

# OHR NET

SHABBAT PARSHAT KI TAVO · 16 ELUL 5763 - SEP. 13, 2003 · VOL. 10 NO. 45

## PARSHA INSIGHTS

### WORDS THAT SPEAK AS LOUD AS ACTIONS

“...and you will say to him” (26:3)

What was said at the birthday party: “What an absolutely *fabulous* present. I can’t begin to tell you how much I adore it. It’s *just* what I wanted. I can see it now on my mantelpiece. You have such divine taste. It must have been so-o-o expensive. You really shouldn’t have. I don’t know where to begin to thank you.”

What was *meant* at the birthday party:

“You call this a present? It’s the most hideous thing I’ve ever seen. I’ve had better gifts out of a cornflakes box. I can see it now in my trash can. Your taste is worse than an Afghan goatherd. This must have cost you all of 50 cents. You really didn’t. I don’t know where to begin to thank you.”

Because insincerity is a fact of life, it’s easy to err on the side of understatement when it comes to saying thank you.

However, this week’s Torah portion teaches us that we should verbalize our gratitude fully: There is a mitzvah to bring up the first fruits of the Land of Yisrael to Jerusalem and present them to the *kohen*.

The one who does this makes a moving declaration of gratitude to G-d for His eternal role as the Guide of Jewish history. Rashi says that a person makes this declaration “so that he should not be an ingrate.”

The question arises; don’t actions speak louder than words? Isn’t the gift enough of a demonstration of gratitude to G-d?

The Torah teaches us here that a person should never stint from sincere thanks. Even though the currency of verbal gratitude may be debased by insincerity, a Jew has an obligation not just to show his gratitude with actions, but to verbalize and specify the nature of the good for which he is thanking his benefactor, whether, man or G-d.

Sources:

- Based on *Da’at Torah*

## PARSHA OVERVIEW

When *Bnei Yisrael* dwell in the Land of Israel, the first fruits are to be taken to the Temple and given to the *kohen* in a ceremony expressing recognition that it is Hashem who guides Jewish history throughout all ages. (This passage forms one of the central parts of the Haggadah that we read at the Passover Seder.) On the last day of Pesach of the fourth and seventh years of the seven-year *shemita* cycle, a person must recite a disclosure stating that he has indeed distributed the tithes to the appropriate people in the prescribed manner. With this *mitzvah*, Moshe concludes the commandments that Hashem has told him to give to the Jewish People. Moshe exhorts them to walk in Hashem’s ways, because they are set aside as a treasured people to Hashem. When *Bnei*

*Yisrael* cross the Jordan River they are to make a new commitment to the Torah. Huge stones are to be erected and the Torah is to be written on them in the world’s seventy primary languages, and they are to be covered with a thin layer of plaster. Half the tribes will stand on Mount Gerizim and half on Mount Eval, and the *levi’im* will stand in a valley between the two mountains. There the *levi’im* will recite 12 commandments and all the people will say “amen” to the blessings and the curses. Moshe then details the blessings that will be bestowed upon *Bnei Yisrael*. These blessings are both physical and spiritual. But if the Jewish People do not keep the Torah, Moshe details a chilling picture of destruction, resulting in exile and wandering among the nations.

Ignore history, it has been wisely said, and you are condemned to relive it. Jews relearn their own history at the Seder table on Pesach eve by reciting the Hagadah which uses as its outline the first chapter in this week's Torah reading. In the times of the *Beit Hamikdash* a Jew showed his appreciation of the heavenly gift of Eretz Yisrael by each year bringing *bikkurim* — the first grains and fruits of his field — to the *kohen* in the Sanctuary and making a declaration.

In this declaration he made it clear that Jewish history did not begin with statehood. He recalled the dangers faced by our Patriarchs and our suffering in Egyptian bondage, highlighting the fact that it was G-d who miraculously saved us from enemies in every generation who sought to destroy us. Only after this introduction did he mention that Hashem

“brought us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey” for which he shows his gratitude by bringing the *bikkurim*.

