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PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

Turning a Blind Ayin Hara

“No layman shall eat of the holy...” (22:10)

Why does the Torah refer to Terumah - the priestly gifts - as ‘the holy’? Why not call it by its more common name, ‘teruma’?

Nothing is more holy than giving. When a person is a giver, he becomes like Hashem. Of course, Hashem is the ultimate giver because there’s nothing that we can give to Him. He already has everything. But in our own way, what makes us holy is to be, as much as we can, like Him.

But being a giver also provides greatest protection from an extremely destructive force that exists in the world. The Gemara (Bava Metziah 107a) says that Rav once visited a cemetery. After leaving the cemetery, he said, “Of the 100 people buried here, only one died of natural causes. The other 99 died of Ayin Hara (The Evil Eye).”

The Torah and Chazal are replete with references to Ayin Hara: Sara put an ayin hara on Yishmael (Rashi on Bereshet 21:14), which gave him a fever and he couldn’t walk. The Midrash Rabbah says that Sarah caused Hagar to have a miscarriage with Ayin Hara. Rashi says that Yaakov told his sons when they went down to Egypt to not all enter through the same gate, to avoid Ayin Hara.

One of the five possibilities of the derech ra’ah (bad path) that we should avoid is ayin harah (Pirkei Avot 2:14). Ayin Hara is also one of the things that remove us from the world (Pirkei Avot 2:16). The first set of luchot given to Moshe at Har Sinai were given with much publicity, which led to an ayin hara and destruction, while the second set, given more quietly, were able to last forever. The Torah said to give a half-shekel for the purposes of a census and to not count Jews directly to avoid an ayin hara. The Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim (241:6) says that brothers do not get consecutive aliyot to avoid ayin hara. In Baba Metziah, 107alef again, Rav Yehuda told Ravin not to buy property adjacent to the city because it would then be subject to an ayin hara that would be able to damage it. And on and on.

Yes. Ayin Hara is a reality and can be enormously destructive. But before you despair completely, there’s another Gemara that quotes Rabbi Yochanan as saying "I am a descendant of Yosef, over whom ayin hara has no power." Why were Yosef and his descendants protected from the Ayin Hara?

Jealousy causes ayin hara. So, someone who is self-evidently focused on the good of others, doesn't provoke ayin hara. A person who is a giver and not a taker, in all of his dealings with the world, will not arouse any jealousy. This is why the descendants of Yosef are not susceptible to the ayin hara – because Yosef was so selfless. Yosef was the mashbir, the provider. Yosef's sole intent was to provide for others, both the Jewish People and the Egyptians.

To the extent that our eyes are focused on others, the evil eye will not focus on us.

**Thanks to Rabbi Asher Resnick*

PARSHA OVERVIEW

The *kohanim* are commanded to avoid contact with corpses in order to maintain a high standard of ritual purity. They may attend the funeral of only their seven closest relatives: father, mother, wife, son, daughter, brother, and unmarried sister. The Kohen Gadol may not attend the funeral even of his closest relatives. Certain marital restrictions are placed on the *kohanim*.

The nation is required to honor the *kohanim*. Physical irregularities that invalidate a *kohen* from serving in the Temple are listed. *Terumah*, a portion of the crop that is given to the *kohanim*, may be eaten only by *kohanim* and their household. An animal may be sacrificed in the Temple after it is eight days old and is free from any physical defects.

The nation is commanded to sanctify the Name of Hashem by insuring that their behavior is always exemplary and by being prepared to surrender their lives rather than murder, engage in licentious relations or worship idols.

The special characteristics of the holidays are described, and the nation is reminded not to do certain types of creative work during these holidays. New grain may not be eaten until the *omer* of barley is offered in the Temple. This Torah portion explains the laws of preparing the oil for the Menorah and baking the *lechem hapanim* in the Temple. A man blasphemes Hashem, and is executed as prescribed in the Torah.

