

O H R N E T

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PARSHA INSIGHTS

A NATION OF PRESIDENTS

"I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stiff-necked people." (22:9)

A former president of the United States once asked his Israeli counterpart how things were going. "I have many problems," said the Israeli. The American president replied, "You think you have problems? You are the president of 8 million people, while I am president of 180 million."

To which the Israeli president replied, "Mr. President, you are president of 180 million people. I, however, am the president of 8 million presidents!"

"I have seen this people, and behold! it is a stiff-necked people."

The Torah itself calls the Jewish People a stiff-necked people. Sometimes this obstinacy can be for the good and sometimes for the not-so-good.

Stubbornness can be an extremely dangerous trait, for it can foil any attempt to improve our situation. Stubbornness enters a person's mind and blinkers him from any other possibility other the one on which he has set his mind.

Thus, in the incident with the golden calf with all its severity, the Torah doesn't focus on the sin itself, rather on the obstinacy that it revealed. A negative action can always be atoned for and repaired, whereas implacable

wrong-headedness allows no place for the way of return.

However, there is also a positive side to being stubborn. In a certain concentration camp there was one particularly sadistic Nazi officer. One day he ordered a Jew to follow him to the top of a nearby hill. He indicated a cloud of dust rising on the distant Eastern horizon. "Do you know what that is?" "No," replied the Jew. "That is the Russian Army. In a couple of hours they will be at the gates of the camp. The war is over for you. I want you to eat this piece of ham now, or I will shoot you." The Jew refused on the spot without batting an eyelash. And the Nazi shot him also without batting an eyelash.

Edward Gibbon in his "Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire" writes that of all the nations that Rome subjugated, the only people that clung successfully to its beliefs was the Jewish People. All of Rome's other vassal states managed to infiltrate the Roman gods into their pantheon without batting an eyelash. The Jews, however, were prepared to make the ultimate sacrifice for what they believed.

That intransigence is imbued in the spiritual genes of our people.

• Source: Based on Rabbi Simcha Zissel from Chelm

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PARSHA OVERVIEW

Moshe conducts a census by counting each silver half-shekel donated by all men age twenty and over. Moshe is commanded to make a copper laver for the Mishkan. The women donate the necessary metal. The formula of the anointing oil is specified, and G-d instructs Moshe to use this oil only for dedicating the Mishkan, its vessels, Aharon and his sons. G-d selects Betzalel and Oholiav as master craftsmen for the Mishkan and its vessels. The Jewish People are commanded to keep the Sabbath as an eternal sign that G-d made the world. Moshe receives the two Tablets of Testimony on which are written the Ten Commandments. The mixed multitude who left Egypt with the Jewish People panic when Moshe's descent seems delayed, and force Aharon to make a golden calf for them to worship. Aharon stalls, trying to delay them. G-d tells Moshe to return to the people immediately, threaten-

ing to destroy everyone and build a new nation from Moshe. When Moshe sees the camp of idol-worship he smashes the tablets and destroys the golden calf. The sons of Levi volunteer to punish the transgressors, executing 3,000 men. Moshe ascends the mountain to pray for forgiveness for the people, and G-d accepts his prayer. Moshe sets up the Mishkan and G-d's cloud of glory returns. Moshe asks G-d to show him the rules by which he conducts the world, but is granted only a small portion of this request. G-d tells Moshe to hew new tablets and reveals to him the text of the prayer that will invoke Divine mercy. Idol worship, intermarriage and the combination of milk and meat are prohibited. The laws of Pesach, the first-born, the first-fruits, Shabbat, Shavuot and Succot are taught. When Moshe descends with the second set of tablets, his face is luminous as a result of contact with the Divine.

LOVE OF THE LAND

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

A LIFE SAVED TWICE-OVER

“May I please get ahead of you in this line? I have to catch a plane back to America and I must get a pizza for the trip to the airport.”

The elderly gentleman generously granted this request and soon the tourist was outside, pizza in hand, rushing towards his cab. But then a huge explosion rocked the air and he realized that the Sbarro restaurant he had just left had been the victim of a terrorist suicide bombing. Rushing back to see what happened to the man who had given him his place and thus had possibly saved his life, he found him alive but wounded. After expressing his deep appreciation for his role in saving his life, he informed him that he was a wealthy businessman back in New York and he would be glad to help him any time he was in need. He left his business card and was on his way to the airport.



