

OHRNET

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PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

Devarim and Summer

Being Jewish and Proud Despite Everything Going on in the World

How can I alone carry your contentiousness...?" (1:12)

Once, I happened to be on a late-afternoon flight bound for JFK. The sun was dropping rapidly toward the sea and I hadn't yet prayed Mincha (the afternoon prayer service).

I pushed the panic button — I mean the call button — in my armrest. The stewardess came over, all smiles, and asked me what I needed. "Can you help me?" I asked, "I have to pray. Is there somewhere that I could stand for about ten minutes without getting in your way?"

Another stewardess joined her, and together they escorted me to the rear galley of the plane. "You'll be fine here, sir. Please don't rush! Take your time!" They almost bowed as they backed up a few paces. From their expressions I could see they were thinking, "This guy is praying to keep the plane in the sky. We better give him plenty of space!" They exited, pulling the curtain across the galley with quiet and reverent precision.

It always strikes me that in spite of the perceptible rise in anti-Semitism in recent days, I often find people who, far from being antagonistic to my Jewishness, are actively helpful and very respectful.

Of course, one explanation is that there are just some people in the world who are nicer than others, but maybe there's a deeper reason.

This week's Torah portion, Devarim, always occurs the week before Tisha B'Av, the saddest day in the Jewish Year. The Rambam lists five tragedies that occurred on Tisha B'Av: The spies returned with a negative report about the Land of Israel; the destruction of both Holy Temples; the destruction of Beitar with the massacre of thousands of Jews, and lastly, on the ninth of Av, Jerusalem was plowed over like a field by the Roman emperor, Turnus Rufus.

However, there's another Tisha B'Av that is closer to home: In the early hours of July 23rd, the first Jews from the Warsaw ghetto were loaded onto a train of sixty closed cars. The car doors were locked from the outside, and the air apertures barred with barbed wire. That was the 9th of Av 1942. The day the first killings started at Treblinka.

Historically, anti-Semites have accused the Jewish People of being filthy rich, filthy poor, grabbing capitalists, grabbing communists, the lackeys and the paymasters of the establishment and, at the same time, rootless cosmopolitans. In fact, the only thing about which all anti-Semites agree is that the world would be an infinitely better place without Jews. What exactly the Jew's crime is, however, remains endlessly elastic.

The granddaddy of all anti-Semites was Haman in the Purim story. As with all anti-Semitism, ostensibly, Haman's hatred of the Jewish People defies a logical explanation. Haman was one of the most powerful people in the greatest empire the world had yet seen. He had vast wealth, a large family and celebrity status – all the king's court bowed before him. Haman had it all. How could he then say, "All this is worth nothing to me whenever I see Mordechai the Jew sitting at the king's gate"? (Megillah 8:13) What bothered Haman so much about Mordechai? The question becomes even stronger when we remember that Haman made this remark after the death sentence against the Jewish People had already become an incontrovertible law. At that point, Mordechai was no more than a walking dead man. What possibly could have bothered Haman so much about Mordechai that Haman's entire world of fabulous riches and fame was as nothing to him?

Some eighty-five years ago, a young yeshiva student who had escaped from Nazi Europe with the Mir Yeshiva was walking through the streets of Shanghai. He was stopped in his tracks by hysterical ranting coming from a radio in an upstairs apartment. The voice sounded like a wild animal. And then he realized he could understand what was being said: The voice was shrieking in German, “Come, let us obliterate from the world that nation that will not let us live in peace!” A sea of voices swelled behind him chanting, “Seig Heil!”

The young man was shaken to the depths of his soul. He had never heard such a statement. He immediately ran to the mashgiach (spiritual mentor) of the Mir Yeshiva, Rabbi Yechezkel Levenstein, zatzal, and repeated what he had heard.

“For once,” responded the mashgiach, “for once, he’s telling the truth.”

The Jewish People will not let the world live in peace. The Jewish People proclaim to the world, by our very existence, that many things the world holds extremely dear are, in fact, worthless. When Haman looks at Mordechai, he sees someone to whom all his power and money and status is a joke — Mordechai negates his entire existence.

For this, the Jewish People have been hated throughout the generations.

But it was not always so.

