

O H R N E T

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PARSHA INSIGHTS

THE UNCHAINED TONGUE

“Remember what Hashem, your G-d, did to Miriam on the way, when you were leaving Egypt” (24:9)

When Miriam criticized her brother Moshe unfairly, God punished her with *tzara'at*, a serious leprosy-like skin affliction that covered her body.

The Torah, for some reason, connects Miriam's punishment with leaving Egypt. What does one thing have to do with the other?

The captivity of the Jewish People in Egypt was more than physical bondage. On a deeper level Egypt represented the enslavement of the power of speech. Egypt not only enslaved the bodies of the Jewish People, but it put in chains the major weapon of the Jewish People – speech. Thus, the Torah writes that the Jewish People “cried out” to G-d. It never writes that they “prayed.” Because in Egypt, speech itself was bound.

The Exodus from Egypt was the beginning of the rebuilding of the power of speech.

Man's pre-eminence derives from his power of speech. He has the ability to direct himself according to his will. When the Jewish People left Egypt, they went straight into the desert. In Hebrew, the word desert is *midbar* which is from the root *mi*

dibur – “from speech” – because the desert is the place that is separated and removed from speech. Since the desert is the maximum place of non-speech, of non-direction, it is the ideal place to rebuild the power of speech from the ground up.

When the Jewish People left Mitzrayim, they were like a newborn baby. When a child begins to speak, his father is obligated to start to teach him Torah. In this formative stage, then, it was essential that the Jewish People guard their mouths and their tongues with great care. Something is most vulnerable during its construction. To protect the reconstruction of speech they were given Torah, and to protect their mouths they were given the manna.

The gravity of Miriam's error was not just what she did, but when she did it. To use the power of speech incorrectly at the time of its reconstruction required a serious punishment. Thus, the Torah connects her mistake with the leaving of Egypt.

It is Miriam's eternal privilege, though, that every generation has a positive commandment to remember what God did to her to teach us that death and life are in the power of the tongue.

Sources:

• *Sfat Emet, Ramban*

PARSHA OVERVIEW

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

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

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

THE REAL THREAT

What is the real danger to the existence of the Jewish People? Most people will respond to this question with frightening terms such as Palestinian terror, Iranian nuclear ability or international anti-Semitism.

Some passages in this week's Torah reading offer us a different perspective.

Male converts to Judaism from the nations of Ammon and Moab are severely limited in their right to marriage within the nation they joined because of the role of their ancestors in subverting our ancestors to sexual immorality and idol worship. The only other nations subject to such limitations are the Edomites and the Egyptians. But the limitation in their cases extend only to the first two generations of con-

verts.

In his commentary, Rashi cites the lesson which our Talmudic Sages drew from this comparison. The Edomites threatened our ancestors with war when they passed by their border on the way to Eretz Yisrael, and the Egyptians cast Hebrew children into the river. Their crimes were heinous but did not pose the threat to survival which the others did with their spiritual subversion.

"This teaches you," is how our Sages put it, "that one who causes another to sin does him more harm than one who kills him, for the slayer deprives him of life in this world while the subverter causes him to lose both this world and the world to come."

LOVE OF THE LAND - THE PEOPLE

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

UNCHALLENGABLE CLAIM

There are three places in Eretz Yisrael, say our Sages (*Bereishet Rabba* 79:7), where the nations of the world cannot even begin to press their false claim that we "stole" the land which G-d, the Master of the World, gave to us, because they were all actually purchased from their owners.

Avraham purchased the Machpela Cave in which



the Patriarchs and Matriarchs are buried, Yaakov purchased the field in Shechem where Yosef is buried, David purchased the site on which the Beit Hamikdash was built by his son.

How tragically ironic it is that it in regard to these very areas — Hebron, Shechem and Temple Mount — we are forced to stand up against the world to defend our rights of ownership.

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

DON'T PUSH!

Every time another Holocaust denier rears his ugly head our thoughts turn to those Jews who survived that great tragedy and lived to tell the true story of what happened.

While we mourn the death of millions of our brothers and sisters in the Holocaust we continue to be inspired by the tales of those who survived. Only G-d knows why some were chosen to be survivors while others perished. The story of each survivor is therefore one of miraculous Divine intervention.

One such survivor was a young girl at the time that she

was taken to a death camp together with her family and neighbors. After days of sweating and thirsting in a sealed cattle car they were all anxious for a shower and a drink. When their deceitful captors led them to the disguised gas chambers they told them that they were being given an opportunity to shower. The women in this girl's group desperately began pushing to get ahead in the line headed for the "showers". But she remembered being taught by her mother never to push others and time after time she remained at the end of the line. Finally the remaining women were sent off to a work camp and she survived the war.