The opportunity to keep his promise soon came. The son of the elderly man phoned him that his father required major surgery in an Israeli hospital and could not afford to pay for it. Upon hearing this, the businessman responded that he was ready to come to Israel himself to see that everything would go well with the operation and that he would cover all expenses.

He soon found himself sitting together with the son who called him in the lobby outside the area where the elderly man was undergoing the critical operation. As they looked up at the television screen they saw an impressive skyscraper in Manhattan in which the businessman had his offices. Then they saw one plane after another crash into it. The date was September 11th, one which would never be forgotten as a day when one life saving led to another.

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PARSHA Q&A ?

1. How many “geira” are in a shekel?
2. What was the minimum age of military service in the Jewish army?
3. What were the three different types of *terumah* donated?
4. The Jews were counted after Yom Kippur and again after Pesach. Both times they numbered the same amount. How can this be? Didn't some 19-year olds turn 20 during that six month period?
5. How many ingredients comprise the incense of the *Mishkan*?
6. According to Rashi, why are sailors called “*malachim*”?
7. What is the difference between *chochma* (wisdom), *bina* (understanding), and *da'at* (knowledge)?
8. Shabbat is a “sign.” What does it signify?
9. When did the Jewish People begin to give contributions for the building of the *Mishkan*?
10. How many books are there in Tanach?
11. From where did the men take the earrings that they donated to make the calf?
12. Why did Aharon build the altar for the golden calf by himself?
13. Why did Moshe break the Tablets?
14. How can two brothers belong to two different tribes?
15. Why did Moshe ask that his name be erased from the Torah?
16. How has the sin of the golden calf affected the Jewish People throughout history?
17. In verse 33:2, G-d says that the inhabitants of *Eretz Canaan* would be driven out of the Land. In that verse, only six of the seven Canaanite nations are mentioned. What happened to the seventh?
18. How did G-d show that He forgave the Jewish People?
19. How did Moshe become wealthy?
20. How do the light rays shining from Moshe's face show us the powerful effect of sin?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

1. 30:13 - Twenty.
2. 30:14 - Twenty.
3. 30:15 - For the *adanim* (sockets), for the purchase of communal sacrifices, and for the building of the *Mishkan*.
4. 30:16 - Their ages were calculated based on Rosh Hashana, not based on their individual birthdays.
5. 30:34 - Eleven ingredients were used making the incense.
6. 30:35 - Because they stir (*malach*) the water with their oars.
7. 31:3 - *Chochma* is knowledge acquired from others. *Bina* is the deduction of new knowledge from what one has already learned. *Da'at* is holy inspiration.
8. 31:13 - It is a sign between G-d and the Jewish People that He has chosen them and a sign to the nations of the world that He has sanctified the Jewish People.
9. 31:18 - The 11th of Tishrei.
10. 31:18 - 24.
11. 32:2,3 - From their ears.
12. 32:5 - He hoped that by building it by himself it would take longer and in the interim Moshe would return.
13. 32:19 - Moshe reasoned: If the Torah forbids those who have estranged themselves from the Torah to partake in even a single commandment (Pesach sacrifice), surely the entire Torah cannot be given to a whole nation which has estranged itself from G-d!
14. 32:27 - Half-brothers, sharing the same mother.
15. 32:32 - So people shouldn't say “Moshe was unworthy to plead for mercy on behalf of the Jewish people.”
16. 32:34 - Whenever G-d punishes the Jewish People, part of that punishment comes as payment for the sin of the golden calf.
17. 33:2 - The seventh nation, the Girgashites, voluntarily emigrated.
18. 33:14 - He agreed to let His *Shechina* dwell among them.
19. 34:1 - Moshe carved the Tablets out of precious stone. G-d commanded Moshe to keep the leftover fragments.
20. 34:35 - Before the sin of the golden calf, the people would not have been afraid to look at the light rays, but after the sin they were afraid.

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SHABBAT 149 - 157

“It is discernable from the eulogy given for a person whether the person is worthy of the World-to-Come or not.”

This statement of Rav Yehuda the son of Rav bar Shila in the name of Rav shows the significance of eulogizing in an appropriate manner. Rashi explains that if a person lived his life in a “kosher” and fitting manner, everyone present at the eulogy will cry profusely and speak praise of the one who has passed from this world.

