



SHABBAT PARSHAT CHUKAT · 7 TAMMUZ 5770 · JUNE 19, 2010 · VOL. 17 NO. 35

PARSHA INSIGHTS

# Oi!

*“This is the (unexplainable) law of the Torah...” (19:1)*

Sometimes it seems to me that the Jewish People are like a backward student that “just doesn’t get it.” For almost as long as there has been Judaism, there has been anti-Semitism.

The Jew’s crime against Mankind however remains endlessly elastic: We are vilified as the filthy rich, the filthy poor, grabbing capitalists, conspiring communists, both the lackeys of the establishment and their paymasters; we are both rootless cosmopolitans and the bastions of the bourgeoisie.

In fact, the only thing on which all anti-Semites can agree is that the world would be an infinitely better place without the Jew. Half the world says this openly, and the other half thinks it.

To counteract this totally illogical and implacable hatred we have attempted two solutions: The first was to try and be like all the other nations. The theory was that if we tone down the more obvious parts of the religion – or better still, try to be identical to our hosts – they would accept us and stop hating us. That theory resulted in a hatred as vicious as any in our history and the barbaric deaths of six million.

The second solution said that if we have our own state, the nations will respect us and leave us alone. That theory has brought us to an existential danger unparalleled in our history.

When will we get the point?

When will we stop blaming the worldwide opprobrium of the State of Israel as a chronic failure of public relations, to be remedied by spin-doctors?

*“This is the (unexplainable) law of the Torah...”*

The hatred of the nations for the Jewish People is not explainable rationally – it is a “chok”, a “statute” – it is

beyond sense or reason.

The spiritual masters teach that the name Sinai comes from the same root as *sinah* – meaning hatred. (Talmud Bavli, Shabbat 84a) When the Jewish People received the Torah, along with it a preternatural hatred entered the world.

The Mishna in Avot (6:2) says that everyday a *bat kol* (an “echo”) emanates from Mount Chorev (Sinai) proclaiming, “Oi!”

What a shame that when we think of *Oi!* a bloated borscht-belt comedian swims into our minds.

Nothing could be further from the true picture.

*Oi!* is a terrifying word.

When the Beit HaMikdash – the Holy Temple – was razed to the ground, the book of Eicha (Lamentations 5:15) laments “Oi!” *Oi* has the same root as the Hebrew words *aima* – “terror”, and *iyum* – “threat.”

At Sinai, the Torah was given as ‘a great sound that does not cease’ (Devarim 8:19). You can still hear that original sound. It has not stopped. To this day it speaks to us.

For those who don’t want to hear that sound, however, they will hear another sound, a *bat kol*, an echo, a reflection that will remind them, in no uncertain terms — “Oi!”

Someone who doesn’t accept the *kol*, the voice, the sound of Sinai, will be faced by a terrifying and threatening echo of that voice.

And the more we distance ourselves from that “great sound that never ceases,” the more that echo will come and remind us who we are and why we are here.

*“This is the (unexplainable) law of the Torah...”*

## PARSHA OVERVIEW

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

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

## ISRAEL Forever

### NO PARTNERS FOR PEACE

With the Americans and the international community consistently exerting pressure on Israel to negotiate a settlement with the Palestinians, it seems that the world forgets that for peace one must have a partner.

This week's Torah portion and its *haftarah* are filled with historical accounts of the difficulties our people have encountered in seeking a partner for peace. Moshe's fervent appeals to the Edomites and Emorties to allow his people to pass through their lands on their way to Eretz Yisrael are

rejected with a show of force. Centuries later Yiftach meets the same resistance from the king of Ammon. Then there are the Canaanites and Og, king of Bashan, who wage undeclared wars.

History repeats itself in our day as an enemy threatens destruction and a neighbor makes negotiations for peace a near impossibility. Then as now it appears to be an exercise in self-delusion to believe that anything outside of Divine intervention 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

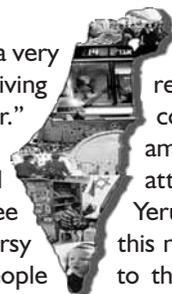
### MAALEH ADUMIM — SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT

In our *Beha'alotcha* column we mentioned the source of the name given to this thriving suburb of Jerusalem with its red colored earth.

A resident of that community wrote us that "it is a very nice place to live" and "we have all kinds of Jews living together and showing a lot of respect for one another."

Although it may take some time to take him up on his invitation to "visit and see the red earth and meet some really great people", we certainly agree with his argument that there should be no controversy surrounding Maaleh Adumim because "the Jewish People have the right to build in our Land."