When Hashem gave the Jewish People the Torah on Mount Sinai, the kings of the East and the West were aware that something had happened that could destabilize their power. They felt the shaking of the earth beneath their feet. They feared another global flood and so they enquired of the Gentile prophet Bilaam what was the cause of this disturbance of the natural order. Bilaam said that there would be no flood, nor would a deluge of fire envelop the world. Rather, the world was responding to the momentous event of the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai. To which they responded, “May Hashem bless His people with peace.”

The default reaction of the nations of the world is, “May Hashem bless His people with peace.” With the sin of the golden calf, however, the Jewish People rejected the Torah. Then the luchot (the two tablets of the Law) were broken with catastrophic results. Until this day, there is not a tragedy, not a disaster, which is not an installment payment for the sin of the golden calf.

When we lose our connection to Torah, the response of the nations is that of Haman. They see us no more than a choker around their necks, stifling their enjoyment of this world. They see in us no spirituality, no “chosen people.” They see us as a gang of killjoys, for we have lost the ability to be the light to the nations, which is Hashem’s role for His people.

However, when we try and exemplify our true heritage, there will be those amongst the nations who will still say, “May Hashem bless His people with peace!”

TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Devarim & Summer

Masechet Avodah Zarah 44-50

The Rabbi, a Philosopher and a Statue

Rabban Gamliel said, “We don’t say that the bathhouse was made for (the statue of) Aphrodites, but rather that Aphrodites was made for the bathhouse.”

This is the second of three answers that Rabban Gamliel offered when explaining why he was permitted to bathe in a bathhouse that was located in the courtyard of the idol Aphrodites (ancient Greek for “Venus,” a statue for those who worship the planet by that name, and the pagan deity for marriage — Tiferet Yisrael).

The mishna on our daf teaches: Prokalus (a pagan philosopher) asked Rabban Gamliel in Acco, who was bathing in a bathhouse of Aphrodites, “Why are you bathing here? Isn’t it written in your Torah: And nothing that is doomed to destruction shall cling to your hand? (Dev. 13:18, referring to the prohibition against receiving benefit from the spoils of an idolatrous city or from any idolatry).”

The mishna continues: Rabban Gamliel said, “One may not answer (with words of Torah) in a bathhouse” (since people are undressed, it would be a dishonor to the Torah to speak words of Torah there, even in a foreign language — Rashi).

And then the mishna states: “And when he went out, he said to him, “I did not come into its (the idol’s) boundary; it came into my boundary.” (The bathhouse was built first, for all to use, and only later was the statue put there. It doesn’t have the right to steal the use of the bathhouse from the public — Rashi).

The mishna records a second reason that Rabban Gamliel gave for permitting the benefit of bathing there, despite the idol’s presence, “We don’t say that the bathhouse was made as an adornment for Aphrodites; rather we say that the statue of Aphrodites is there as an adornment for the bathhouse” (therefore the idol is “serving the bathhouse,” and is secondary and inconsequential relative to it — Rashi).

The third reason Rabban Gamliel offers in the mishna: “Even if a person would give you much money, you would not go in front of your idol in an undressed and impure state, and empty out your bodily wastes in front of it. But this idol is placed at the opening to the sewage drain from the bathhouse, and all of the people are emptying their wastes into the conduit that drains onto the statue. The Torah prohibits benefit from an idol only if it is treated as a deity (‘You will utterly destroy...their gods, upon the lofty mountains and upon the hills, and under every lush tree.’ — Dev. 12:2); but there is no prohibition to receive benefit if the idol is not treated with the ‘dignity’ of a deity.”

The gemara raises a question regarding Rabban Gamliel’s initial reply: “One may not answer (with words of Torah) in a bathhouse.” Since halacha forbids speaking words of Torah there due to the undressed state of the people there, how could Rabban Gamliel provide this reply, which itself is a statement of Jewish Law, that it is forbidden to speak words of Torah in a bathhouse?

The gemara answers by citing a beraita with a different text than we see in our mishna: “When he went out, he replied, ‘One does not speak words of Torah in a bathhouse’.” What is meant by this answer? Tosefot notes the Rashbam’s explanation: “After he (Rabban Gamliel) went out of the bathhouse, he said, ‘The reason I didn’t answer your question until now, earlier on the inside, is because the halacha is that one may not speak words of Torah inside a bathhouse.’” Rabban Gamliel only then proceeded to give his three answers to the original question of why he was permitted to bathe there.

