

O H R N E T

SHABBAT PARSHAT B'SHALACH · 15 SHVAT 5763 · JAN. 18, 2003 · VOL. 10 NO. 16

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PARSHA INSIGHTS

PUSHING THE BLANKET

*“Pharaoh approached, the Children of Israel raised their eyes and beheld! – Egypt was journeying after them, and they were very frightened; the Children of Yisrael cried out to G-d.” (14:10)*

What kind of mother is it that can send her child off in the morning with a sandwich and an explosive vest? Of the lunacy of a national policy of suicide bombings there can be no doubt. Every fiber of a normal right-thinking individual is revolted by this carnage, by the wanton devaluation of innocent life. In the last two years, however, we have learned a bitter lesson: Self-sacrifice, however ill-intentioned, is the most powerful weapon known to man. Nothing can stand in the way of self-sacrifice – except a corresponding display of self-sacrifice.

In this week’s Torah portion, when the Children of Israel saw the awesome seemingly supernatural degree of the Egyptians’ self-sacrifice in pursuing them, they cried out to G-d. Unlike the back-seat-driving of other kings, Pharaoh led his troops into battle at the head (14:10). And also unlike other kings Pharaoh was prepared to divide the spoils of war and not horde it to himself (15:9). When the Jewish People saw this other-worldly self-sacrifice they implored G-d to give them an equivalent degree of supernatural self-sacrifice to combat Pharaoh. G-d replied to Moshe “Why do you cry out to Me? Speak to the Children of Yisrael and let them journey forward!” Was G-d ignoring their plea? No. He was telling them that the power of self-sacrifice is not some miraculous gift; it is a power in the heart and the mind of man to harness. G-d told them to journey into the sea, an action of self-sacrifice in itself would be sufficient to defeat the Egyptians.

So, should Israeli television start a campaign of ads for mummies from Kiryat Shemona to Eilat to send their kids off to school in the morning with a smile and a bomb?

No. That’s not quite what I’m suggesting.

Notice that G-d didn’t ask the Children of Israel to give up their lives, He wanted them to be *prepared* to give up their lives. There’s all the difference in the world.

Part of our innermost thoughts when we say the Shema is that, if necessary, we are prepared to give up our lives for the sake of our faith. A Jew doesn’t seek martyrdom, but if we are called upon to surrender our lives to sanctify the Name, we do this with all the commitment of a suicide bomber.

And even for those of us who will never be put in the position of dying to sanctify the Name of G-d, we can still make self-sacrifice part of our lives. Every little bit of self-sacrifice creates a powerful defense lawyer in the Heavenly Court for ourselves and the whole of the Jewish People.

If we are prepared to make small sacrifices, G-d may not ask us to make big ones.

Recently there was an interesting meeting between two worlds. Howard Schultz, chairman and chief global strategist of Starbucks, the wildly successful chain of coffee houses described his meeting with Rabbi Nosson Tzvi Finkel, the great Rosh Yeshiva of the Mir Yeshiva in Jerusalem:

“When I was in Israel, I went to Mea Shearim, the ultra-Orthodox area within Jerusalem. Along with a group of businessmen I was with, I had the opportunity to have an audience with Rabbi Nosson Tzvi Finkel, the head of a yeshiva there. I had never heard of him and didn’t know anything about him. We went into his study and waited 10 to 15 minutes for him. Finally, the doors opened.

“What we did not know was that Rabbi Finkel was severely afflicted with Parkinson’s disease. He sat down at the head of the table, and, naturally, our inclination was to look away. We didn’t want to embarrass him.

“We were all looking away, and we heard this big bang on the table: “Gentlemen, look at me...” ...His speech affliction was worse than his physical shaking. It was really hard to listen to him and watch him...

“Then he asked, “Who can tell me what the lesson of the Holocaust is?” He called on one guy, who didn’t know what to do — it was like being called on in the fifth grade without the answer. And the guy says something benign like, “We will never, ever forget?” And the rabbi completely dismisses him. I felt terrible for the guy until I realized the rabbi was getting

*continued on page two*

## PARSHA OVERVIEW

Pharaoh finally sends *B'nei 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

### A SHABBAT OF SONG

How should a nation respond to the approach of a dangerous enemy? Does the answer lie only in more sophisticated defense systems and more powerful deterrent bombs?

