

# OHRNET

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## PARSHA INSIGHTS

### UNKNOWN UNKNOWN

“Then Moses and the children of Israel will sing...” (15:1)

Let me start with a confession. I have never seen a Harry Potter movie. I haven't even read the books. But I do remember with much affection a great work of imaginative writing, “The Lord of the Rings” by J.R.R. Tolkien.

I was thinking the other day about what makes “The Lord of the Rings” so powerful.

Tolkien pulls the rug out from underneath you.

He starts off with a tale that seems to be very homey and contained and then he starts to reveal that the events that are taking place in this little village are really part of a vast cosmic struggle. He changed the canvas on you. He dropped the floor from underneath you like a roller coaster and the experience takes your breath away.

The power of this technique lies in the disparity between what you think you know and the realization that you really don't know what's going on at all.

In a rare philosophical reflection, former US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld once mused, “...there are known *knowns*: there are things we know we know.

...there are known *unknowns*: that is to say we know there are things we know we don't know. But there are also “unknown unknowns” — the ones we don't know we don't know.”

The revealing of an unknown unknown stuns the viewer.

The experience of the splitting of the Red Sea was an “unknown unknown.” Not only did the knowledge of the scale of G-d's power become vastly bigger than anyone could have imagined in their wildest dreams, but G-d revealed how this world is connected to the worlds above – and more.

“Then Moshe and the Children of Israel *will* sing this song...” Grammatically this verse should have read, “...*sang* this song...” Why does the Torah use an unusual tense here?

The Torah wants to communicate the vast and unparalleled experience of the splitting of the sea. It wants us to feel as if we are actually standing on the beach with Moshe and the Jewish People witnessing an unknown unknown.

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## PARSHA OVERVIEW

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

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

## ISRAEL Forever

### NOTHING NEW

There is nothing new in the opposition of nations to the idea of Jews being independent in their own land. In this week's Torah portion we read, in the words of the song which our ancestors sang at the Splitting of the Sea, that as a result of this miracle "the chieftains of Edom were confounded, trembling gripped the powers of Moab." (*Shemot* 15:15)

The Canaanites who dissolved with fear had good reason for fearing the nation which would displace them in their land. But why should Edom and Moab, whose lands were

not designated for Jewish habitation, be upset, especially since our ancestors were to be commanded by G-d to refrain from attacking them?

The answer lies in the age-old hatred of Jewry and its inheritance of *Eretz Yisrael* which once again rears its ugly head in the international support of Palestinian terrorists.

Our fervent prayers are for once again meriting the Divine intervention which will cause the nations to tremble and enable us to sing about a secure Israel forever.

## LOVE OF THE LAND - THE PEOPLE

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

### RABBI CHAYIM BEN ATAR – THE MIRACLE OF THE FIG TREE

One of the many old Jerusalem synagogues destroyed by the Arabs in the War of Independence was the "Ohr Hachayim Beit Midrash". It was called by that name in honor of the classic commentary on Chumash written by the great sage Rabbi Chayim ben Atar who arrived in Yerushalayim 260 years ago after a long, dangerous journey.

The author of "Ohr Hachayim" spent most of his time studying in this synagogue wrapped in *tallit* and *tefillin*, his

face beaming an angelic radiance.

There was, however, one obstacle to his intense Torah study. In the courtyard of the synagogue was a fig tree that attracted the local Arab youngsters whose loud activity of picking the fruit greatly disturbed his ability to concentrate. The sage thereupon commanded the tree to cease producing fruit, and this barren tree stood for many years in the courtyard as a monument to the value which Heaven placed on the Torah study of Rabbi Chayim ben Atar.