Tosefot mentions an alternate text of the beraita: “And when he went out, he replied, ‘One does not speak words of Torah in a bathhouse’.” This text implies

that this is the only answer he gave when he went out. HaRav Rabbeinu Elchanan says that this seems problematic, since the text of our mishna suggests that he answered the original question when he went out (in three ways!), and didn't just explain why he didn't answer it before going out. Tosefot quotes the "Ri", who clarifies what actually happened, based on a gemara in Masechet Shabbat (10a). There are three rooms in a bathhouse: an inner one where people are undressed, a middle one where people are both dressed and undressed, and an outer room where the people are dressed. In the inner room no words of Torah are allowed. In the middle room, although one is not permitted to speak words of Torah, it is more lenient than in the inner room, and, for example, "sheilat shalom" (a greeting) is permitted. In the outer room words of Torah are permitted. Initially, Rabban Gamliel was in the inner room and gave absolutely no reply. And when he went out to the middle room, where words of Torah are still forbidden, he nevertheless permitted himself to explain that that he wasn't yet allowed to answer the original question there. He was permitted to do so in order to maintain peace with the pagan and not potentially provoke his wrath. When he reached the other room, where Torah is permitted, Rabban Gamliel answered the original question in triplicate.

To summarize: Rashbam: On the inside he answered nothing; on the outside he answered everything and explained why he didn't answer on the inside. Ri: Inner room, nothing; middle room, explanation of why no answer yet; outer room, full answers.

The Tiferet Yisrael asks why Rabban Gamliel didn't simply tell the pagan, when he was still inside (either in the middle room or even in the inner room), that he would tell him later? This would not be speaking words of Torah and would at least be a response that should lessen the chance that the pagan would become angry with him in the meantime for not saying anything inside, something that could possibly lead to danger. After the Tiferet Yisrael first answers that this too might upset the powerful pagan, he suggests a perhaps more profound answer. Had Rabban Gamliel initially stalled by saying "Later," it may have appeared to the pagan that he did not have an answer to the question, and was stalling for time to think some more. For the Rabbi to be benefiting there without apparently knowing why it should be permitted might be construed as a chillul Hashem, and Rabban Gamliel therefore explained as much as he could as soon as he was permitted.

- Avoda Zara 44b

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Devarim

This Torah portion begins the last of the Five Books of The Torah, Sefer Devarim. This Book is also called Mishneh Torah, "Repetition of the Torah" (hence the Greek/English title "Deuteronomy"). Sefer Devarim relates what Moshe told the Jewish People during the last five weeks of his life, as they prepared to cross the Jordan River into the Land of Israel. Moshe reviews the mitzvahs with the people, stressing the change of lifestyle they are about to undergo — from the supernatural existence of the desert under Moshe's guidance, to the apparently natural life they will experience under Yehoshua's leadership in the Land.

The central theme this week is the sin of the spies, the meraglim. This Torah portion opens with Moshe alluding to the sins of the previous generation who died in the desert. He describes what would have happened if they had not sinned by sending spies into Eretz Yisrael. Hashem would have given them, without a fight, all the land from the Mediterranean to the Euphrates, including the lands of Ammon, Moav and Edom.

Moshe details the subtle sins that culminate in the sin of the spies, and reviews at length this incident and its results. The entire generation would die in the desert and Moshe would not enter Eretz Yisrael. He reminds them that their immediate reaction to Hashem's decree was to want to "go up and fight" to redress the sin. He recounts how they would not listen when he told them not to go, and that they no longer merited vanquishing their enemies miraculously. They had ignored him and suffered a massive defeat. They were not allowed to fight with the kingdoms of Esav, Moav or Ammon. These lands were not to be part of the map of Eretz Yisrael in the meantime. When the conquest of Canaan will begin with Sichon and Og, it will be via natural warfare.

Va'etchanan

Although Moshe is content that Yehoshua will lead the nation, Moshe nevertheless prays to enter the Land of Israel in order to fulfill its special mitzvahs. Hashem refuses. Moshe reminds the Jewish People of the gathering at Mount Sinai when they received the Torah, that they saw no visual representation of the Divine, but only the sound of words. Moshe impresses on the Jewish People that the Mount Sinai revelation took place before an entire nation, not to a select elite, and that only the Jewish People will ever claim that Hashem spoke to their entire nation. Moshe specifically enjoins the Bnei Yisrael to "pass over" the Mount Sinai event to their children throughout all generations.