In a subsequent correspondence from Andy Luterman he



calls attention to the reason we cited for the name which he claims is from an Arab source. (We relied on what the eminent historian Zev Vilnai wrote in his "Agadat Yisrael" without carefully checking his source, and we regret our oversight.) Instead of writing that the red color of Maaleh Adumim earth "stems from the large amount of blood which was shed by robbers who attacked pilgrims and travelers on their way to Yerushalayim", says our reader, we should have noted that this name appears twice in the Book of Joshua in reference to the boundaries of the Tribes, and we might have also referred to the tradition that on Yom Kippur the goat for Azazel was led out to somewhere near Maaleh Adumim.

OHRNET magazine is published by OHR SOMAYACH Tanenbaum College

POB 18103, Jerusalem 91180, Israel • Tel: +972-2-581-0315 • Email: info@ohr.edu • www.ohr.edu

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## PARSHA Q&A ?

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

## PARSHA Q&A!

### Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

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

- How much of forbidden food must be eaten to deserve lashes
- When does one get lashes for eating *bikkurim* or sacrificial flesh
- Can one bring second tithe to Yerushalayim after destruction of the Beit Hamikdash
- Lashes for forbidden shaving or mutilation
- When it is possible to receive one set of lashes for many violations and many sets for one action
- Lashes for wearing *shatnez* or cultivating *kelayim*
- How many lashes for each sin
- Medical evaluation of how many lashes sinner can endure
- How lashes are administered
- Do the lashes absolve sinner of liability for *karet*
- The reward for resisting temptation to sin
- When Heaven expressed consent for human decisions
- From the 613 *mitzvot* of Moshe to the one of Chabakuk
- Rabbi Akiva laughs when his colleagues weep

## LAUGHTER AND TEARS

“Rabbi Akiva, why are you laughing?” This is what his fellow Sages asked him with tears in their eyes upon seeing a fox come out of the site where once had stood the Holy of Holies in the now-destroyed Beit Hamikdash.

“Why are you weeping?” responded Rabbi Akiva.

“We see a place so sacred that the Torah warned that any outsider who entered would die is now desecrated by a fox parading there,” they explained, “so how can we not cry?”

“For that very reason,” explained Rabbi Akiva, “I laugh with joy. The prophecy of Uriah regarding the destruction and exile concludes with *Har Habayit* – Temple Mount – turning into a jungle. Until that came true I dared not yet look forward to the fulfillment of the prophecy of Zecharia regarding redemption. Now that I see that fox I realize the first prophecy has been fulfilled and I can begin to look forward to the fulfillment of the second.”

Why, asks Chasam Sofer, did the other Sages not have the same perspective?

Rabbi Akiva, he explains, had a particular perspective of the fox. We see this in his dialogue with a Jew who tried to dissuade him from teaching Torah because such defiance of the Roman ban

on learning Torah could endanger the Jews. Rabbi Akiva told him the parable of the fox who passed by a river and saw fish frantically swimming to escape the hooks and nets of fishermen. When he suggested that they come up on dry land to escape this danger, they replied:

“You, fox, are reputed to be the cleverest of animals but you speak like a fool. If we are in danger while we are in the water which is our natural habitat, what chance do we have of survival if we leave the water!”

Rabbi Akiva went on to compare Torah for Jews to water for fish with the conclusion that abandoning Torah would be a greater danger to survival (*Mesechta Berachot* 61b).

Rabbi Akiva’s colleagues were also aware of the prophecy regarding the Temple Mount but they envisioned a jungle with lions and tigers, not a puny animal like a fox.

They therefore wept at seeing such a desecration of holiness. Rabbi Akiva, however, understood that the fox represented all the voices that would echo abandonment of Torah and they represented a greater threat to Jewish survival than all predatory animals. The appearance of the fox meant that the jungle prophecy had been fulfilled and he could laugh while the others cried.

“Akiva,” was their response, “you have indeed comforted us.”

• *Makkot* 24b

## What the SAGES Say

“613 *mitzvot* were commanded to Moshe – 365 prohibitions corresponding to the number of days in the solar year (each day one is warned to avoid sin – Rashi) and 248 positive commands corresponding to the parts of the human body (each of them urging one to do a *mitzvah* – Rashi).”

