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PARSHA INSIGHTS

THE SPICE OF LIFE

“...and he wrote her a bill of divorce...” (24:1)

Nothing is sadder than a family break-up. Divorce is the scourge of our modern world. American statistics show 50% of first marriages end in divorce, and the figures become more depressing for each successive marriage, with 65% of second marriages ending in divorce and even higher rates for third marriages and beyond. Between 3.6 to 5% of marriages break up every year, which means that a large portion of adults personally experience divorce at some point in their lives.

In many communities, pre-nuptial agreements are par for the course as more and more couples enter marriage with fewer and fewer expectations.

The Torah acknowledges that not all marriages will be successful.

It gives us the mitzvah of “*gerushin*”, divorce, in such an unhappy event. “*Till death us do part...*” is not a Jewish idea. However, divorce while being a mitzvah is no source for joy. The Talmud says that when a couple gets divorced, the *mizbe'ach*, the holy altar, weeps.

How are we to understand this idea, that the *mizbe'ach* “weeps”?

Nothing in Judaism is merely poetic. And why should specifically the *mizbe'ach* weep? Why not the Tablets of the Covenant? Why not the husband’s *tefillin*? Why not the wife’s Shabbat candelabra – her *sheitel*?

Probably the greatest cause of marital disharmony is misunderstanding the purpose of marriage. The secular paradigm, enshrined in every fairy tale from the Brothers

Grimm to the Brothers Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, is that the princess finds everything she wants in her Prince Charming, and he finds everything he wants in her: Beauty, poise, intelligence, money, someone who puts the top on the toothpaste – everything!

Marriage is not about finding someone to fulfill you. It’s about finding *someone you can fulfill*.

Marriage is a machine for giving – that’s all it is. Marriage is about living the principle that you are *not* the center of the world. In the Book of Genesis the Torah says, “*It is not good for man to live alone.*” When you live alone, you only have one person to give to – yours truly. The world revolves around you. You are the center of the universe.

The *mizbe'ach* is the place when man ‘gives’ to G-d. Man gives of his best and offers it to his Creator. The word ‘*korban*’ (woefully inadequately translated as ‘sacrifice’, comes from the root ‘closeness’.) When you give, you become close. When you take, you distance yourself.

The Torah tells us that no *korban* could be offered without the presence of salt on the *mizbe'ach*. Salt is the archetypal giver. Salt has only one purpose – to give taste to something else. By itself it is nothing. When a person sees himself as “salt”, when he sees the whole purpose of his existence is to give, he has added the vital ingredient to his marriage.

He has added the spice of life.

• Source: Rabbi C. Z. Senter

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PARSHA OVERVIEW

The Torah describes the only permissible way a woman captured in battle may be married. If a man marries two wives, and the less-favored wife bears a firstborn son, this son's right to inherit a double portion is protected against the father's desire to favor the child of the favored wife. The penalty for a rebellious son, who will inevitably degenerate into a monstrous criminal, is stoning. A body must not be left on the gallows overnight, because it had housed a holy soul. Lost property must be returned. Men are forbidden from wearing women's clothing and vice versa. A mother bird may not be taken together with her eggs. A fence must be built around the roof of a house. It is forbidden to plant a mixture of seeds, to plow with an ox and a donkey together, or to combine wool and linen in a garment. A four-cornered garment must have twisted threads — *tzitzit* — on its corners. Laws regarding illicit relationships are detailed. When Israel goes to war, the camp must be governed by rules of spiritual purity. An escaped slave must not be returned to his master.

