

OHRNET

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PARSHA INSIGHTS

WAKING UP JEWISH

“And Yitro heard...” (18:1)

Sometimes holiness can look too holy. Yitro was convinced that to become Jewish he had to be on a very lofty spiritual level before he converted, and thus held himself back from “taking the plunge”.

Then he saw that even after being raised to the highest levels of prophecy at the Red Sea (where the lowest servant saw more than was revealed in the vision of Yechezkel the Prophet), the Jewish People still had to battle Amalek, the Evil Inclination incarnate.

From this he understood that being Jewish doesn't mean standing on an unassailable platform of holiness, but rather being prepared to struggle every day against the “yetzer hara” (“evil inclination”) — which can only be subdued with the help of Heaven.

Once he understood this he decided that he could become Jewish.

This is one understanding of Rashi's comment at the beginning of this week's Torah portion:

“What was it that Yitro heard? He heard of the splitting of

the sea and the war against Amalek.”

In spite of the awesome level to which the Jewish People were raised at the splitting of the sea, they still had to wage war on Amalek.

Every day we wake up and “become” Jewish again. We say a blessing that celebrates that G-d did not create us as non-Jews. How can we say that blessing every day? Shouldn't it be a one-off blessing to be said, for example, at our Bar or Bat Mitzvah? How can we say this every day? Is there the slightest possibility that I will wake up tomorrow morning and suddenly find that my identity has been “stolen” from being Jewish?

Waking up Jewish means that every day I have to remind myself what being Jewish means. It doesn't mean just experiencing the great sea-splitting moments of spirituality. It means getting out of bed prepared to fight my own “negativity” with G-d's help.

• Source: based on the *Chidushei HaRim* in *Mayana shel Torah*

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Hearing of the miracles G-d performed for *Bnei Yisrael*, Moshe's father-in-law Yitro arrives with Moshe's wife and sons, reuniting the family in the wilderness. Yitro is so impressed by Moshe's detailing of the Exodus from Egypt that he converts to Judaism. Seeing that the only judicial authority for the entire Jewish nation is Moshe himself, Yitro suggests that subsidiary judges be appointed to adjudicate smaller matters, leaving Moshe free to attend to larger issues. Moshe accepts his advice. *Bnei Yisrael* arrive at Mt. Sinai where G-d offers them the Torah. After they accept, G-d charges Moshe to instruct the people not to approach the mountain and to prepare for three days. On the third day, amidst thunder and lightning, G-d's voice emanates

from the smoke-enshrouded mountain and He speaks to the Jewish People, giving them the Ten Commandments: 1. Believe in G-d, 2. Don't worship other “gods”, 3. Don't use G-d's name in vain, 4. Observe Shabbat, 5. Honor your parents, 6. Don't murder, 7. Don't commit adultery, 8. Don't kidnap, 9. Don't testify falsely, 10. Don't covet.

After receiving the first two commandments, the Jewish People, overwhelmed by this experience of the Divine, request that Moshe relay G-d's word to them. G-d instructs Moshe to caution the Jewish People regarding their responsibility to be faithful to the One who spoke to them.

KETUVOT 9 - 15

“And is a verse written based on the future?” “Yes, as it’s written...”

This question and answer on our *daf* follows the *gemara* stating that a widow is called an “*almana*” in the Torah because in the future the Rabbis would establish the minimum *ketuba* due her as a “*mana*” (100 zuz). But would the Torah use this terminology prior to its having meaning (since the institution of a *ketuba* did not yet exist at the time of the verse, and was only later decreed by the Rabbis)? (Rashi)

“Yes” answers the *gemara*, and provides a precedent for the Torah referring to something that would not “exist” until later. The verse states, “And the name of the third river is Chidekel, which runs east of Ashur (Gen. 2:14). Ashur, explains Rav Yosef, is the city named “Salika”, which certainly did not exist at the time of Creation (Rashi). “Did it exist yet?” asks the *gemara* rhetorically. And just as the Torah refers to a place before it existed, likewise it refers to a *ketuba* before it was instituted.

• Ketuvot 10b

Rabbi Elazar said: “Mizbe’ach — mei’ziach, mei’zin, mi’chavev, mi’chaper.”

These four qualities — which are related to the root-word “Mizbe’ach” — are four distinct benefits the Jewish People receive from the Mizbe’ach at the time of the Beit Hamikdash. What are they?

“Mei’zin”: sustenance; in the merit of the sacrifices the world is nourished — just as sacrifices are brought from food, so too they are a cause for a *beracha* of abundance from Above (Rashi).