Q & A

EMOR

Questions

1. Which male descendants of Aharon are *exempt* from the prohibition against contacting a dead body?
2. Does a *kohen* have an option regarding becoming ritually defiled when his unmarried sister passes away?
3. How does one honor a *kohen*?
4. How does the Torah restrict the *Kohen Gadol* with regard to mourning?
5. The Torah states in verse 22:3 that one who "approaches holy objects" while in a state of *tumah* (impurity) is penalized with excision. What does the Torah mean by "approaches"?
6. What is the smallest piece of a corpse that is able to transmit *tumah*?
7. Who in the household of a *kohen* may eat *tenumah*?
8. If the daughter of a *kohen* marries a "*zar*" she may no longer eat *tenumah*. What is a *zar*?
9. What is the difference between a *neder* and a *nedavah*?
10. May a person slaughter an animal and its father on the same day?
11. How does the Torah define "profaning" the Name of G-d?
12. Apart from Shabbos, how many days are there during the year about which the Torah says that work is forbidden?
13. How big is an *omer*?
14. On what day do we begin to "count the *omer*"?
15. Why do we begin counting the *omer* at night?
16. How does the *omer* differ from other *minchah* offerings?
17. The blowing of the *shofar* on Rosh Hashanah is called a "*zichron teruah*" (sound of remembrance). For what is it a reminder?
18. What is unusual about the wood of the *esrog* tree?
19. Who was the father of the blasphemer?
20. What is the penalty for intentionally wounding one's parent?

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

Answers

1. 21:1 - Challalim - those disqualified from the priesthood because they are descended from a relationship forbidden to a kohen.
2. 21:3 - No, he is required to do so.
3. 21:8 - He is first in all matters of holiness. For example, a kohen reads from the Torah first, and is usually the one to lead the blessings before and after meals.
4. 21:10-12 - He may not allow his hair to grow long, nor attend to his close relatives if they die, nor accompany a funeral procession.
5. 22:3 - Eats.
6. 22:5 - A piece the size of an olive.
7. 22:11 - He, his wife, his sons, his unmarried daughters and his non-Jewish slaves.
8. 22:12 - A non-kohen.
9. 22:18 - A *neder* is an obligation upon a person; a *nedavah* is an obligation placed upon an object.
10. 22:28 - Yes. The Torah only prohibits slaughtering an animal and its mother on the same day.
11. 22:32 - Willfully transgressing the commandments.
12. 23:7-36 - Seven.
13. 23:10 - One tenth of an eipha.
14. 23:15 - On the 16th of Nissan.
15. 23:15 - The Torah requires counting seven complete weeks. If we begin counting in the daytime, the seven weeks would not be complete, because according to the Torah a day starts at nightfall.
16. 23:16 - It was made from barley.
17. 23:24 - The akeidas (binding of) Yitzchak.
18. 23:40 - It has the same taste as the fruit.
19. 24:10 - The Egyptian killed by Moshe (Shemos 2:12).
20. 24:21 - Death.

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

Getting Stoned

After a certain unnamed man (son of a Jewish mother and Egyptian father) blasphemously uttered the name of Hashem for a curse, he was brought in front of Moses and detained until Hashem would reveal to Moses the man's fate. Ultimately, Hashem told Moses that this blasphemer ought to be subject to the death penalty – he should be taken outside of the camp and the entire nation shall stone him. Indeed, that is precisely what was done (Lev. 24:10-23). In that passage, the verb *regimah* for “stoning” a person to death makes four appearances. This essay seeks to determine what, if anything, is the difference between *regimah* and the more common word *sekilah*. Are they actual synonyms or is there something more to the story?

Let's begin with the word *sekilah*, whose root is clearly the trilateral SAMECH-KUF-LAMMED. Inflections of this root that refer to “stoning” somebody or something to death appear twenty times in the Bible. It is the prescribed punishment for one who approaches Mount Sinai (Ex. 19:13), for an ox who kills a person (Ex. 21:28-29, 21:32), for an idolator (Deut. 17:5) or one who incites other to commit idolatry (Deut. 13:11), and for the betrothed virgin who commits adultery and her paramour (Deut. 22:21, 22:24).