• *Rabbi Simlai - Makkot* 23b

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## ALL OR NOTHING

**From: Reuben**

*Dear Rabbi,*

*Based on my limited knowledge of Torah, it appears that an improperly done mitzvah receives no merit. For example: From what I understand, there are no degrees of kosher and treif food; either the food is kosher or it isn't. If the food is kosher and you've said a proper blessing, you've done a mitzvah; if it's treif, you've sinned.*

*My questions are thus: If I don't eat pork or shellfish and refrain from eating dairy with meat, have I accomplished anything at all if none of the bread, apples, steak, broccoli, chicken, and cereal was kosher as per Torah guidelines? If I diligently light Shabbat candles and attend Friday night services, but then continue to watch television, turn on/off lights, and drive my car, have I accomplished anything at all?*

*If the answer to the above two examples is, "no, you have not fulfilled any mitzvot," then is there any difference between doing the above and not even making the effort (since the effort did not result in a mitzvah)? Was the attempt at fulfilling a mitzvah "worth it"?*

Dear Reuben,

On the whole, it seems that your assumption is basically correct: there are no partial *mitzvot* – either you fulfill a mitzvah or you do not. But the conclusion you arrive at, namely that partially keeping kosher or Shabbat, for example, has no value is incorrect.

The reason I say this is because, if I understand your logic based on the examples you bring, you're considering all kosher observance as one mitzvah or all Shabbat observance as one mitzvah. Therefore, according to your

logic, if you don't keep everything, you keep nothing.

This is incorrect.

Each instance of either refraining from transgressing or, alternatively, proactively fulfilling a mitzvah, is its own "mitzvah".

So in the first case, a person has certainly accomplished a great deal by intentionally refraining from eating certain forbidden foods even if he ate other forbidden food.

Similarly, in the second case, he has also accomplished a great deal by proactively fulfilling certain *mitzvot* of Shabbat even if he transgresses others.

This reasoning is applicable in another common, but more subtle case — for example smoking on Shabbat. A person might think that since he can't refrain from smoking entirely, there's no point in even trying to keep Shabbat at all. This is wrong. He should keep as much of Shabbat as possible, even if he doesn't reduce his amount of smoking. Furthermore, to the extent that he's able to refrain from smoking in the name of Shabbat observance, he has actually observed Shabbat. If he cuts down from 10 to 5 cigarettes, rather than saying he transgresses with the 5 he smokes and so he might as well smoke the other 5, the truth is actually that he has observed Shabbat with the 5 he hasn't smoked, so he might as well not smoke the other 5. In the merit of honoring the Shabbat by refraining from smoking 5, perhaps the next Shabbat he'll have the fortitude to refrain from 6...until eventually, his partial Shabbat observance will become complete.

So the bottom line is that not each general category, but rather each individual mitzvah, is what's reckoned. One is rewarded for the specific *mitzvot* he keeps while he's simultaneously but separately held accountable for those he doesn't.

May our portion be among those whose service of G-d is whole.

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## ANGER CONTROL REVISITED

**Question:** In your column of *Parshat Emor* on “controlling anger”, you offered a perspective of a Heavenly source for one’s suffering. But what is the purpose of the suffering one feels when insulted?

**Answer:** Addressing a large Jerusalem audience at a recent event dedicated to interpersonal relationships organized by the Derech Institute of Ohr Somayach, guest speaker Rabbi Yisroel Reisman, rabbi of Agudath Israel of Madison in

Brooklyn, mentioned that he had printed a card for his congregants with a message on how to deal with your question.

When something is said which disturbs or embarrasses you, immediately praise G-d and say, with great joy, a brief prayer taken from the *Sefer Erech Appayim*. The gist of this prayer is a thanks to G-d for granting you the opportunity to atone for your sins with such an insignificant suffering rather than more serious ones which may have been your lot.

## THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY \_\_\_\_\_

### SAVED FROM THE QUEEN

A serious dilemma faced the great rabbi of Prague, Rabbi Yechezkel Landau, author of the *Responsa Noda BiYehuda*. A *kohen* in the community asked him to officiate at his marriage to a divorcee. When he refused to do so on religious grounds, the man reported him to the Austrian Queen Maria Theresa who ordered the rabbi to perform the service or face serious punishment.

The rabbi thereupon informed the informant *kohen* that he would indeed officiate and arrangements for the wedding were made. As the couple stood under the chupah and the

climatic moment arrived, the rabbi turned to the *kohen* and asked him to repeat after him word for word this marriage declaration:

“You are betrothed to me according to the rule of Queen Maria Theresa.”

The guests broke into loud laughter and left the *kohen* and the divorcee to themselves. The brilliant rabbi of Prague thus remained faithful to his religion and no longer in danger from the Queen.

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