Taking interest for lending to a Jew is forbidden. *Bnei Yisrael*

are not to make vows. A worker may eat of the fruit he is harvesting. Divorce and marriage are legislated. For the first year of marriage, a husband is exempt from the army and stays home to rejoice with his wife. Tools of labor may not be impounded, as this prevents the debtor from earning a living. The penalty for kidnapping for profit is death. Removal of the signs of the disease *tzara'at* is forbidden. Even for an overdue loan, the creditor must return the collateral daily if the debtor needs it. Workers' pay must not be delayed. The guilty may not be subjugated by punishing an innocent relative. Because of their vulnerability, converts and orphans have special rights of protection. The poor are to have a portion of the harvest. A court may impose lashes. An ox must not be muzzled while threshing. It is a mitzvah for a man to marry his brother's widow if the deceased left no offspring. Weights and measures must be accurate and used honestly. The *parsha* concludes with the mitzvah to erase the name of Amalek, for, in spite of knowing about the Exodus, they ambushed the Jewish People.

ISRAEL Forever

THE PRICE OF EMBARRASSMENT

One of the common mistakes made in human relations is the liberty which some people take in embarrassing another on the basis of such action being justified. This is why we are sometimes witnesses to public outbursts of individuals who claim they are shaming another in self-defense.

In this week's Torah portion we find the source for penalizing one who embarrasses another. The scenario is that of the woman seeking to save her husband who publicly shames his opponent. The penalty for this is payment for the shame caused, figuratively described as "cutting off her

hand". Since her husband was not in serious danger she had no justification for her action and must therefore pay the price.

Perhaps this scenario was chosen to convey the message because the woman involved could have deluded herself that her action was justified, and the Torah wished to dispel any such illusions about the right to shame others.

The media throughout the world, and unfortunately in Israel as well, thrive on shaming individuals, especially politicians. Restraint shown in this area will certainly help to 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

AVIAH SON OF YERAVAM — ONE IN A FAMILY

The only one of the family of Yeravam who had a normal burial was his son Aviah who passed away as a young man. This family was one that established the Kingdom of Yisrael. The violent deaths that Heaven visited upon this household were punishment for subverting the people to idol worship. Aviah too had been appointed by his father to serve as a sentry to prevent Jews from his kingdom from making the



pilgrimage to Jerusalem during the Three Festivals. But he defied his father's orders, abandoned his post, and joined the crowds going to the *Beit Hamikdash*.

The Zohar adds that because G-d saw that Aviah did such a good thing, he removed him from the world before he could become corrupted in order that he would inherit the World-to-Come.

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PARSHA Q&A ?

1. Why must a captured woman mourn her family for a month in her captor's house?
2. What fraction of the inheritance does a first-born receive if he has a) one brother? b) two brothers?
3. What will become of a *ben sorer u'moreh* if his parents don't bring him to court?
4. Why is it a degradation to G-d to hang a criminal's body on the gallows overnight?
5. What do you do if you find a lost object that costs money to maintain?
6. Why does the Torah forbid wearing the clothing of the opposite gender?
7. Why does the Torah link the mitzvah of sending away the mother-bird with the mitzvah of making a railing on the roof of your house?
8. What mixture of wool and linen is permitted to be worn?
9. What three things happen to a man who falsely slanders his bride?
10. Although the Egyptians enslaved the Jewish People, the Torah allows marriage with their third-generation converts. Why?
11. Why is causing someone to sin worse than killing him?
12. If one charges interest to his fellow Jew, how many commandments has he transgressed?
13. What is the groom's special obligation to his bride during their first year together?
14. When is a groom required to fight in a non-obligatory war?
15. What type of object may one not take as collateral?
16. "Remember what G-d did to Miriam." To what event does the Torah refer?
17. If a poor person finds money, the one who lost it receives a blessing. From where do we derive this?
18. Who has the primary obligation to perform *yibum*?
19. Which two people in this week's *Parsha* are required to speak in *Lashon Hakodesh*?
20. How does the Torah describe those who cheat in business?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