The term *sekilah* also appears when Moses refused Pharaoh's offer to bring sacrifices to Hashem in Egypt (in lieu of allowing the nation to leave), because Moses claimed that the Egyptian would not tolerate the Jews slaughtering their gods and would instead “stone” the Jews. Similarly, when the Jews complained to Moses that there was no water in the desert, Moses cried out to Hashem, claiming, “Just a little bit more and they will stone me” (Ex. 17:4). The term *sekilah* was also used when a similar sentiment was expressed by King David (I Sam. 30:6). At another point, King David actually was “stoned” and cursed by Shimi ben Geira, but he was not killed in that stoning (II Sam. 16:6, 16:13). The term *sekilah* further appears in two more instances of men who were stoned to death: Achan, who illegally took the spoils of war from Jericho (Joshua 7:25); and Naboth, against whom Jezebel and Ahab conspired to take his vineyard (I Kings 23:10-15).

Derivatives of the root SAMECH-KUF-LAMMED appear two more times in the Bible, but not in the sense of “stoning” somebody, rather in the sense of “clearing/removing” stones. Most famously, Isaiah prophesied about the Future Redemption and urged the Jewish People to pave the way for that to happen and *saklu m'even* (“remove the stones”) that may impede its path of arrival (Isa. 62:10). Similarly, in a parable about planting a vineyard, Isaiah again uses the word *sakel* to refer to clearing out rocks that could be detrimental to the cultivation of grapevines (Isa. 5:2). This agricultural use of the term also appears in the Mishnah (Sheviit 3:7, 2:3).

When discussing the root SAMECH-KUF-LAMMED, the early lexicographer Menachem Ibn Saruk (920-970) in *Machberet Menachem* lists two separate semantic categories for that root: “stoning” and “clearing/cleaning.” This implies that he does not see those two meanings as related. However, Ibn Janach (990-1050) and Radak (1160-1234) in their respective *Sefer HaShorashim* both see the two meanings of this root as related, in the sense that they mean the exact opposite of each other. It is a well-established phenomenon in the Hebrew language that a given root might have one meaning and also mean the exact opposite (a “self-antonym”); this case is just another example: one meaning of this root refers to “using” stones, while the other meaning refers to “getting rid” of them.

Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim (1740-1814) bridges the gap between these two meanings of *sekilah* by explaining that both refer to the act of “throwing” rocks, but that the first meaning refers to “throwing” rocks at a person, while the second meaning refers to clearing an area of the rocks that are there by “throwing” those rocks elsewhere.

*To read the rest of this article and find out about how *sekilah* differs from *regimah*, visit us online at: http://ohr.edu/this_week/whats_in_a_word/

PEREK SHIRA: The Song of Existence

by Rabbi Shmuel Kraines

THE SONG OF THE ELEPHANT

The elephant says: "How great are Your deeds, Hashem; very deep are Your thoughts!" (Tehillim 92:6)

Elephant in Hebrew is "pil," which is related to the word "pele," meaning wonder. Its huge size, elongated trunk, and overlarge ears are unique in the animal kingdom. It is an imposing mass of tough flesh, armed with spear-like ivory tusks, yet it feeds on nothing more than simple vegetation. Due to its unusual characteristics, our Sages teach that one who sees an elephant must recite the blessing "Meshaneh HaB'rios," which praises Hashem for having fashioned diverse creatures (see Shulchan Aruch 225:8-9).

One can be certain that all of its strange features were in truth designed with deep wisdom. It was given a trunk since a long neck for feeding would not be able to hold its giant head. If it were carnivorous, it would be difficult for it to hunt enough meat to sustain its colossal body. As a massive being of wondrous design, it sings of the profound Divine wisdom within all of Hashem's great deeds.

This song is excerpted from the psalm about the World to Come. Only then, when the world reaches its final state of perfection, will we be clearly able to perceive the true intent of Hashem's great deeds.