Moshe predicts, accurately, that when the Jewish People dwell in Eretz Yisrael, they will sin and be scattered among all the nations. They will stay few in number — but will eventually return to Hashem.

Moshe designates three "refuge cities" to which an inadvertent killer may flee. Moshe repeats the Ten Commandments and then teaches the Shema, the central credo of Judaism, that there is only One G-d. Moshe warns the people not to succumb to materialism, forgetting their purpose as a spiritual nation. The Torah portion concludes with Moshe exhorting Bnei Yisrael not to intermarry when they enter Eretz Yisrael, as they cannot be a treasured and holy nation if they intermarry, and that in doing so they would become indistinguishable from the other nations.

Ekev

If Bnei Yisrael carefully observe even those "minor" mitzvahs that are usually "trampled" underfoot, Moshe promises them that they will be the most blessed of the nations on earth. Moshe tells Bnei Yisrael that they will conquer Eretz Canaan little by little — so that the land will not be overrun by wild animals in the hiatus before Bnei Yisrael are able to organize and settle the whole land. After again warning Bnei Yisrael to burn all carved idols of Canaanite gods, Moshe stresses that the Torah is indivisible and not open to partial observance.

Moshe describes the Land of Israel as a land of wheat, barley, grapes, figs, and pomegranates, a land of oil-yielding olives and date-honey. Moshe cautions Bnei

Yisrael not to become haughty and think that their success in Eretz Yisrael is a result of their own powers or vigor. Rather, it was Hashem who gave them wealth and success. Nor did Hashem drive out the Canaanites because of Bnei Yisrael's righteousness, but rather because of the sins of the Canaanites, for the road from Mount Sinai had been a catalogue of large and small sins and rebellions against Hashem and Moshe.

Moshe details the events after Hashem spoke the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai, culminating in his bringing down the second set of Tablets on Yom Kippur. Aharon's passing from this world is recorded, as is the elevation of the Levi'im to be Hashem's ministers. Moshe points out that the 70 souls who went down to Egypt have now become like the stars of heaven in abundance. After specifying the great virtues of the Land of Israel, Moshe says the second paragraph of the Shema, conceptualizing the blessings that accompany keeping mitzvahs, and the curses that result from non-observance.

Re'eh

Moshe presents to the nation the blessing of a spiritually oriented life, and the curse of becoming disconnected from Hashem. When the nation enters Eretz Yisrael, they must burn down any trees that had been used for idol-worship, and destroy all idolatrous statues. Hashem will choose only one place where the Divine Presence will dwell. Offerings may be brought only there, but not to a private altar.

Moshe repeatedly warns against eating animal blood. In the desert, all meat was slaughtered in the Mishkan, but in Eretz Yisrael meat may be shechted anywhere. Moshe lists the categories of foods that may be eaten only in Jerusalem. He warns the nation against copying the ways of the other nations. Since the Torah is complete and perfect, nothing may be added to or subtracted from it. If a so-called prophet tells the people to permanently abandon a Torah law or indulge in idol worship, he is to be put to death. One who entices others to worship idols is to be put to death. A city of idolatry must be razed. It is prohibited to show excessive signs of mourning, such as marking the skin or making a bald spot.

Moshe reiterates the classifications of kosher and non-kosher food and the prohibition of cooking meat and milk. Produce of the second tithe must be eaten in Jerusalem, and if the amount is too large to carry, it may be exchanged for money with which food is bought in Jerusalem and eaten there. In certain years this tithe is given to the poor. Bnei Yisrael are instructed to always be open-hearted, and in the seventh year any loans must be discounted, and then Hashem will bless the person in all ways. A Jewish bondsman is released after six years, and must be sent away with generous provisions. If he refuses to leave, his ear is pierced with an awl at the door post and he remains a bondsman until the Jubilee Year. This Torah portion concludes with a description of the three pilgrimage festivals: Pesach, Shavuot and Succot.

Shoftim

Moshe tells Bnei Yisrael to appoint judges and officers in their cities. A bribe of even an insignificant sum is forbidden. Trees are not to be planted near Hashem's altar, as was the way of idolaters. Blemishes in animals designated for offerings and other points of disqualification are listed. The Great Sanhedrin is to make binding decisions on new situations, according to Torah criteria, to prevent the fragmentation of the Torah. A very learned scholar who refuses to accept the halachic decisions of the Sanhedrin incurs the death penalty. A Jewish king may have possessions and symbols of power only as commensurate with the honor of his office, but not for self-aggrandizement. He is to write for himself two Sifrei Torah — one to be kept with him wherever he goes, so that he doesn't become haughty. Neither the Kohanim nor the Levi'im are to inherit land in the Land of Israel. Rather, they are to be supported by the community, by a system of tithes.