1. 21:13 - So her captor will find her unattractive.
2. 21:17 - a) 2/3 b) 1/2
3. 21:22 - He will eventually rob and kill to support his physical indulgences.
4. 21:23 - Because humans are made in G-d's image, and because the Jewish People are G-d's children.
5. 22:2 - Sell it and save the money for the owner.
6. 22:5 - It leads to immorality.
7. 22:8 - To teach that one mitzvah leads to another, and to prosperity.
8. 22:12 - Wool *tzitzit* on a linen garment.
9. 22:18 - He receives lashes, pays a fine of 100 silver *selah*, and may never divorce her against her will.
10. 23:8 - Because they hosted Yaakov and his family during the famine.
11. 23:9 - Murder takes away life in this world, while causing someone to sin takes away his life in the World to Come.
12. 23:21 - Three; two negative commandments and a positive commandment.
13. 24:5 - To gladden her.
14. 24:5 - When he remarries his ex-wife.
15. 24:6 - Utensils used to prepare food.
16. 24:9 - G-d punishing Miriam with *tzara'at* for speaking *lashon harah*.
17. 24:19 - From the mitzvah to leave the "forgotten bundle" for the poor.
18. 25:6 - The eldest brother.
19. 25:8 - The *yavam* (brother-in-law) and the *yavamah* (his childless brother's widow).
20. 25:16 - "An abomination (*to'evah*) to G-d."

לע"נ

מרת פייגא בת ר' דוד ע"ה

ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

A digest of the topics covered in the seven weekly pages of the Talmud studied in the course of the worldwide Daf Yomi cycle along with an insight from them

- The offspring of crossbreeding
- Identifying signs of horses and donkeys
- The product of wild and domesticated parents
- The status of the animal called *kevi*
- Whether the ban on slaughtering mother and offspring applies to sacrificial animals
- Does it apply to the illegal slaughter of the mother
- When partners purchase mother and offspring
- Multiple lashes for slaughter of mother and two offspring
- When the seller of animals must inform buyer that he sold the mother or offspring that day for slaughter
- When does the mitzvah of covering the blood of a slaughtered creature apply
- Some important advice in home economics
- What sort of slaughtering is exempt from obligation to cover blood

FISH OR MEAT FOR DINNER?

Some important advice in home economics was offered by Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah: A person's menu should be determined according to his means. If he has only one *maneh* he should be content with vegetables for his meal. If he has ten he can afford fish, and if he has fifty he can even splurge on meat.

This indication that meat is more expensive than fish seems to run counter to a midrash cited by Tosefot which explains why the number of bulls offered as sacrifices during the seven days of Sukkot was in descending order from 13 to 7. The midrash compares it to how one entertains a

guest. The first day he offers him the delicacy of fowl, the second fish and the third day meat.

A look at how this midrash appears in our texts - as opposed to the text cited by Tosefot - eliminates the problem, for there it places meat on the second day and fish on the third.

What is interesting is that in his commentary Rabbi Zvi Hersh Chayos writes that he was unable to locate the midrash cited by Tosefot, while it actually appears in our editions and is even identified in the commentary of the Yefei Einayim in the back of the Vilna edition of the Babylonian Talmud.

• Chullin 84a

What the SAGES Say

"A man should spend less than he has on food and drink, as much as he has on clothes, and more than he has on the honor of his wife and children because they are dependent on him and he is dependent on G-d."

• Rabbi Avira - Chullin 84b

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CIRCULAR TESHUVA

From: Robert

*Dear Rabbi,
If a person does something wrong then regrets it, accepting upon himself not to do it again, and then later does the same thing again, over and over, repenting then transgressing, does that help at all? Is there any purpose after a certain point of even repenting?*

Dear Robert,

Our Sages taught (Mishna, Yoma 85b) that one who says to himself, "I'll transgress then repent, transgress then repent", from Heaven he will be prevented from repenting. This is because he intends to abuse the special rectifying power of teshuva by using it in order to be able to commit more sin. Such an audacious approach undermines the purpose of teshuva and, therefore, the teshuva of such a person is undermined.

However, one who transgresses and truly regrets, accepting upon himself to refrain from this in the future, and then falls into sin again, is granted the ability to do teshuva. And even if this happens many times (as is usually the case), a person is still required to repent, and this repentance, if sincere, is accepted.