Standing in the orchestra of the world, do not crane your neck to try to read the music notes of your neighbor. Your instrument and part are designed exactly according to your own abilities. Rejoice in your lot and play your part wholeheartedly. The Master Composer has arranged a song perfect beyond comprehension.

Sources: Malbim (cited in Hakol Yeshabchucha; see also Shemos 23:11); Bereishis Rabbah 96:5

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TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Sotah 37-43

A Blessing for a Generous Person

A Blessing for a Generous Person

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said, “The cup of beracha is not given to a person saying a beracha (for Bircat Hamazon – Rashi) unless the person is ‘tov ayin’ (who hates theft and does acts of kindness with his money – Rashi).”

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi cites as his source a verse in Proverbs (22:9) which states, “He who has a generous eye will be blessed....” But how does this verse show that the generous person (tov ayin) should be the one saying the blessing since it seems to state the opposite, that a generous person will receive a blessing?

Answer: His proof is based on the fact that the word in the verse for “be blessed” – yevorach – is written without a vav between the beit and the reish in the word. Therefore, it can be read as yevarech, meaning “he will say the blessing.” Nevertheless, we cannot ignore the way it is pronounced, without a vav – yevorach – which means he will be blessed as well. This is also true since he also receives a blessing for saying a blessing during Bircat Hamazon for the welfare of the ba’al habayit, the one who provided the food. Since he blesses the ba’al habayit, Hashem blesses him as well, as the verse says, “I will bless those who bless you” (Gen. 12:3). (Maharsha)

Sotah 38b

The Blessing Before the Priestly Blessing

Rabbi Zeira said that Rabbi Chisda said, “Who has sanctified us with the holiness of Aaron, and has commanded us to bless his people Israel with love.”

This statement on our daf teaches the text of the beracha that a kohen says immediately before fulfilling the mitzvah of Bircat Kohanim, the Priestly Blessing. After saying this beracha, the kohen blesses the congregation as commanded in the Torah (Bamidbar 6:22-27).

It is interesting to note that the wording of this beracha differs from the wording of all other berachot that are said before fulfilling a mitzvah. The kohen does not merely state in this beracha that he is commanded to fulfill this mitzvah. Instead, he adds that he is commanded to fulfill this mitzvah “with love.” Why?

One explanation offered is one that is based on the Midrash. It states there that one should not think that the mitzvah for the kohen to bless the congregation is simply to say the words of blessing out of a

sense of duty and in haste. Rather, an essential part of the mitzvah is to bless the people with heartfelt intent and meaning every word. In short, it needs to be “with love.” This idea can be seen in the wording of the Torah’s command to the kohen, “Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying: This is how you shall bless the children of Israel, saying to them....” The kohen is told “to say,” which means to express the words with kindness, warmth and love. The root of “to say” is “omer,” as opposed to first word in the verse – “daber” – which means “speak” but does not connote the “softness” and “love” that describes the manner in which they were commanded to bless the congregation. (Maharitz Chiyut in the name of the Be’er Sheva)

Sotah 39a

LETTER AND SPIRIT

Insights based on the writings of Rav S.R. Hirsch by Rabbi Yosef Herschman

Celebrating Preparation

As the Torah records each of the festivals, a date is provided. Pesach is on the fifteenth day of the first month (Nissan). But for Shavuot, no date is provided. Succot is celebrated on the fifteenth day of the seventh month (Tishrei). Instead, the Torah teaches that Shavuot will be the culmination of a seven-week count from the Omer offering (the day after Pesach, the 16th of Nissan). After those seven weeks, the fiftieth day is sanctified as a festival.

In contrast to Pesach and Succot, the Torah does not recount the historical event that is commemorated on this festival. By tradition we know that it commemorates the day of the Lawgiving – mattan Torah. If our exodus from Egypt was on the fifteenth of Nissan, then, according to the description in the Torah, mattan Torah was on or about fifty days later. But was it “on” or was it “about”?