The Maharsha adds that our *gemara* teaches that it is specifically a eulogy of praise — which is said after passing - that is an exact reflection of the true nature of the person being eulogized, unlike what was said about the person while he was alive in this world. Praises spoken while the person was alive may possibly have been false flattery (*chanupa*); words which were said for the speaker’s personal benefit or to avoid unpleasantness. Only praise that is recited after a person’s passing is a true indication of the speaker’s feelings and a correct sign of whether the person being eulogized is worthy of the World-to-Come.

• *Shabbat 153a*

“And tzedaka (charity) saves from death.” (Proverbs 10:2)

The Sage Shmuel elucidated this verse in our *gemara*. One might think it teaches that giving *tzedaka* prevents only a strange and undignified death but offers no further protection from an otherwise fatal circumstance. Shmuel teaches that *tzedaka* in fact saves from death itself and gives life (Rashi).

A number of examples are brought as illustrations of this idea on our *Daf*, the most well-known being the story of the daughter of Rabbi Akiva.

Rabbi Akiva and his wife Rachel had a kind and beloved daughter, a rare jewel. As she grew up, her family concerned themselves with finding a suitable match for her, a young man who would appreciate her special qualities. When such a person was found, the family began making wedding preparations. The family was understandably excited. But Rabbi Akiva was a bit worried. Years before, an astrologer had told him that a terrible disaster would occur on his daughter’s wedding day. She would be bitten by a poisonous snake and die.

Rabbi Akiva placed his trust in G-d, knowing well that the stars and astrology do not control the lives of Jews. With great devotion, Rabbi Akiva prayed that no harm would befall his cherished child.

The wedding day arrived and guests came from far and near to celebrate the wedding of the daughter of Rabbi Akiva. Everything proceeded as expected.

During the wedding meal, while everyone was enjoying the delicious food and drink, a poor man walked into the hall. “Can anyone give me something to eat?” he called out in a soft voice, too weakened by hunger to speak loudly. No one heard the poor man except for the bride, Rabbi Akiva’s daughter. She got up from her place of honor and though she had fasted the entire day she gave the beggar her own portion of the wedding feast. No one noticed this simple act of kindness that the bride showed to the poor man.

Later that evening, as some of the guests had begun to leave, the bride went to her room to rest. She had been wearing a gold pin in her hair to keep her veil in place. She removed the pin from her hair and looked around in the dim light for a place to put it. Finding no suitable, secure place, she stuck it in the wall near her bed.

When the bride awakened in the morning and went to take her pin, an incredible sight met her eyes. A dead snake had been impaled by the pin!

Not much time passed before Rabbi Akiva heard about the snake. He immediately remembered the words of the astrologer. Certainly this was the snake about which he had foretold.

Rabbi Akiva asked his daughter, “Tell me, did you perform any good deeds yesterday at your wedding?”

The bride considered the events of the previous day. “I saw a poor, hungry man at the wedding who was asking for food. No one heard him but me. So, I took my own portion of food from the wedding feast and gave it to him.”

Rabbi Akiva then told her of the astrologer’s forecast and concluded by saying, “In the merit of your charitable act of giving food to the poor man, your own life was saved.”

• *Shabbat 156b*

THE PERFECT G-D

From: David

*Dear Rabbi,
We are told that G-d is perfect. How do we know that?
If G-d is perfect, then how did He create an imperfect
world? Rather, since His creations are imperfect, doesn't
that show that He is imperfect?*

Dear David,

This is a great question! It is one of the things that Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzatto, the renowned author of the classic work of Jewish thought, "The Way of G-d", says we must believe and know. Belief is something we are told is true. But how can we know that G-d is perfect?

Since nothing comes from nothing, "Existence" points to a Creator, just as the existence of a table or watch points to the existence of a carpenter or watchmaker. This Creator is G-d who created Existence.

It follows that while Existence is dependent on G-d, G-d is not bound by Existence. G-d is greater than, or outside of, Creation. This means that while Creation is finite, the Creator, being outside of place and time, is infinite.

Being infinite, G-d is by definition not lacking in any way. He is therefore omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient. These "omni's", and any other conceivable ones are expressions or manifestations of His perfection.

Also, since G-d is infinite, He has no beginning or end. He always was, is and will be. G-d must therefore be void of any deficiency, since this would preclude His being eternal. Since G-d's infinity includes His being eternal, He must therefore be perfect.

So why then are the world and G-d's creations imperfect?

