, who revealed the teachings of the Zohar to the world on Lag B'Omer.