Rabbinic tradition teaches that mattan Torah was on Shabbat. There are two rabbinic traditions regarding the day of the week of the Exodus. According to the Seder Olam, it was on a Friday, whereas according to the Talmud (Shabbat 87b) it was on a Thursday. According to Seder Olam, the Torah was given fifty days after the Exodus, but according to the Talmud, the Torah was given fifty-one days later. In this view, our celebration – fifty days after Pesach – marks not the anniversary of mattan Torah, but the day before the Law-giving!

Now that our calendar has been set, Shavuot always falls out on the sixth of Sivan, but in the Torah ideal, where the month was sanctified by observance of the new moon, this was not always the case. Shavuot could fall on the fifth, sixth or seventh of the month, depending on when the new moon was sighted. If the Torah wanted us to celebrate the anniversary of the Law-giving, it would have provided a set date, just as the Torah did for Pesach and Succot. But it did not. Instead, the Torah teaches that we are to establish a festival on the fiftieth day after the Omer, without consideration of the day of the month.

The day that is elevated to a festival is not the day of the revelation at Sinai, but the final day of counting leading up to that great day. According to accepted Talmudic tradition, the fiftieth day was the day before the Law-giving. Thus, we celebrate our making ourselves worthy of receiving the Torah. This fiftieth day was the

day on which the people were ready for their great mission – to be the receivers and bearers of Torah. Even the name of the festival teaches this: Its name does not commemorate a historical event (like Pesach and Succot), but instead is called “Weeks” – after the preparatory counting leading up to the Law-giving.

The event of Sinai itself was not the entirety of the Law-giving. On that day we received only ten of the 613 commandments of the Torah. The rest were taught over a forty-year period. Sinai was an introduction to Torah, which would then be transmitted through Moshe. The purpose of the day was to demonstrate that Hashem can speak to man, and that He had indeed spoken to Moshe. This was made known to us through our own personal experience so that we would receive the whole Torah through Moshe’s transmission with full confidence that it was the word of Hashem. This purpose is explicit in the Torah (Shemot 19:9).

Our celebration of Shavuot is not because Hashem gave the Torah to the Jewish nation, but because we were prepared to receive it. As we count the days from the festival of our national birth, we are encouraged to make these days count, so that we celebrate anew our preparedness to receive and bear the Torah.

- Source: Commentary, Vayikra 23:21

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COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

KIDDUSH (Part 1): Unity Through Separation

INTRODUCTION

“Although you may enjoy the rest and the tranquility of Shabbat, have in mind that you are not observing the day for your own pleasure; rather to honor the One who commanded you to do so.”

Sefat Emet (Rabbi Yehudah Aryeh Leib Alter)

One of the more obvious symbols in the Jewish cycle is wine. Many rituals are accompanied by a cup that brims over with wine. When a couple marries, they drink wine under the Chuppah. At the seven days of celebration after the wedding, special blessings are recited, which conclude with a blessing over wine. When a Brit Milah is performed, a blessing is recited over a cup of wine. There is wine at a Pidyon HaBen (redemption of a first-born son). We herald in Shabbat and Yom Tov with wine and, similarly, we take leave of them with a cup of wine.

On the face of it, this may not seem remarkable. Anyone familiar with Jewish rituals knows that wine nearly always plays a very prominent role. However, when one thinks about it, it really is rather surprising because of the potentially destructive nature of wine. Wine has played a very conspicuous role in the downfall of mankind almost since the beginning of history. According to Rabbi Meir (Tractate Brachot 40a) the Tree of Knowledge was a grapevine because “there is nothing that brings [more] wailing upon man as wine.” Rabbi Meir is teaching us that it was the latent destructiveness of wine that caused Adam and Chavah to sin and it is the same latent destructiveness that is the cause of so much sorrow up to and including today. The Talmud continues by describing how, on leaving the Ark after having been constrained within it for a whole year, Noach planted a vineyard and became drunk from its wine which directly led to his degradation (Ber. 9:20-21). And in both the Torah and the Prophets the list of tragedies that occurred because of excessive wine drinking seems never-ending. Perhaps it would be more understandable if wine would have been entirely forbidden as it symbolizes the ease with which wine can overcome a person’s spiritual identity and turn them into a completely physical being (ibid. Rashi). At the very least it would seem more appropriate that wine be regarded with distrust and that it come with all kinds of warnings about the dangers of excessive drinking. And, yet, not only is that not the case but we seem to actually do the opposite and embrace it and rejoice with by making wine so central to so many of our ceremonies.