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THE JUMPING COAL

The Torah insisted that a steady fire should burn on the altar in the Beit Hamikdash, and twice issued a prohibition of “You shall not extinguish it” (*Vayikra* 6:5-6). Not only does this prohibition apply to the flame which is upon the altar but extends even to removing a burning coal from the altar and extinguishing it.

This rule, which is cited in our *gemara* in the name of Rabbi Nachman quoting the Sage Rabbah bar Avuho seems to be in conflict with something we learned in an earlier *mishna* (*Zevachim* 86a). There it is stated that a coal which bounds from the altar to the floor need not be returned above and may be allowed to burn itself out below. The reason given for this is that once it has reached the stage of coal we consider that material used as fuel as having fulfilled its role as a mitzvah object. If so, why is a coal removed from the altar considered as still performing a mitzvah service and not to be extinguished?

Tosefot deals with this problem and suggests a distinction between a coal which bounds from the altar to one which is removed by a person. Although no explanation is made of this distinction it seems that it is based on what we view as the final fulfillment of a coal’s role as a mitzvah object. Since it is a natural occurrence for a coal to bound from a burning fire we consider that it has fulfilled its role when this happens. Human intervention, on the other hand, takes place before the intended role is fulfilled and the ensuing extinguishing of the removed coal is considered a violation of the Torah prohibition.

• *Zevachim* 91b

LIMITED LAUNDERING

Any food which comes into contact with the flesh of a *chatat* sacrifice and absorbs some of its content assumes the status of that sacrifice and may only be consumed within the time frame that the sacrifice may be eaten (*Vayikra* 6:20). In the same passage we are told that if blood of that sacrifice spills from the vessel which received it for applying to the altar and lands on a garment, that garment must be laundered within the sacred confines of the Beit Hamikdash.

An interesting question arises in our *gemara* in regard to the extent of this laundering: Must the entire garment be laundered or only that portion which has been stained by the blood?

The answer to this question is supplied by an analysis of the text of the passage involved. “If its blood be spilled on a garment,” says the Torah, “that which has been spilled upon shall be laundered in a sacred place”.

Had the Torah required laundering of the entire garment it would have simply stated that the garment be laundered, since such a phrase is always used in regard to a comprehensive cleaning of the garment involved, not just the affected area. The repetition of the phrase “that which has been spilled upon” indicates that the laundering is limited to the specific area upon which the blood has settled.

• *Zevachim* 94a

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PARSHA Q&A ?

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

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to This Week's Questions!

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

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

DID YOU KNOW THAT...

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PURSUIT OF THE TRUTH

From: E.M.

Dear Rabbi,

I am a young woman who has been religious all my life. When I was a teenager I had several burning questions about Judaism such as the age of the earth, free will, etc. Although I sought and received answers to some of these questions, as I got older and became occupied and generally satisfied with my life, I did not feel the same urgent need to pursue every question that remained.

Lately, I've been thinking that although I do not feel that burning need to pursue all my questions, perhaps I should strive to pursue them anyway. Maybe it is just laziness that keeps me from pursuing the truth. But then, there may be no limit to all the questions I would have to ask since there is always more to understand and deeper levels to reveal!

So my question is, can one "relax" if he doesn't feel the need to understand everything, even though there are things that remain unanswered? Or must one pursue every case of intellectual lack of understanding, regardless of interest and drive involved? I know it's a strange question, but it's really been bothering me to no end and I'd really appreciate your answer. Thank you so much!

Dear E.M.,

Your question is not strange at all, but rather quite commendable. It shows that the burning inquisitiveness of your youth is still aflame. As you know, Judaism encourages one to question and challenge in pursuit of the truth. The Torah thus commands, "Ask your father and he will tell you, your wise men and they will say to you" (Deuteronomy 32:7). In Judaism, one does not pursue knowledge for ulterior motives, but rather in quest of answers. This is why the "four questions" are such an integral part of the Passover Seder. From our most formative years we are inculcated to analyze, compare, perceive differences and ask, "Why"? In fact, the vast teachings of the Talmud are not presented as encyclopedic information, but rather in the dynamic form of statement, challenge, and resolution.

Not only are we encouraged to ask questions, but we are required to seek answers. According to the Torah commentator Sforno (Italy 1470-1550), this is the meaning of the verse, "Know today and respond to your heart that Hashem is G-d" (Deuteronomy 4:39). Sforno explains, "It is urgent that one contemplate and know all that is unknown to him

and then integrate in his heart the truth he has found".