This review of history is so important because there is a tragic secular tendency to view Jewish history as beginning and ending with statehood. The Jew who thinks about what he says on Pesach eve realizes that we were a people before we entered our promised land and we remained a people even after being expelled from it because of our sins. But, most of all, he takes to heart that it was not our power that made it possible for us to enjoy our land but rather that it was a gift from G-d.

If we learn these lessons of history we will be privileged not to be condemned to relive losing our land ever again.

## LOVE OF THE LAND - THE PEOPLE

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

### AVIAH SON OF YERAVAM — ONE IN A FAMILY

The only one of the family of Yeruvam who had a normal burial was his son Aviah who passed away as a young man. This family was one that established the Kingdom of Yisrael. The violent deaths that Heaven visited upon this household were punishment for subverting the people to idol worship. Aviah too had been appointed by his father to serve as a sentry to pre-



vent Jews from his kingdom from making the pilgrimage to Jerusalem during the Three Festivals. But he defied his father's orders, abandoned his post and joined the crowds going to the *Beit Hamikdash*.

The Zohar adds that because G-d saw that Aviah did such a good thing, He removed him from the world before he could become corrupted in order that he would inherit the World-to-Come.

## THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

### A LIFESAVING CAUTION

An urgent telephone call interrupted a meeting which Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, rav of the Ramat Elchanan community in Bnei Brak, was having with some of the residents of the neighborhood about how to increase public participation in the local Torah classes. The catalyst for this meeting was a tragic spate of untimely deaths in the community, and the tone of this call indicated that another might be on the way.

“An hour ago I prescribed a medicine for a woman in your community,” said the doctor on the other end in an alarmed voice, “and I just realized that I made a grave

mistake. If she takes that medicine it could do her irreparable harm. You must stop her immediately!”

After figuring out exactly where this woman lived, one of the men at the meeting rushed out to sound the alarm. No sooner had he reached the next street than he saw the woman's husband pacing back and forth. “My wife bought a medicine the doctor prescribed for her,” he explained, “but she refuses to take it until she is assured that it is kosher. I gave it to a local pharmacological expert to analyze and am out here waiting for his verdict.”

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## DOUBLE MEANING OF THE KNIFE

In the introductory part of our morning prayers we recite the Torah chapter dealing with the Patriarch Avraham preparing to offer his son Yitzchak as a sacrifice to G-d, and we appeal to Heaven to have mercy on us in the merit of this great deed. One of the passages in this chapter of the *akeida* serves as a source for two rules regarding the *shechita* slaughtering of animals, one general and the other specific to sacrifices:

“And Avraham extended his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son” (*Bereishet* 22:10)

The use of the term “took the knife” rather than “prepared a knife” led the *gemara* (*Mesechta Chulin* 16a) to conclude that the sharp instrument used for *shechita*, whether it be a stone or a reed, must be detached from its source. In our *gemara* this same passage is identified as the source for the rule that the *shechita* of sacrifices may be done only with a knife and not with any other sharp instrument.

This is deduced from the fact that the specific term “knife” is used rather than “a cutting instrument”. This insistence on a metal vessel, explains Tosefot, applies only to sacrifices, because all of the service performed in regard to them was done with sacred vessels, as opposed to the *shechita* of animals for secular use.

One problem arises, however, in extending this requirement of a knife to the *shechita* of all sacrifices. Yitzchak, after all, was intended to be offered as an *olah* sacrifice. This problem is solved by citing a passage (*Vayikra* 7:37) which mentions all the different categories of sacrifices in one sentence, indicating that the rule which applies to the *olah* regarding a knife should be extended to all the other sacrifices.

One problem remains which we offer as a challenge to our readers. To prove that Yitzchak was designated to be an *olah* the *gemara* quotes the passage (*Bereishet* 22:13) about Avraham offering a suddenly appeared ram as “an *olah* in place of his son”. Why does it prefer this to the passage (*ibid.* 22:3) at the outset of the chapter in which Avraham is explicitly commanded to offer Yitzchak as an *olah*?