All divination is prohibited. Hashem promises the Jewish People that He will send them prophets to guide them, and Moshe explains how a true prophet may be distinguished from a false one. Cities of refuge are to be provided an accidental killer to escape the blood-avenger from the deceased's family. However, someone who kills with malice is to be handed over to the blood-avenger. Moshe cautions Bnei Yisrael not to move boundary markers to increase their property. Two witnesses who conspire to frame a third party are to be punished with the very same punishment that they conspired to bring upon the innocent party.

A kohen is to be anointed specifically for when Israel goes to war, to instill the nation's trust in Hashem. Among those disqualified from going to war is anyone who has built a new house but not lived in it yet, or anyone who is fearful or fainthearted. An enemy must be given the chance to make peace, but if they refuse, all the males are to be killed. Fruit trees are to be preserved and not cut down during the siege. If a corpse is found between cities, the elders of the nearest city must take a heifer, slaughter it, and wash their hands over it, saying that they are not guilty of the death.

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INSIGHTS INTO HALACHA

Rabbi Yehuda Spitz

5785 – The Rarest Year of Them All

Part XV: Havdalah on Sunday Night

Tisha B'Av on Sunday

Previous articles in this series discussed several ramifications of Tisha B'Av occurring on Motza'ei Shabbos this year. Another unique aspect with a Sunday Tisha B'Av, that starts as Shabbos Chazon ends, along with our not-too-common fleishig Erev Tisha B'Av Seudah Hamafsekes a.k.a. Seudah Shlishis [see Gemara Taanis (29b) – that for this Seudah Hamfsekes, as it is on Shabbos, one may partake in a fancy seudah, “Afilu k'seudas Shlomo b'shaato” – as great as one King Solomon himself would have hosted] and the fast commencing, is that Havdalah is not recited on Motza'ei Shabbos. Rather, most of this Havdalah actually gets pushed off until Sunday night, with small parts of it performed on Motza'ei Shabbos.

Half-Havdalah?

In Maariv in shul on Motza'ei Shabbos-Tisha B'Av, we recite “Attah Chonantanu” to allow the performing of melacha (or by simply saying “Hamavdil Bein Kodesh L'Chol”) once it is Tzeis Hakoachavim at the conclusion of Shabbos. There is no bracha of Besamim at all as that is considered hana'ah

(benefit or pleasure), which we minimize on Tisha B'Av. This bracha is also not recited on Motzai Tzom (Sunday night), as at that point it is no longer directly after Shabbos.

Regarding the bracha of Borei Me'orei Ha'Aish on the flame this Motzai Shabbos/Tisha B'Av, that is generally recited in shul (or at home) after Maariv as a stand-alone bracha.

On Sunday night Motza'ei Tisha B'Av, when the fast is over, the rest of Havdalah is recited before breaking the fast. Yet, this Havdalah we start from the bracha on the Kos and it only consists of that bracha and the bracha of "Hamavdil Bein Kodesh L'Chol."

But there is still an unanswered question: What should be the contents of the Kos on which we are making this Motza'ei Tisha B'Av Havdalah? Generally speaking, many of the Nine Days' restrictions are still in effect through the next day until at least midday (Chatzos Hayom), including those of eating meat and drinking wine. Hence, those restrictions still apply until Monday morning. However, Havdalah still needs to be recited when the fast ends. So, what do we do?

Wine or Beer?

In order to answer this question, a bit of background is in order. There is a famous three-way dispute about how to properly perform Havdalah on the Motza'ei Shabbos of the Nine Days (generally Motza'ei Shabbos Chazon), when wine's consumption would already be prohibited.

The first approach to this is the Shulchan Aruch's, ruling that whoever makes the Havdalah should just drink the wine himself, as in his opinion, the Nine Days' restrictions were never intended to negate a Mitzvah. The Rema, on the other hand, maintains that it is preferable to find a child that has reached the age of Chinuch, and let him drink the Havdalah wine. That way, the one who actually makes the Havdalah does not have to transgress this prohibition. He concludes however, that mei'ikar hadin the Shulchan Aruch is correct, and if one cannot find a child to drink the wine, then an adult may do so.