“Mi’chachev”: endearment — the sacrifices we offer to G-d cause the Jewish People to be more dear and beloved to their Father (Rashi).

The *gemara* asks that the first and fourth words — *mei’ziach* and *mi’chaper* — both seem to mean “atonement and removal of sins” and are redundant! The *gemara* answers as follows:

“Mei’ziach” refers to the benefit of removing harsh and dire decrees from the Jewish People (Rashi), whereas “mi’chaper” refers to atonement for transgressions.

• Ketuvot 10b

LOVE OF THE LAND

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

AVNIT — TOMB OF RAV CHISDA

An unmarked grave in Avnit, less than a mile from Tzefat, is assumed to be the resting place of the great Talmudic Sage Rav Chisda.

A disciple of Rav Huna and his successor as the head of the great yeshiva of Sura, Rav Chisda was so constantly immersed in Torah study that the Angel of Death was unable to overcome him. His opportunity finally came when he distracted Rav Chisda by causing a tree near his place of study to crash with a loud noise.

Although Rav Chisda spent his lifetime learning and

teaching Torah in Babylon, he, like his master Rav Huna, was buried in Eretz Yisrael. Although the Torah relates that the Patriarch Yaakov put up a monument to mark the grave of his beloved wife Rachel, the structure that we see in Beit Lechem when visiting this holy site was built in 1841 by Sir Moses Montefiore.

The British benefactor received a building permit from the Turkish sultan and paid the fees for maintaining the site. Before his death at the age of 101 he asked that a small imitation of the dome on Rachel’s grave be placed on his grave and that dust from Rachel’s tomb be placed in his own grave.



PARSHA Q&A ?

1. Yitro had 7 names. Why was one of his names *Yeter*?
2. News of which two events motivated Yitro to come join the Jewish People?
3. What name of Yitro indicates his love for Torah?
4. Why was Tzipora with her father, Yitro, and not with Moshe when *Bnei Yisrael* left Egypt?
5. Why does verse 18:5 say that Yitro came to the desert — don't we already know that the *Bnei Yisrael* were in the desert?
6. Why did Moshe tell Yitro all that G-d had done for the Jewish People?
7. According to the *Midrash* quoted by Rashi, how did Yitro respond when he was told about the destruction of Egypt?
8. Who is considered as if he enjoys the splendor of the *Shechina*?
9. On what day did Moshe sit to judge the Jewish People?
10. Who is considered a co-partner in Creation?
11. "Moshe sat to judge the people, and the people stood before Moshe...." What bothered Yitro about this arrangement?
12. Why did Yitro return to his own land?
13. How did the encampment at Sinai differ from the other encampments?
14. To whom does the Torah refer when it uses the term "*Beit Yaakov*"?
15. How is G-d's protection of the Jewish People similar to an eagle's protection of its young?
16. What was G-d's original plan for *Matan Torah*? What was the response of the Jewish People?
17. How many times greater is the "measure of reward" than the "measure of punishment"?
18. How is it derived that "Don't steal" refers to kidnapping?
19. In response to hearing the Torah given at Sinai, how far backwards did the Jewish people retreat in fear?
20. Why does the use of iron tools profane the altar?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to This Week's Questions!

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

1. 18:1 - Because he caused a parsha to be added to the Torah. *Yeter* means addition.
2. 18:1 - The splitting of the sea and the war against Amalek.
3. 18:1 - Chovav.
4. 18:3 - When Aharon met Moshe with his family on their way down to Egypt, Aharon said to Moshe: "We're pained over the Jews already in Egypt, and you're bringing more Jews to Egypt?" Moshe, hearing this, sent his wife and children back to Midian.
5. 18:5 - To show Yitro's greatness. He was living in a luxurious place; yet he went to the desert in order to study the Torah.
6. 18:8 - To draw Yitro closer to the Torah way of life.
7. 18:9 - He grieved.
8. 18:12 - One who dines with Torah scholars.
9. 18:13 - The day after Yom Kippur.
10. 18:13 - A judge who renders a correct decision.
11. 18:14 - Yitro felt that the people weren't being treated with the proper respect.
12. 18:27 - To convert the members of his family to Judaism.
13. 19:2 - The Jewish People were united.
14. 19:3 - The Jewish women.
15. 19:4 - An eagle carries its young on top of its wings to protect them from human arrows. So too, G-d's cloud of glory separated between the Egyptians and the Jewish camp in order to absorb Egyptian missiles and arrows fired at the Jewish People.
16. 19:9 - G-d offered to appear to Moshe and to give the Torah through him. The Jewish People responded that they wished to hear the Torah directly from G-d.
17. 20:6 - 500 times.
18. 20:13 - Since it is written immediately after "Don't murder" and "Don't commit adultery," it is derived that "Don't steal" refers to a crime carrying the same penalty as the first two, namely, the death penalty.
19. 20:15 - They backed away from the mountain twelve *mil* (one *mil* is 2000 cubits).
20. 20:22 - The altar was created to extend life; iron is sometimes used to make weapons which shorten life.