While this may be true for other nations, the history of the Jewish people indicates that there is another element as well.

In the Torah portion we read in synagogues on this *Shabbat Shirah* we echo the song of praise to Heaven our ancestors sang as the Egyptian army pursuing them drowned in the sea. But we also relive the anxiety they felt before the sea miraculously split for them and they saw Pharaoh and his troops drawing near. At that moment they adopted the tactic of their forefathers who prayed to Heaven in time of need.

The phrase used by the Torah to describe Pharaoh “drawing near” is interpreted by the *Midrash* as more than just an account of the frightening pursuit. It also signals that the Egyptian ruler succeeded in drawing his Israelite quarry nearer to their Creator by heightening their sense of dependence on divine mercy.

The special prayers which are daily said in synagogues throughout Israel and the world for the security of Jews in their Holy Land are echoes of the prayers of our ancestors. Prayers which were answered then with a miraculous rescue followed by song. Our prayers too will be answered and we shall joyously sing the praise of G-d who will save Israel forever.

## PARSHA INSIGHTS

*continued from page one*

ready to call on someone else. All of us were sort of under the table, looking away — you know, please, not me. He did not call me. I was sweating. He called on another guy, who had such a fantastic answer: “We will never, ever again be a victim or bystander.”

The rabbi said, “You guys just don’t get it. Okay, gentlemen, let me tell you the essence of the human spirit.

“As you know, during the Holocaust, the people were transported in the worst possible, inhumane way by railcar. They thought they were going to a work camp. We all know they were going to a death camp.

“After hours and hours in this inhumane corral with no light, no bathroom, cold, they arrived at the camps. The doors were swung wide open, and they were blinded by the light. Men were separated from women, mothers from

daughters, fathers from sons. They went off to the bunkers to sleep.

“As they went into the area to sleep, only one person was given a blanket for every six. The person who received the blanket, when he went to bed, had to decide, ‘Am I going to push the blanket to the five other people who did not get one, or am I going to pull it toward myself to stay warm?’ “

”And Rabbi Finkel says, “It was during this defining moment that we learned the power of the human spirit, because we pushed the blanket to five others.”

”And with that, he stood up and said, “Take your blanket. Take it back to America and push it to five other people.”

A little self-sacrifice goes a long way.

Sources:

- *Kedushat Levi; Hermes magazine, Columbia Business School*

Published by **Ohr Somayach** Tanenbaum College

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## THEY WHO LEAD

“On the way a man wishes to follow,” say our Sages, “they lead him.” The Torah source for this is the account of how the heathen prophet Bilaam decided to accept the invitation of the Moabite king Balak to curse the Israelites whom he saw as a threat to his land. When Bilaam first sought direction from G-d he was told not to go with Balak’s emissaries and not to curse the blessed Israelites (*Bamidbar 22:12*). Bilaam reluctantly informed the emissaries that he was unable to comply with their wish but in his heart he longed for the opportunity to earn the great reward promised him. This desire produced the result that he was informed in a second nocturnal vision that he could go with Balak’s emissaries (*ibid. 22:20*).

Maharsha calls attention to the use of the plural term “they” in the above mentioned statement about being led in the direction one wishes to follow. He explains it according to the principle, often mentioned in his writings, that every human act, statement and even thought creates an angel, for good or evil. Man indeed has free will, for “everything is determined by Heaven except fear of Heaven” (*Ketubot 30a*). It is “they”, the angels created by the exercise of this free will, who then lead him along the path he has chosen to follow.

Bilaam had such a strong desire to go with Balak’s emissaries and to curse the Israelites that G-d sent him the angel created from that desire to lead him along the path he had chosen by telling him that he could go.

The same idea finds expression in a passage of the Prophets (*Yeshayahu 48:17*) and the Sacred Writings (*Mishlei 3:34*). In each of these sources, explains Maharsha, it is the angels created by human desire who lead man towards the destination he has chosen.