Indeed, pursuing spiritual questions is an aspect of Torah study about which it is written, "The Torah shall not depart your mouth, and you shall contemplate upon it day and night" (Joshua 1:8). Our Sages commented on this verse, "If you find a time which is neither day or night, then you may refrain from learning Torah". This doesn't necessarily mean that one must learn Torah all day and night, since one must do what is necessary to earn a living and maintain one's health. Nevertheless it demonstrates that one must pursue Torah knowledge as much as possible.

The fact that you felt a more burning desire to pursue your questions when you were younger is not surprising. During youth one is naturally inquisitive and concerned about knowing oneself and the world about him, and usually has the time to do so. Part of maturity, though, is to continue the intellectual inquisitiveness of youth into adulthood, and not rely as an adult on the understanding of one's youth. Naturally, this becomes more difficult as we become preoccupied with a career or raising a family. Nevertheless, the intensity with which we pursue these goals should exemplify to us the extent to which we should be able to apply ourselves to spiritual pursuits. This is the meaning of the verse, "If you seek wisdom like silver, and search for it as for hidden treasures, then you shall attain awe of Hashem, and find knowledge of G-d" (Proverbs 2:3-4). Just as one doesn't relax in search of wealth, so too one mustn't be lazy in one's spiritual quest. It is absolutely wonderful that you realize there's no limit, as in fact our Sages instructed, "You are not required to complete the task, yet you are not free to withdraw from it" (Avot 2:21).

So, to answer your question, every person according to his ability and opportunity is required to seek spirituality by asking and seeking answers. This is a life-long endeavor in which a Jew must engage himself, even if he doesn't find it the most thrilling adventure. Nevertheless, there are several things you can do to make it more interesting. First, often we lack the drive because we're spiritually out of shape. Exercise your spiritual muscles by forcing yourself to pursue a topic. Soon you'll start feeling "younger" again. Second, set aside specific times during your weekly schedule to contemplate spiritual issues. Or better yet, arrange a *chavruta* (learning partner) in which you ask, challenge, and explore issues together. You can even introduce friendly competition as to who comes up with quicker or better answers, asking others to "officiate", which may evolve into a study group. It is also essential to seek a rabbi or rebbeztzin whom you can converse with or whose classes you can attend. Such a connection can be very inspiring, rekindling the flame and ensuring that the fire keeps burning.

WHO GETS THE MAFTIR?

Question: The synagogue I regularly attend serves hundreds of families and has found it necessary to make a rule that anyone who wishes to reserve the maftir call-up to the Torah reading for his son's Bar Mitzvah must notify the officer in charge of such matters a year in advance so as to avoid conflicts with other candidates for this honor. While I dutifully made such notification, a fellow congregant with a Bar Mitzvah that very Shabbat who assumed there would be no problem did not bother to notify until a couple of weeks before the date in question. Since both of us want our sons to have maftir what is the right thing to do?

Answer: A case exactly like yours was once brought before the foremost halachic authority, Hagaon Rav Yosef Shalom

Eliyashiv, *shlita*. It was assumed by the fellow in your position that he had priority because he acted according to the rules while the other fellow had not.

He was surprised to hear otherwise from the great rav. The privilege of being called up to maftir, he pointed out, was one that belonged to every boy in the congregation coming of age. The father's negligence in reserving the maftir for his son in accordance with the rules should therefore not compromise his son's rights since he as a minor could not be held responsible for the oversight.

With the rights to maftir thus being equal, the ruling was to draw lots to determine who gets the maftir that Shabbat.

*as reported by Rabbi Yitzchak Zilberstein,
Rabbi of the Ramat Elchanan community in Bnei Brak*

PUBLIC DOMAIN _____

Re: E-Mail See Mail (Ohrnet Matot-Masei)

In a recent Ohrnet column in explaining the rationale behind the ban against reading another's mail you wrote: "It is for this reason that a case has already been made for exempting postcards from this ban because the very nature of their exposed contents indicates that the writer had nothing to hide from the eyes of others."

This may be so today; however 50-70+ years ago a postcard was less expensive and therefore it was used by many people even though private matters were written.

It could also be that even today private matters are written on a postcard, and the writer is hoping that a potential

reader might ignore it assuming that no one would write private matters in such an exposed fashion.

• A. G.

Re: Uncovering the Issue (Ohrnet Devarim)

Your answer to this lady was very thoughtful and nice, thank you for posting it publicly. It could be useful to know that there are extensive articles on this kind of dilemma for ladies on the Eishes Chayil Website, www.eisheschayil.com

It could be that looking at other women's answers to this kind of situation could help this lady also.

• Kol Tuv, Mrs. A.

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