Although many Ashkenazic authorities follow the Rema on this, there is a third opinion, that of the Aruch Hashulchan. He maintained that the best solution to

our concern is to make Havdalah on Motza'ei Shabbos Chazon using beer instead of wine. Since beer is cited throughout the ages as a 'Chamar Medina,' a 'drink of the land' on which Havdalah is permitted to be made, it would therefore be the simplest resolution.

How to Make Havdalah

Although it would seem that the same debate should apply when Tisha B'Av falls out on Motza'ei Shabbos, nevertheless, it seems that this is actually dependent on whether Motza'ei Tisha B'Av is still considered part of the Nine Days. Although we know that the Nine Days' restrictions continue until at least midday (Chatzos) of the tenth of Av, with some being stringent the whole next day for some of the restrictions, there is an interesting machlokes between the Mishnah Berurah and Aruch Hashulchan whether the Sunday night-Motza'ei Tisha B'Av Havdalah is more relaxed vis-à-vis drinking wine for Havdalah.

The Mishnah Berurah concludes that Motza'ei Tisha B'Av is not as restrictive as the rest of the Nine Days, and one may therefore personally drink from the Havdalah wine without necessitating finding a child to drink. Accordingly, the bracha of 'Borei Pri Hagafen' would be the bracha of choice on the Kos for this Sunday night Havdalah.

Yet, the Aruch Hashulchan disagrees, maintaining that the Nine Days restrictions are still fully in effect until the following day, and it is therefore preferable to make Havdalah on 'Shaar Mashkin' (Chamar Medina) and not wine. A third opinion, that of the Elyah Rabba and Pri Megadim, is that one may use wine, but should give it to a child to drink, similar to the Rema's ruling on a standard Motza'ei Shabbos Chazon, due to Nine Days' restrictions.

Most contemporary authorities seem to follow the Mishnah Berurah's ruling that one may make this Havdalah with wine and personally drink it. Certainly, those who follow the Shulchan Aruch's ruling of drinking the Havdalah wine during the Nine Days would do so here as well, as Havdalah is the same 'Makom Mitzva' that the Shulchan Aruch ruled is an exception to the Nine Days' restrictions. And those with reservations as to beer being considered 'Chamar Medina' nowadays, would still have the same concerns this week as well.

As with all cases in halacha, one should ascertain from a knowledgeable rabbinic authority which opinion he should personally follow.

Although Tisha B'Av being observed on Sunday occurs not infrequently (as when 9 Av falls out on Shabbos, the fast day's observance is also pushed off to Sunday), nonetheless, in this author's mind, it is quite fascinating that this remarkable coincidence occurs in our exceptional year.

Our fascinating journey detailing the many remarkable facets of our rare year will indeed be continued...

Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch famously wrote that “the Jew's catechism is his calendar.” It is this author's wish that by showcasing the uniqueness of our calendar year and its rare minhagim, this article will help raise appreciation of them and our fascinating calendrical customs.

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Q & A - Devarim

Questions

1. How do we see from the beginning of *Parshat Devarim* that Moshe was concerned for the Jewish People's honor?
2. How much time elapsed between leaving Mt. Sinai and sending the spies?
3. Moshe rebuked the Jewish People shortly before his death. From whom did he learn this?
4. Why did Moshe wait until he had smitten the Amorite kings before rebuking the Jewish People?
5. What were some of the achievements that resulted from the Jewish People "dwelling" at Mt. Sinai?
6. Why does the Torah single out the names of the *avot* in connection with the giving of the Land?
7. What did Moshe convey to the Jewish People by saying: "You today are like the stars of the Heavens"?
8. "*Apikorsim*" (those who denigrate Talmud scholars) observed Moshe's every move in order to accuse him. What did they observe, and what did they accuse him of?
9. Moshe was looking for several qualities in the judges he chose. Which quality couldn't he find?
10. Moshe told the judges, "The case that is too hard for you, bring it to me." How was he punished for this statement?
11. Why did Moshe describe the desert as great and frightful?
12. Which tribe was not represented among the spies?
13. Which city did Calev inherit?
14. How many kingdoms was Avraham promised? How many were conquered by Yehoshua?
15. Why were the Jewish People forbidden to provoke Ammon?
16. Why were the Jewish People not permitted to conquer the Philistines?
17. How did Hashem instill the dread of the Jewish People into the nations of the world?
18. Why did Moshe fear Og?
19. Who was instrumental in destroying the Refaim?
20. What was the advantage of Reuven and Gad leading the way into battle?