• *Maccot 10b*

## HONORING GRANDPARENTS

The prime responsibility for executing a convicted murderer was delegated by the Torah (*Bamidbar 35:19*) to the close relative who is his “blood avenger”. The one exception is the case of a father who murdered his son. The brother of the victim cannot be assigned this role because of the respect he owes his father. Should the victim have a son, however, he may be appointed as the executioner of his grandfather.

Rashi’s explanation that a grandson is not obligated in the mitzvah of honoring his grandfather is the springboard for a

major discussion in halachic literature. Those commentaries who contend that a grandson is obligated to honor his grandfather draw support from a passage in the Torah (*Bereishet 46:1*) which relates that when Yaakov reached Beersheba on his way to a reunion with Yosef in Egypt he offered sacrifices to “the G-d of his father Yitzchak”. Rashi there explains that only Yitzchak’s name is mentioned and not that of Yaakov’s grandfather Avraham, because greater honor is due a father than to a grandfather. It is on this basis that Rema (*Shulchan Aruch Yoreh De’ah 240:24*) rules that there is an obligation to honor a grandfather but that honor to a father is a greater obligation. (Only if there is a conflict between the two obligations would this matter. Otherwise the honor due to a grandparent is equal to that due to a parent.)

In *Mesechta Sota (49a)* there is the incident of Rabbi Acha bar Yaakov who asked the grandson he raised to give him a drink of water only to be reminded that he was only a grandson and therefore not obligated to honor him like a son. This is cited as support for the opposing position although a difference may be made between a father’s father and a mother’s father as is the case in that gemara.

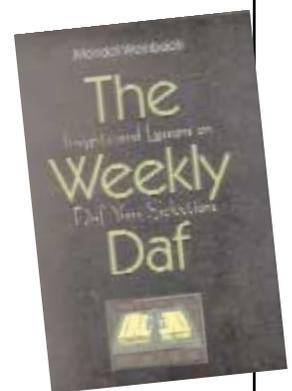
For further research on this subject see the Responsa of Rabbi Akiva Eiger (Vol. I, No. 68) and the Responsa of *Shvut Yaakov* (Vol. II, No. 94)

• *Maccot 12a*

## The Weekly Daf

by RABBI MENDEL WEINBACH

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## 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.

## SHABBAT IN SPACE

From: Judy in LA

Dear Rabbi,

*I imagine that being an astronaut is very taxing (I mean on the astronaut's efforts, not just the taxpayers' money). I recently saw a beautiful IMAX production on the Space Shuttle. But I imagine the cramped quarters, physical stress and the psychological fears of being in a seeming endless "space" must be difficult on the astronauts. My question: Would a Jew also be obligated to observe Jewish laws in space, such as keeping Shabbat, eating kosher?*

Dear Judy,

Colonel Ilan Ramon is scheduled to become the first Israeli, and the third Jew, scheduled to leave Earth's atmosphere as part of the NASA crew on the next shuttle in January 2003. He has requested kosher food and NASA has agreed to provide. I wonder how the other astronauts will react to him biting into lox and cream cheese on a garlic bagel?

Regarding Shabbat, NASA could, in theory, give the Jewish astronaut Shabbat off if doing so would not endanger life. I hope lift-off does not need to occur on Shabbat. The big question is *how* to count days and know when it's Shabbat. Since the shuttle orbits Earth every 90 minutes, each orbit would seem to constitute a day for the shuttler since the sun has risen and set during that time from his perspective. But perhaps the Shabbat day should be determined in a different manner.

This question has been theoretical for some time, but

now it's a 7,6,5...countdown to Shabbat and the answer doesn't seem to appear in the Code of Jewish Law. So what else would a Jew do in such a case but Ask the Rabbi!

I heard that the astronaut has found a spiritual mentor in Cape Canaveral, the place for most astronaut training and the site of the lift-off. The astronaut views himself as "representing all Jews and all Israelis" and has asked his mentor numerous questions about kashrut and Shabbat observance with apparent intent to observe the law. Although there is a principle in Jewish law that saving life would require not observing Shabbat, it is to be assumed that the Colonel will not be involved in vital activities non-stop, and therefore will be able to observe Shabbat. But when is Shabbat in space?