• *Zevachim* 97b

## THE MAKING OF A KOHEN

When did Pinchas, the son of Elazar and grandson of Aharon, achieve the exalted status of *kohen*? This question, which is the subject of a debate between two Sages in our *gemara*, would appear to have a simple answer. After all, isn't someone whose father and grandfather are *kohanim* automatically a *kohen*?

In his commentary on *Chumash* (*Bamidbar* 25:3) Rashi supplies the answer. After Pinchas courageously brought an end to the plague, which struck the nation because of the sinful

action of Zimri, by slaying this prince of the Tribe of Shimon, G-d promised him a “covenant of *kehuna* forever”. This was necessary because only Aharon and his sons had been consecrated as *kohanim*. Children born to them after their consecration would also be *kohanim*. But Pinchas had *already* been born, and could not be considered a *kohen* either because of consecration or birth.

Rabbi Elazar quoted Rabbi Chanina as stating that this heroic action of Pinchas was indeed the turning point in his career and he then achieved the status of *kohen*. Rabbi Ashi, on the other hand, calls attention to the fact that nowhere do we find the title *kohen* attached to the name of Pinchas until he succeeded in averting a civil war among the tribes of Israel. When the conquest of *Eretz Yisrael* was completed, Yehoshua sent the tribes of Reuven and Gad and half the tribe of Menashe to settle the area on the eastern side of the Jordan River which Moshe had promised them. Upon their arrival they erected a huge altar on the bank of the river separating them from the other tribes. Assuming that this was an act of secession and that the altar was meant to serve as an independent place of worship, the main body of Israel mobilized their forces for war against the suspected separatists. When Pinchas led a delegation to present an ultimatum he was informed that the altar was never intended for worship, but rather as a monument to the unity of all the tribes even though a river separated them. Only after effecting this reconciliation do we find (*Yehoshua* 22:30) the title “Pinchas the *Kohen*”.

According to this approach Pinchas was indeed promised the status of *kohen* following his slaying of Zimri. His consecration, as Tosefot explains, required his being anointed, invested with the sacred garments and inauguration with a special *mincha* service. There was opposition among the people to carrying out this consecration because he had slain the head of a tribe. It was only after he saved the nation from civil war were they reconciled to his becoming a *kohen*.

• *Zevachim* 101b

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## PARSHA Q&A ?

1. When historically did the obligation to bring *bikkurim* begin?
2. *Bikkurim* are from which crops?
3. How does one designate *bikkurim*?
4. Who shakes the basket containing the *bikkurim*?
5. What does “*v’anita v’amarta*” mean?
6. Which Arami “tried to destroy my father?”
7. When during the year may *bikkurim* be brought? Until when are the special verses recited?
8. Someone declaring that he separated *terumah* and *ma’aser* says: “And I didn’t forget.” What didn’t he forget?
9. What were the Jewish People to do with the 12 stones on Mt. Eval?
10. Six tribes stood on Mt. Eval and six on Mt. Gerizim. Who and what were in the middle?
11. Who “causes the blind to go astray?”
12. How does one “strike another secretly?”
13. Eleven curses were spoken on Mt. Eval. What is the significance of this number?
14. Why are sheep called “*ashterot*”?
15. How is the manner of expressing the curses in *Parshat Bechukotai* more severe than in this week’s *parsha*?
16. What is meant by “the Jewish People will become a proverb?”
17. Why did all the curses expressed in 48:16-44 befall the Jewish People?
18. “In the morning you shall say, ‘If only it were (last) evening’ and in the evening you will say, ‘If only it were (this) morning.’” Why?
19. To which tribe did Moshe give the Torah first?
20. How long does it take to understand the depth of one’s teacher’s wisdom?