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Abarbanel

ON PARSHAT YITRO

By Rabbi Pinchas Kasnett

The first of the 'Ten Commandments' is, "I am Hashem your G-d, who has taken you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of slavery" (Shmot 20:2). For centuries, the most renowned commentators on the Torah have struggled with two obvious questions raised by this verse. First, is this a mere statement about G-d or is this a commandment to believe in G-d as the omniscient, omnipotent Creator and sustainer of all existence? If so, why is it expressed as a statement? Secondly, why is G-d describing Himself as the 'One who took us out of Egypt'? Why not 'the One who created the entire universe', a much more powerful statement?

Abarbanel explains that the statement "I am Hashem your G-d" is not counted as one of the 613 *mitzvot*. These are clear commandments to either do something or refrain from doing something. The belief in the existence of G-d, however, was made known to us by the signs, wonders and revelations of the Divine Presence that happened before our eyes. This reality is the source from which the *mitzvot* were born, but it is not counted as one of the *mitzvot*. There is a Midrashic story which confirms this idea. The Mechilta (Shmot 20:3) asks the question: Since we have been told 'I am Hashem your G-d' why do we need the second commandment, 'You shall not recognize the gods of others in My presence' (Shmot 20:3)? The Midrash answers with a parable: A new king makes his entry into the country. His subjects ask him what the decrees are that they are responsible to follow. He answers that he will make decrees only after they accept him as their king. Otherwise his decrees will be meaningless and ignored. Similarly, G-d said to the Jewish People: 'I am Hashem your G-d'. I am the one that you accepted upon yourselves as your king, and therefore accepted My decrees. Thus, you cannot have any other gods besides Me. As such, the acceptance of G-d as king is a completely separate concept and not in the category of a *mitzvah*.

Abarbanel summarizes that this statement is not a commandment of belief or action. Rather it is the introduction to the commandments that follow. The purpose of the statement is to tell the people Who is speaking to them: not an angel or a prophet, but rather the First Cause of all existence, without any intermediaries. The statement itself contains three different expressions. 'Hashem', the four-letter ineffable name for G-d; secondly, 'your G-d'; and thirdly, 'Who took you out of Egypt'. These three expressions are to let us know that we should listen to the commandments and observe them because there are three aspects to G-d. The first — 'Hashem' — teaches us that His essence is the Creator of all existence. The four-letter name of G-d has the same root in Hebrew as the word for existence itself. He is the Creator and Sustainer of all existence. It is as if He is saying to us, 'Since I have given you the gift of your very existence, it is only fitting that you observe My commandments.' The second aspect, connoted by 'your G-d' is an expression of G-d's unique providential relationship with the Jewish People throughout history. Unlike other nations and peoples, we are not subject to astrological influences or the dynamics of history, geography and economics. Rather, G-d directs our fortunes. Again, it is only fitting that we observe His commandments. Finally, it was G-d who took us out of Egypt, a house of slavery from which escape was otherwise impossible. Again, G-d is telling us that because of the enormous good that He did for us by miraculously taking us out of Egypt, it is our obligation to keep all of the *mitzvot*, which are summarized and contained within the nine commandments that follow. The fact that G-d created the universe from absolute nothingness is a powerful but sometimes abstract and unfathomable concept. The historical experience of the exodus from Egypt is tangible and ultimately even more powerful.

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Rav Bulman *zt"l*
on the
Torah Portion of the Week

MEZUZA MEANING

From: Helen

Dear Rabbi,
I am Jewish but not religious. I have seen mezuzas as pendants on necklaces and in Jewish homes, but don't really know much about what a mezuzah is. A few questions come to mind, but any knowledge you could share would be appreciated: What is a mezuzah, is there anything inside, where does one put it, can non-observant Jews wear one if they're not religious or have one in their house if the house is not kosher?

Dear Helen,

I admire your interest in such an important and meaningful mitzvah.

In order to properly answer your question, it's important to clarify a common misconception about what a mezuzah is. Many people mistakenly think that the elongated protective container for the mezuzah is the mezuzah itself. This is incorrect.

Rather, a mezuzah is a parchment upon which are written two particular paragraphs from the Torah which refer to affixing these verses that declare our belief in G-d and our commitment to performing His commandments on the doorposts of our homes and gates.