## PARSHA Q&A ?

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

## PARSHA Q&A!

### Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

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

- When the thoughts regarding time and place of sacrifice consumption are in conflict
- Who performs *melikah* on a sacrificial fowl and how
- The blood application and burning of the fowl
- Differences between the *olah* and *chatat* fowl sacrifices
- How a wrong thought or wrong blood application affect a fowl sacrifice
- Disqualifications of *melikah* slaughter of a fowl sacrifice
- Is *shechitah* considered as the same as all other sacrificial services
- When the fowl which was slaughtered turns out to be a *treifah*
- The limitations of the *kal vachomer* method of Torah interpretation
- The ritual impurity caused by eating the flesh of a fowl which died not through *shechitah*
- When animals qualified for sacrifice become mixed up with those who are not

## WHY THE SHECHITAH OF A SACRIFICE IS DIFFERENT

**S***hechitah* – the slaughtering of an animal offered as a sacrifice – is not considered an *avodah* – a ritual that must conform to all the restrictions affecting all other parts of the sacrificial service.

This principle is mentioned in our *gemara* and in a number of places in *Mesechta Zevachim*. Several explanations are put forth by the commentaries as a source.

Rashi (*Zevachim* 14b) states that this is evident from the

fact that the Torah did not disqualify for *shechitah* those who are ineligible for all the other parts of the service.

*Tosefot* (*ibid.*) quotes Rabbi Yaakov of Orleans who calls attention to the fact that *shechitah* is required for the consumption of non-sacrificial animals as well, so it cannot be considered an essential part of sacrificial service.

*Tosefot* also suggests that the source for this different status of *shechitah* is evident in the fact that the one performing the *shechitah* is not required to stand in the Sanctuary area while performing this service as he is while performing all the others.

• *Zevachim* 68b

## What the SAGES Say

“The *eglah arufah* – the calf beheaded in the ceremony of atonement for an unresolved murder – becomes forbidden for private use once it is brought to the *nachal eitan* site of the ceremony.”

• Rabbi Yannai - *Zevachim* 70b

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## WISPY LISP

**From: Alexy**

*Dear Rabbi,  
Did Moshe have a speech impediment?*

Dear Alexy,

From a simple reading of the Torah verses and Talmudic teachings, it would seem that he did. However, we'll see that's not necessarily the case.

When G-d charges Moshe through the burning bush to demand that Pharaoh let the Jewish People go, Moshe replies, "I beseech You, O Lord. I am not a man of words...for I am heavy of mouth and heavy of tongue" (Ex. 4:10).

Moshe seems to be demurring G-d's command because of an inability to speak well enough to convince Pharaoh of such a great request.

Similarly, Talmudic sources also seem to indicate that Moshe had a speech impediment.

One teaching describes that Pharaoh suspected Moshe wanted to usurp his throne. He placed before the lad his glittering crown of gold on one side (which if he took, he'd be put to death) and glittering red coals on the other. Moshe went to reach for the crown, but an angel turned his hand toward the fiery coals instead. Moshe instinctively cooled his burning fingers in his mouth, which then impaired his speech.

Another tradition informs us that Moshe could not pronounce certain of the Hebrew letters – namely bet, vav, mem and peh.

However, on the other hand, we also find that Moshe had a very highly developed "power of speech". When Moshe slew the Egyptian taskmaster who was mercilessly beating the Jewish slave, our sources explain that he did so by pronouncing a Divine name to incur G-d's judgment over the person. (This is based on a possible reading of the continuation of the verses, where the next day, when rebuking a Jew who was beating his fellow Jew, the offender replied to Moshe, "Will you kill me by speaking as you did to the Egyptian?")

And even regarding G-d's sending Moshe to Pharaoh, after Moshe recalls his so-called speech impediment, G-d replies, "Is there not Aaron your brother, the Levite? I know that he will surely speak, and behold, he is coming forth toward you....You shall speak to him, and you shall put the words into his mouth....And he will speak for you to the people, and it will be that he will be your speaker, and you will be his leader". If Moshe was such a bad talker, how was he to put the words in Aaron's mouth?