## PARSHA Q&A!

### Answers to This Week’s Questions!

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

1. 26:1 - After the Land was conquered and divided.
2. 26:2 - The seven species for which *Eretz Yisrael* is praised: Wheat, barley, grapes, olives, figs, dates, and pomagranets.
3. 26:2 - When he sees the first fruit ripen on a tree, he binds a piece of straw around it to mark it as *bikkurim*.
4. 26:4 - The *kohen* places his hands under the hands of the one bringing it, and they wave the basket together.
5. 26:5 - Speak loudly.
6. 26:5 - Lavan.
7. 26:11 - *Bikkurim* are brought from Shavuot until Channuka. The verses are recited only until Succot.
8. 26:13 - To bless Hashem.
9. 10. 27:2 - Build an altar.
10. 27:12 - *Kohanim*, *levi’im* and the Holy Ark.
11. 27:18 - Any person who intentionally gives bad advice.
12. 27:24 - By slandering him.
13. 27:24 - Each curse corresponds to one of the tribes, except for the tribe of Shimon. Since Moshe didn’t intend to bless the tribe of Shimon before his death, he did not want to curse them either.
14. 28:4 - Because they “enrich” (*m’ashiro*) their owners.
15. 28:23 - In *Bechukotai* the Torah speaks in the plural, whereas in this week’s *Parsha* the curses are mentioned in the singular.
16. 28:37 - Whenever someone wants to express the idea of extraordinary suffering, they will use the Jewish People as an example.
17. 28:47 - Because they did not serve Hashem with gladness when everything was abundant.
18. 28:67 - Because the curse of each hour will be greater than that of the previous hour.
19. 29:3 - To the Tribe of Levi.
20. 29:8 - 40 years.

## VEGETARIANISM

From: Joy

Dear Rabbi,

I'd like to know if and why vegetarianism may be a positive ethical choice for an observant Jew. Even if eating meat is permitted, could it be morally better to abstain?

Dear Joy,

G-d initially intended that people be vegetarians: "Behold, I have given you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the earth, and every tree that has seed-bearing fruit to you for food" (Gen. 1:29). Rashi (1040-1105), citing the Sages who noted, "[Initially] Adam was not permitted to eat meat", explains that G-d "did not permit Adam and his wife to kill a creature and to eat flesh. Only every green herb shall they all eat together".

Ramban (1195-1270) offers a reason for this initial dietary law: "Living creatures that possess a 'moving' soul have a certain spiritual superiority in which they are similar to [humans] who possess an 'intellect' soul — they pursue their welfare and food, and they flee from pain and death". According to Rabbi Joseph Albo (1380-1440), the prohibition to eat meat was because, "In the killing of animals there is cruelty, rage, and the accustoming of oneself to the bad habit of shedding innocent blood".

By the time of Noah, humanity had degenerated greatly: "And G-d saw the earth and behold it was corrupted, for all flesh had corrupted its way upon the earth" (Gen. 6:12). As a concession to people's weakness, G-d permitted meat: "Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you; as the green herb have I given you all" (Gen. 9:3). Rabbi Albo explains that eating meat was permitted to emphasize humans' higher moral level and degree of responsibility.

The permission given to Noah was not unconditional — eating blood was immediately prohibited: "But flesh with life in it, which is its blood, do not eat" (Gen. 9:4).

Additional laws also teach us sensitivity when taking life for food. Ritual slaughter with an absolutely smooth blade is designed to minimize pain. It is forbidden to kill a cow and her calf on the same day (Leviticus 22:28); likewise one must send away a mother bird before taking her young (Deut. 22:7). Indeed, our Sages taught that eating meat is justified only when we demonstrate respect for life, and pursue holy and spiritual lives — then it is likened to sacrifice on the altar.

This being said, there are many reasons offered for refraining from eating meat. They include health reasons, unacceptable living conditions for animals, alleviating world hunger, and preserving the environment and natural resources. While Judaism places great importance on health, kindness to animals, helping the needy and preserving the environment, it is beyond our scope to explore the effect of vegetarianism on these factors. If after thorough research one becomes convinced of these claims, any of them could be a valid reason to refrain from eating meat.