One scholar reportedly consulted is a Jerusalem rabbi renowned for his expertise in "Science and Halacha (Jewish law)." This rabbi is reported to have ruled that the Colonel should be relieved of his obligation to observe Shabbat because he will not be experiencing Earth time.

However, the consensus of opinions so far is that he should keep Shabbat according to his last place of residence on Earth, Cape Canaveral. There is a precedent for this ruling. A Chassidic Rebbe travelled one summer to Leningrad. At that time of year there was no visible sunset in Leningrad. The Rebbe kept Shabbat according to the times for Shabbat in Petersburg, his previous city.

The Colonel is planning to recite the Friday night kiddush over a closed bottle of wine with a straw inserted, since the zero-gravity environment would allow the wine to spill in all directions from an open goblet.

It has often been said that keeping Shabbat is an experience "out-of-this-world" — in this case literally! He is also planning on reciting the traditional traveller's prayer (*tefillat haderech*), and our prayers join his that G-d allow him a safe, successful and glatt-kosher trip.

## WHAT'S THE RIGHT THING TO DO?

### REAL-LIFE QUESTIONS OF SOCIAL AND BUSINESS ETHICS

## THE TORAH WORK ETHIC

**Question:** I am fortunate in holding down a good job even in these difficult times. My work ethic is, in my opinion, a decent one since I put in an honest day's work and don't waste the time for which I am being paid. Some of my co-workers make fun of how hard I work at my job, arguing that the wages we are being paid don't justify such an effort. Are they right?

**Answer:** How wrong they are can best be appreciated by quoting the words of Rambam at the conclusion of the laws regarding the rights of employees:

"Just as the employer is commanded not to deprive the

employee of his wages or withhold them, so too is the employee commanded not to steal from his employer by slacking off a bit here and a bit there and thus dishonestly spending his workday. It is incumbent on him to carefully utilize all of his time... and he is obligated to work with all of his might, as the righteous Patriarch Yaakov declared to his wives: 'With all my might I worked for your father'."

From the words of Rambam we learn that a Torah-true work ethic includes quality of labor as well as quantity. The closing words of Rambam that Yaakov was rewarded by Heaven for his work ethic even in this world by becoming a very prosperous man should be an inspiration for people who indeed give their all for their employers. Inevitably those individuals will be rewarded not only in the World to Come but in this world as well with raises and promotions.

## THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

### BROTHERS IN BLOOD

“Sharing for Life” is the name of a program designed to give American visitors to Israel an opportunity to become “blood brothers” with Jews in Israel. Magen David Adom, with the help of its American arm (ARMED) and the conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, is encouraging these visitors to donate blood while they are here.

The routine need for blood has been increased by the terrorist attacks which leave behind military and civilian casualties. In addition there is the threat of a biological attack by terrorists or the Iraqis which necessitates addi-

tional supplies of blood components to produce antibodies for appropriate vaccines.

These considerations inspired the campaign about which its organizers say “There is no more personal demonstration of commitment and concern than giving blood”. Tourists have been invited to come to the MDA National Blood Center in Ramat Gan, one of the world’s most advanced blood processing facilities, or to simply walk into one of the 25 bloodmobiles stationed at their hotels or other convenient locations, roll up their sleeves and become blood brothers in the fullest sense of the term.

### DID YOU KNOW THAT...

...that Ohr Somayach has successfully run full-time programs in six languages – Hebrew, English, Russian, Spanish, French and Persian.

### 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 YITZCHAK LURIA (THE “ARI”) – THE DELAYED BRIT

The famous leader of the kabbalists in Tsefat, Rabbi Yitzchak Luria (Adoneinu Rav Yitzchak), came to that city after living for years in Egypt. Tradition has it, however, that he was born in Jerusalem to extremely righteous parents. The Prophet Eliyahu told his father that he should not allow the *brit* of his son to take place until he appeared to him in the synagogue. When the time of the *brit* arrived Eliyahu had still not appeared. No one among the assembled guests under-



stood the reason for the delay since the *mohel*, the father and the baby were all there. The father ignored the mounting cries to start the *brit* until Eliyahu finally arrived.

The prophet, who traditionally arrives at every *brit* in invisible form, was this time seen taking the baby in his arms and informing his father that he should take special care of his son, for he would be a light to all Israel and the entire world.

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