Thus, a "mezuzah- pendant" is in no way a mezuzah but rather a small replica of a container for the mezuzah, which some wear as a Jewish symbol akin to wearing a Star of David. Similarly, affixing a mezuzah container to the doorpost with no kosher mezuzah inside is also merely symbolic.

Therefore, as far as the mitzvah of mezuzah is concerned, much more importance must be given to the parchment than the package. Since in order to fulfill the mitzvah of mezuzah many requirements must be met, a mezuzah should be acquired only through a reliable, G-d-fearing and observant Jew.

Unfortunately, many people who think they are performing the mitzvah have only printed slips of paper in the box, making the "mezuzah" nothing more than a pendant hanging on the doorpost. This would be like putting a picture of the circuitry of a stereo in

the stereo encasement and expecting the stereo to work!

In Jewish texts, the mezuzah is viewed as being a source of spiritual and physical protection for the home as well as associated with prolonging life. The Talmud states that G-d is unlike an earthly king. An earthly king dwells within while his servants stand guard outside. However with G-d it's different: His servants dwell within while it is He who guards them from without.

People customarily place their right hand on the mezuzah case (in deference for the mezuzah scroll inside) while going through the doorway. Some actually kiss their hand as they do so. Often, these gestures are done only when traversing a passage between indoors and outdoors. When doing so, a person is encouraged to recite special verses expressing Divine protection; but at the very least, one should make a mental note of the mitzvah of mezuzah and its meaning.

A non-observant Jew may fulfill the mitzvah of mezuzah, which would be a very good thing, as long as it's done properly. This would involve not only acquiring kosher mezuzas as mentioned above, but also affixing them in the right places in the right way. Also, mezuzas are affixed not only in internal doorways but in external ones as well, which requires making special provision to protect the mezuzah from the elements.

For all of these reasons, anyone who is considering putting mezuzas in his home or office should consult a competent Orthodox rabbi for guidance. Similarly, since mezuzas must be periodically checked to ascertain they have not been damaged and are still kosher, even people who already have them would benefit by checking with a rabbi that all is in order.

Often, either scenario may be incorporated into a celebration with friends and family in honor of the fulfillment of the mitzvah. This is a very meaningful way to infuse the newly "mezuzah-ed" home with a joyous Jewish spirit.

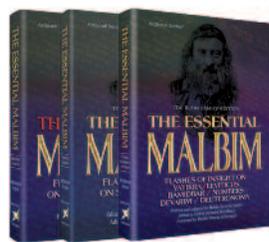
Sources:

- Deuteronomy 6:4-9; 11:13-21
- Menachot 33b, Avoda Zara 11a
- Shabbat 32b
- Shulchan Aruch, Y.D. 285:1,2

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SHEMONEH ESREI — TENTH BLESSING: INGATHERING OF EXILES

“Sound the Great Shofar...”

Why do we call it the “great shofar”? Our Sages taught: “Ten things were created on the first Shabbat eve at twilight.” One of the ten things mentioned is the “ram of Avraham our father (Avot 5:6). It is called by his name because he sacrificed it to G-d on Mount Moriah. In other places it is referred to as the “ram of Yitzchak” since it was sacrificed in place of him.

Considering the fact that all of the words of the Sages are precise, it must be understood why the ram is called by the name of both Avraham and his son.

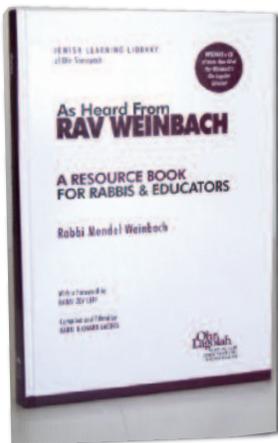
It is well known that Avraham and Yitzchak correspond to the attributes of *chesed* (kindness) and *gevurah* (severity), respectively. Accordingly, the ram’s left horn is connected with Yitzchak, since, according to kabalistic teachings the left is always associated with *gevurah*. The right horn is associated with *chesed*, the attribute of Avraham.

The Ramak (Rabbi Moshe Cordovero) explains in his commentary on the Siddur titled “Tefillah L’Moshe” that the left horn of the ram which is associated with the attribute of *gevurah* is connected with the redemption from Egypt. Since it came from

the side of severity, the redemption was not complete — and we were therefore subjected afterwards to other exiles.

That same shofar was used again at Mount Sinai, when the Jewish nation received the Torah, which was also given from the side of *gevurah*, as is implied in the phrase “with fire and might.” As it is written, “He presented the fiery Torah to them (the Jewish People),” and it is also written, “On the third day when it was morning, there was thunder and lightning and a heavy cloud on the mountain, and the sound of the shofar was very powerful.”