Paradoxically, through the extensive use of wine, the Torah teaches us a foundational lesson: everything in the physical world can be elevated to be a spiritual experience. And wine, a symbol of a person’s ability to descend to the lowest levels, is no different. Precisely due to its enormously potent power, we are commanded to utilize it for benefit in spiritual realms. This means taking wine, the epitome of the physical controlling the spiritual in a negative manner, and elevating it. We do this by turning it into something sanctified, by making a blessing over it and drinking it at the holiest moments of our year. This concept of elevating the mundane is fundamental to Judaism. Rabbi Yitzchak Friedman (1850-1917) was the first Rebbe of Boyan Chassidut and is known as the Pachad Yitzchak after his seminal work. Regarding the way a person should to fulfill the obligation to say Kiddush, the Sage Shmuel teaches, “Ein Kiddush Elah Bemakom Seudah – Kiddush must be recited only in the place where the meal is eaten.” The Pachad Yitzchak taught that Shmuel’s statement can be

understood as “Ein Kiddush – i.e., the only way to attain holiness is Elah Bemakom Seudah, through eating a meal.” If one eats with the correct intent, they will attain immense holiness.

To be continued...

@OHR – All about our students, alumni and staff

by Rabbi Shlomo Simon

I just received this article from one of our esteemed alumni Rabbi Daniel Freedman. I thought it should be shared with a wider audience.

He wrote:

I can imagine the opposition to an institution like Ohr Somayach must have been manifold in those hazy days after 67 when the country’s stability hung in the balance in the midst of a Global Cold War. The Yom Kippur war in the early 70s must have put a wrench in the vision of the Roshei Yeshiva. But nonetheless in hindsight we can see that the naysayers were “dead wrong.”

In the 70s a group of exceptionally intelligent and gifted passed through the hallowed halls of the various temporary buildings that were eventually supplanted by the Tannenbaum Main Campus on 22 Shimon Hatzaddik. One such individual shaped the lives of many young men both in Jerusalem and abroad. Rabbi Zeev Kraines had a charismatic pull on bringing disaffected young Jews back to their roots. He introduced many young men to the gedolim that shaped the early days of Ohr Somayach: Rav Aharon Feldman shlita, Rav Moshe Shapiro ztzl, Rav Nachman Bulman ztzl among others.

When Zeev Kraines formed the sub-branch of Ohr Somayach in Johannesburg, little did he know that he instilled a fire and spirit in many families and individuals who reignited their own connection to Hashem.

This inspiration led me to join Ohr Somayach in the early 2000s and for 14 years I imbibed the lessons and Torah that was presented as emes. Ohr Somayach is unique in that there is an unceasing desire for seeking out the emes no matter how far that takes you. Difficult questions are always respected and answered unabashedly without fluff and intellectual sophistry.

In this way I left Ohr Somayach as an alumnus but with a deep connection with the Rabbeim, Roshei Yeshiva and the Torah that emanates from those hallowed halls that have now been rebuilt anew for the next generation.

In any case, I thought it might be interesting to note that as I write these words in the Beis Haknesses in the far flung reaches of a small newly built neighborhood in Beit Shemesh no less than 6 former alumni are learning here night seder, and one alumnus’ son learns in the morning. Of this, two are in kollel and the rest work in some capacity, either in the morning/afternoon/evening.

I was struck by how much this has added to the growth and energy of the Shul as a whole and Evening learning and how grateful I am to the Roshei Yeshiva, as well as of course Yaakov Kaplan and Danny Lemberg among the other members of the board who have taken the achraiys and responsibility for making sure an institution like Ohr Somayach exists for without which all of this would never have been possible.