The explanation is as follows: Moshe did not have a speech impediment in the normal sense of the word. Rather, he was so spiritually elevated that he was not able to communicate in a way that average people could understand. This is what is meant by Moshe being heavy of mouth and tongue – the regular instruments of speech were too clumsy and coarse to express his level of lofty comprehension. So G-d sent him Aaron who was elevated enough to comprehend Moshe but "low" enough to convey his ideas to other people. This is the meaning of Aaron "coming toward" Moshe and in turn speaking for him to the people. And it is for this reason that Aaron is described as the speaker and Moshe as the "leader" where the Hebrew word used is "elohim". Moshe is so elevated that he is likened to Aaron what G-d is to Moshe. As G-d later communicated the Torah through Moshe, Moshe communicates G-d's message through Aaron.

So in this light, how are we to explain the teachings regarding Moshe's burning his mouth and his inability to pronounce certain of the letters?

Moshe was certainly destined to replace Pharaoh. However, as a youth raised in his palace, he could have indulged in the glitter of Egyptian wealth until he himself gained control of the crown. But this would not have ensured the physical and spiritual redemption of the Jewish People. For this Moshe would have to rise to great spiritual mastery. This is represented by the challenge of choosing the golden crown or the fire, where fire represents spiritual fervor. Had Moshe chosen the material manifestation of kingship, his mission would have been terminated. The spiritual force within him pushed him toward the fire (despite having all the sensuality of the fleshpots of Egypt at his fingertips) for which he ultimately merited the revelation of the burning bush, but which simultaneously impeded his ability to communicate with ordinary people.

Similarly, this is also the deeper meaning of the teaching regarding Moshe's inability to pronounce certain of the letters. The Hebrew letters are divided into five groups based on where they're enunciated: throat, palate, tongue, teeth, lips. Since the letters make up the Torah, these different groups correspond to different levels of Torah ideas where the guttural letters are the deepest and those expressed by the lips correspond to the more external meanings. The fact that these labial letters – bet, vav, mem, peh ("bumaf") — are specifically the ones Moshe is described as having difficulty pronouncing refers to the way in which Moshe's extremely deep level of comprehension impeded his ability to communicate such subliminal understandings to the outside world!

## IS ALL FAIR IN BUSINESS?

**Question:** I am in the process of establishing a new business. My research has shown me that despite the existence of similar businesses I have a fair chance of succeeding if I apply my energy and talents. My only concern is that by competing with those already in the field I may be depriving them of their livelihood. Is there an obligation for me to consider limits on competition?

**Answer:** In our capitalistic economy we have become accustomed to the slogan that "All's fair in war and in business". This is certainly not the ethical approach from a Torah viewpoint. A great deal of discussion of the halachic aspects of *hasagat gevul* trespassing on another's livelihood is to be found both in the Talmud and *Shulchan Aruch*, and one who wishes to avoid transgressing in this area should consult a competent halachic authority about what is permitted.

Just to offer a perspective of the seriousness that our Sages attached to this issue, we offer two selections from

the Talmud.

When the Prophet Yechezkel praised the righteous man who avoided adultery (18:15) this is interpreted by our Sages (*Sanhedrin 81a*) as an allegory to the ethical standard of a man who did not infringe upon another's occupation. What a powerful message about the inviolable sanctity of a man's livelihood!

The concern for unfair competition finds expression in the position of Rabbi Yehuda (*Bava Metzia 60a*) that it is forbidden for a storekeeper to distribute sweets and nuts to children in order to draw them to him to do their family's shopping. The only reason that this practice is permitted according to the majority view of the Sages is because the other storekeepers have the option of doing the same. This gives us at least a glimpse at the restrictions which can govern competition and which should signal to us that all is *not* fair in business.

## THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

### A SPANISH TRIBUTE

Jerusalemites are familiar with the Raoul Wallenberg Square in the center of the capital. It was to be expected that the Jewish State would thus honor the Swedish diplomat credited with saving tens of thousands of Jews from the Holocaust.

But it came as a pleasant surprise to learn that the city council of the Spanish city of Monforte unanimously voted to name a street in the town's old Jewish Quarter "Rua de Raoul Wallenberg".

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