The Ramak further explains that the “great shofar” refers to the right horn, namely the ram of Avraham, from the side of kindness. The redemption from the right side will be with abundant mercies, and will therefore not be followed by another exile. Accordingly, regarding the future redemption it is written, “It shall be on that day a “great shofar” will be blown, and those who are lost in the land of Assyria and those cast away in the land of Egypt will come together, and they will prostrate themselves to G-d on the holy mountain of Jerusalem.” We therefore hope and pray that G-d speedily sound the “great shofar”, for then all the Jewish People will experience eternal freedom.



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RABBI CHAIM GROSS

What's your goal in life? For most people it's to become a successful doctor, lawyer, prime minister, film director, professional athlete, businessman... fill in the blank. Of course, not everyone has the abilities and talents needed to rise to the top of their chosen path. But some do. Rabbi Chaim Gross, a teacher in the Center Program at Ohr Somayach, most likely would have been successful in any one of those endeavors.

Rabbi Gross, 37, is an Englishman who earned an MA with a "double first" in History from Cambridge University. He was a soccer player, cricketer and a starter on the Field Hockey team at Cambridge, ran the London Marathon and was Captain of the British Field Hockey team at the Maccabian Games in 1997. He could have continued in academia or gone into a profession, or perhaps even have earned his living as a sportsman. Instead he chose yeshiva.

"I'm from a traditional Orthodox (Mill Hill United Synagogue in London) family. We always kept kosher and Shabbat, but I hadn't been exposed to learning until I came to yeshiva."

He attended a select English private school — Haberdashers Aske's — where he excelled in academics and sport. While at Cambridge he made a life-changing decision. Many field hockey games were held on Saturday, away from school. After a few weeks of tendering excuses as to why he couldn't make it to the away games on Shabbat, he was forced to make a decision to "play or stay". He chose to quit the team and stay in Cambridge for Shabbat, where he became a regular at Rabbi Shaul Robinson's Shabbat table. Rabbi Robinson, presently the senior rabbi at Lincoln Square Synagogue in New York City, was then the Jewish Chaplain in Cambridge.

Upon graduation, Rabbi Gross was given a scholarship by the Israeli government to come to Israel and do graduate level work at Hebrew University. The terms of the scholarship were quite liberal and allowed Rabbi Gross to study in yeshiva at the same time as he was attending classes at Hebrew U. After trying out a number of different yeshivas, he dropped in at the Center Program of Ohr Somayach in

Jerusalem. "The place was on fire. Rabbi Wiener and Rabbi Mandel were super-dynamic. I was sold."

He came to Ohr Somayach in October of 1999 and stayed for 14 months, eventually moving to the Mir Yeshiva, where he has been learning for the last 13 years. In the interim he married Merissa, a Glaswegian from a traditional Jewish home, and settled in the Har Nof neighborhood in Jerusalem. They have, *bli ayin hara*, six children, ranging in age from four months to eleven years. In addition to being a devoted mother to her children, Merissa is the director of *kiruv* programs at Midreshet Rachel, a women's seminary in Jerusalem.

After having received *smicha*, Rabbi Gross wrote a Hebrew *sefer* entitled "*Hashulchan Ve'hakeilim*" which is highly regarded in the yeshiva world. Its purpose is to provide a concise review of the material needed to be mastered for *smicha* exams in Yoreh De'ah. "It's not gripping, but it's useful," says Rabbi Gross with his typical British understatement.

In 2007 he got a call from Rabbi Mandel asking if he would consider teaching at the Center Program. He jumped at the chance. He has been giving a *shiur* in the Yeshiva for the last seven years. In addition, he recruits English college students and makes it a point of visiting his alma

mater to recruit some of the best and brightest English Jews for Ohr Somayach.

With no aversion to hard work and a seeming aversion to leisure time, he works as Editor of a Shabbat *parsha* sheet which is distributed to over 50 United Synagogue Congregations in the UK. Early Shabbat mornings from 6:30 am to 8:00 am, one can find Rabbi Gross at the "Shabbos Kollel" of Minyan Avreichim in Har Nof, which he helps to run. Lest one think that he might take a *shluf* on a Shabbat afternoon, the Kollel meets again from 3:00 until *mincha*. He has recently published *kuntresim* on *Mesechta Berachot*, which the Kollel has been learning.

When asked what his long term goal is, Rabbi Gross is quite clear. "It's to try imparting a love of Torah and a desire for growth in Yiddishkeit. I'd like to help change the students' lives in a significant way."