This is the underlying question posed by the wicked Roman procurator Turnus Rufus to Rabbi Akiva who challenged, "If G-d is perfect, why do you circumcise?" (Midrash Tanchuma Tazria 5). The implication, of course, is that since you circumcise, either G-d's creation, and by extension G-d Himself, is imperfect; or the natural state is perfect and you are wrong to circumcise.

Rabbi Akiva, in notorious Jewish fashion, retorted by answering with a rhetorical question: "Which is more perfect, wheat kernels or baked delicacies?" Obviously baked goods are more elevated and desirable. But what was Rabbi Akiva getting at?

He intended to communicate to Turnus Rufus that G-d intentionally created the world in an "imperfect" state in order that, through perfecting it and ourselves, humans may become partners with G-d in the act of Creation. And through perfecting Creation we become its crowning glory, thereby realizing the purpose for which all was created.

With this in mind, it should be clear that G-d's having created a "perfect" world would have been static, unrewarding and therefore imperfect; whereas an "imperfect" world which enables man to perfect it and himself, and to deserve the reward for doing so, is the ultimate expression of His infinite perfection.

@ OHR Profiles of Ohr Somayach Alumni and Students

written by Shimon O'Heron

Aharon Chaim Makabi
Los Angeles, CA
UCLA – Major in Chemistry,
Master's Degree in Chemical Engineering
Center Program

How does an Observant Jew thrive in his Judaism inside the Islamic Republic of Iran? Twenty-six year old Ohr Somayach student Aharon Chaim Makabi says it was impossible. With only one day a week for Jewish education, compulsory military service looming over his head (even for Jews), and anti-Semitism pressing against him, Aharon Chaim moved to



Los Angeles with his family at age 17 to find a place where he could thrive as a Jew. This bright and courageous young man cut his way through the challenges of being an immigrant to find a seat both in the lecture halls of UCLA and in Torah classes at the local *kollel*.

Bachelor's degree and Master's degree under his belt, he joined Ohr Somayach's Center Program to grab hold of the treasure of his people, the Torah. Aharon Chaim says "The language of the Torah is a bridge between us, our past, and our heritage." Aharon Chaim concludes that thanks to Ohr Somayach he is gaining the skills to be independent in his learning and hopes to build a vibrant Jewish home.

WHAT'S THE RIGHT THING TO DO?

REAL-LIFE QUESTIONS OF SOCIAL AND BUSINESS ETHICS

THE LATECOMER LOSES OUT

Question:

I recently attended a *brit mila* at which everybody stood around for a long time waiting for the *mohel* to arrive. In desperation, the baby's father asked another *mohel* who lived nearby to do the circumcision. Just as he was about to begin, the first *mohel* showed up. What is the right thing to do in such a case?

Answer:

There are several variations of this situation which are discussed by the halachic authorities:

1) The father ordered another *mohel* because he assumed that the one he originally ordered was out of town and would not arrive on time. The original *mohel* was in fact in town and arrived on time.

In such a case the first one should do the *mila* because the father never retracted his original order. (*Rema* in *Shulchan Aruch Yoreh De'ah* 264:1)

2) The father ordered another *mohel* because the first one failed to arrive on time.

He did arrive after the *mila* was done and complained to the father and *mohel* about his mitzvah being taken from him.

In this case he is the victim of his own tardiness and has no claim on the father and the other *mohel*. (*Zocher Habrit*)

3) The case you mentioned in which the late-coming *mohel* does arrive before the other *mohel* begins:

If the second *mohel* already has begun to prepare the baby for the *brit* he should be allowed to complete the *mila*. If not, it would be preferable to allow the first to do the *mila* to save him from great embarrassment and to compensate the second one with some payment or by giving him some honor such as saying the blessings following the *brit*. (Rabbi Yitzchak Zilberstein, in his *Aleinu Leshabayach* who adds that there is no need to wait more than half an hour for the first *mohel*.)

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

LITTLE LEAGUE, BIG PLAYERS

When officials of Rockland County in New York State decided to allocate the use of county sports fields to baseball teams in the Orthodox "Little League" as part of services due to local residents, they included professional umpires in the package. One of these umpires, who also officiates at games of non-Jewish Little League teams, was recently reported as commenting on the difference between the two leagues.

At those other games, he said, there are frequent violent clashes, not only between the players of the opposing teams but even between the fathers who are spectators. What a pleasure, he concluded, it is to umpire a game in which the players are so well behaved!

It may also be assumed that there is no trouble between the fathers who are probably using their free time to study Torah rather than watch their children play.

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