Another valid reason is if one feels refraining from meat helps one's own spiritual improvement either by increasing self-control or sensitivity, as expressed by Rabbi Solomon Efraim Luchitz (Prague, 1550-1619) author of *Kli Yakar*: "What was the necessity for the entire procedure of ritual slaughter? For the sake of self-discipline. It is far more appropriate for man not to eat meat". However, it's important to realize that refraining for humane reasons doesn't necessarily make one more kind. While the Nazis passed laws protecting animals, they were murdering millions of human beings.

Sources:

- *Judaism and Vegetarianism*, Richard H. Schwartz
- *Sanhedrin 59b*
- *Ramban, Genesis 1:29*
- *Rabbi Joseph Albo, Sefer Ha-Ikkarim, Vol. III, ch. 15*
- *Pesachim 59b, also see Tanya ch. 7*
- *Kli Yakar, quoted in The Commandments and Their Rationale, Abraham Chill, p. 400*

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## “HEY TAXI”

**Question:** I often have to hail a taxicab on a busy city street and once, while in a big rush, did so by signaling with an upraised hand to a driver headed in the opposite direction. He nodded his head in acknowledgment of my signal and began to circle around to pick me up. Another cabbie who observed this scene and was hungry for business pulled up to offer his services. Accepting his offer would perhaps have saved me a minute of waiting for the first cab and I was in a hurry. What's the right thing to do?

**Answer:** A cabbie once told me that taxi drivers have a special name for one of their own who tries to steal another driver's business but it is hardly worth repeating in such a dignified publication.

In regard to the legal and moral obligations when one enters into a transaction with another and then wishes to back out there are distinctions made in halacha. A formal *kinyan* grants the other party the right of legal enforcement, while only paying money in certain cases or merely giving a word in most cases raises only the moral ques-

tion of faithfulness.

When you hail a taxi it is a virtual promise to that cabbie that you are hiring his services and there is a moral obligation to remain faithful to that promise. Similar situations arise when people making a wedding make promises to a photographer or a band and then wish to back out and we can probably list dozens of other examples.

In our morning prayers we say that a man should be “G-d-fearing in public and in private... and speak truth in his heart”. The paragon of this last attribute, says the Talmud, was the Sage Rabbi Safra. He was once in the midst of reciting the *Shema* when a customer came to make a purchase. Since he could not interrupt his recital to acknowledge the buyer's first bid it was interpreted as a rejection of that bid and a higher offer was made. When Rabbi Safra concluded his prayers he insisted that the buyer pay only the lower bid because in his heart he had acquiesced to it.

If one must be true to his thoughts how much more so must he be true to his signal and word.

## PUBLIC DOMAIN

### Re: Uncovering the Issue (Ohrnet's Ask! feature)

I would like to respond to the woman who wore a wig to work and people thought she stopped covering her hair. It is true that, to non-Jews or non-observant Jews, even the most “fake” looking sheitel looks like hair. I myself had the same experience, when some of my closer co-workers (who knew my situation) told me that a woman in a different department said, “I can't believe she stopped covering her hair!” Even when they told her it was a wig, she didn't believe them (and this was a short, synthetic sheitel!).

The next time the woman visited my department to speak to someone else, I looked out of the corner of my eye to see when she was looking in my direction, then casually shifted the front of my sheitel a bit. My other co-workers later reported that she told them, “I couldn't believe that could be a wig, but now I see it is!”

• A. A.

### High Holidays and Ohrnet

To Ohrnet and Ohr.edu:

I am currently working on a High-Holy Day Companion for my shul. I think your site is amazing, and I wish to include a few articles that have been provided on your excellent website. Obviously full references and quotes are listed, together with the author's name and “Ohr Somayach”.

The High-Holy Day companion is for non-profit purposes, and (barring printing costs), will be made available for free. I realise that your material is under copyright, and if you so wish, I can remove the material.

My shul is Ohr Somayach Sandton (Gallo Manor), headed by Rabbi Ze'ev Kraines. Thanking you, for your time and effort

• D. F., Johannesburg, South Africa

*Ohr Somayach, Ohrnet and Ohr.edu are honored and pleased to be able to help out and have a share in your worthy effort. – Ed.*