Lest one query, "How sincere must he have been if he turned around and sinned again?" the answer is - He was as sincere as he was. This may not have been enough to prevent him from transgressing again, but at least it was not his intention to repent in order to be able to sin. And the truth is, in reality, even very strong conviction often

melts in the face of temptation. So the main thing is to be as sincere as possible, to regret and express one's full-hearted intention not to sin again.

And even if this happens time and time again, one must not give up hope saying, "What's the point?, I know I'll do it again." This is exactly what the evil inclination desires. It lures and prods one into sinning, and then dissuades one from repenting because of it. To this our Sages referred in the last blessing of the evening Shema, "remove Satan from before us and from behind us". This is as if to say: G-d, please remove Satan from before me luring me into sin. But even if I do sin, stop him from afterwards preventing me from doing teshuva.

That being said, despite our appreciation for the curative and correcting power of teshuva and our faith in G-d's helping hand, as taught by the Sages, "If not for G-d's help, one could not overcome it [the evil inclination]", we are of course required to make practical, tangible steps to improving our situation. So, it's not enough to genuinely repent and pray for future Divine intervention, but rather on the crest of the wave of teshuva, one must think of and execute strategies that will help prevent one from being challenged again.

This is perhaps the hardest part of teshuva, because it demands a change in inner orientation and commits us to change our ways of life. More often than not, one will initially view this as great sacrifice and extremely limiting. However, with conviction and fortitude, one will come to appreciate the liberation from the stranglehold of the evil inclination.

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WHAT WOULD YOU DO FOR YOURSELF?

Question: Someone who prays in the same synagogue with me left his *tefillin* home one day in his rush to come to the Shacharit service on time. He approached someone with a request to lend him *tefillin* when he completed his *shmone esrei* so he would be able to catch his regular ride and save the time and expense of taking several buses to his place of work or hailing an expensive cab. This neighbor hesitated to do so because he was accustomed to keeping his *tefillin* on until the very end of the service in accordance with the most preferred practice. What is the right thing to do?

Answer: This very question came before Rabbi Yitzchak Zilberstein, Rabbi of the Ramat Elchanan community in Bnei Brak. His response was based on something that the Chafetz Chaim wrote in his *Mishna Berura* about a person engaging in

only as much work as he needs for his basic subsistence so that the major part of his time can be devoted to Torah study. In order that his evil inclination should not delude him into how much he needs for his subsistence, he writes, let him imagine a situation in which he assumed responsibility for supporting someone else and then consider what he estimates a basic level of subsistence.

Applying this to the above situation, Rabbi Zilberstein asked the reluctant *tefillin* wearer what he would do for himself if keeping his *tefillin* on until the end of the service would mean that he would be late for work and be forced to take a cab. Whatever he would have done for himself in such a case is what is incumbent on him in regard to the other fellow.

This is the meaning of “Love your neighbor like yourself”.

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY _____

THE BANK SHARES THE WEALTH

In the highly competitive business of banking it is common to see these financial institutions spending large sums of money on advertising to attract new clients. But it certainly came as a surprise to the radio audience in Israel to hear a commercial from Bank Discount appealing for people to bring to its branches throughout the country old winter coats, sweaters, heaters, blankets and any other items which the bank would distribute to needy families “so that everyone would enjoy a warmer winter”.

The bank did a great job of collecting the requested items as Jews once again demonstrated their generosity and their inability to simply discard an item no longer in use. But when

it came to distributing the items, the bank official in charge of the project realized that the best channel was a “Gemach” used-clothing center catering to the financially strapped large families in the religious sector. The director of the “Begeg Yad Leyad” network of used-clothing centers was pleasantly surprised to hear a man from the bank call her to ask if he could deliver a large shipment to her central branch. She couldn’t help but laugh when she recalled that upon hearing the commercial appeal she had wondered how a bank was going to handle distribution. Now that she got her answer she gladly welcomed the opportunity to help the bank share its new kind of wealth with the needy.

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