Answers

1. 1:1 Moshe mentions only the names of the places where the Jewish People sinned, but does not mention the sins themselves.
2. 1:2 - 40 days.
3. 1:3 - From Yaakov, who rebuked his sons shortly before his death.
4. 1:4 So that no one could say, "What right has he to rebuke us; has he brought us into any part of the Land as he promised?"
5. 1:6 - They received the Torah, built the mishkan and all its vessels, appointed a Sanhedrin, and appointed officers.
6. 1:8 - Each of the avot possessed sufficient merit for the Jewish People to inherit the Land.
7. 1:10 - They are an eternal people, just as the sun, moon and stars are eternal.
8. 1:13 They observed the time he left home in the morning. If Moshe left early, they accused him of having family problems (which drove him from his home). If he left late, they accused him of staying home in order to plot evil against them.
9. 1:15 - Men of understanding.
10. 1:17 - When the daughters of Tzelofchad asked him a halachic question, the law was concealed from him.
11. 1:19 - Because the Jewish People saw huge, frightening snakes and scorpions in the desert.
12. 1:23 - Levi.
13. 1:36 - Hebron.
14. 2:5 - Avraham was promised the land of ten kingdoms. Yehoshua conquered seven. The lands of Moav, Ammon and Esav will be received in the time of the mashiach.
15. 2:9 - This was a reward for Lot's younger daughter, the mother of Ammon, for concealing her father's improper conduct.
16. 2:23 - Because Avraham had made a peace treaty with Avimelech, King of the Philistines.
17. 2:25 - During the battle against Og, the sun stood still for the sake of the Jewish People, and the whole world saw this.
18. 3:2 - Og possessed merit for having once helped Avraham.
19. 3:11 - Amrafel.
20. 3:18 - They were mighty men, and the enemy would succumb to them.

Q & A – Va'etchanan

Questions

1. "And I prayed to Hashem at that time." Why "at that time"?
2. What characteristic trait is represented by Hashem's "strong hand"?
3. What is *ha'levanon*?
4. What did Hashem tell Yehoshua after the battle of Ai?
5. What will happen if the Jewish People fail to keep the *mitzvot* properly?
6. How did the decree that Moshe not enter the Land affect him even in death?
7. What is hinted by the word *v'noshantem*?
8. Why were the Jewish People exiled two years earlier than indicated by Moshe's prophecy?
9. "You'll serve man-made gods." Is this literal?
10. Why is east called *mizrach*?
11. "Keep the Shabbat day *as I have commanded you*." When had Hashem previously commanded us to keep Shabbat?
12. Where did the Jewish People first receive the command to honor parents?
13. What is meant by "Hashem, our G-d, Hashem is One"?
14. What are two meanings of loving Hashem "with all your might"?
15. How well-versed must one be in Torah?
16. Where does the word *totafot* come from?
17. Who is fit to swear in Hashem's name?
18. What does it mean that the Jews are the "smallest nation"?
19. When someone serves Hashem with love, how many generations receive reward?
20. Why are evil-doers rewarded in this world?

Answers

1. 3:23 - Defeating Sichon and Og, whose lands were part of Eretz Canaan, Moshe thought perhaps Hashem had annulled the vow against his entering the Land.
2. 3:24 - His willingness to forgive.
3. 3:25 - Ha'levanon means the Beit Hamikdash, which makes "white" (lavan), i.e., atones for the Jewish People.
4. 3:28 - Yehoshua must lead the army into battle.
5. 4:9 - The non-Jewish world will regard them as foolish.
6. 4:22 - Even his remains weren't buried in the Land.
7. 4:25 - The gematria of v'noshantem, 852, hints at the number of years until the first exile.
8. 4:25 - So that the rest of the prophecy "that you shall utterly perish" would not be fulfilled.
9. 4:28 - No. It means that you will serve others who serve idols.
10. 4:41 - It is the direction from which the sun shines (mizrach means shining).
11. 5:13 - Before Matan Torah, at Marah. (Shmot 15:25)
12. 5:16 - At Marah. (Shmot 15:25).
13. 6:4 - Hashem, who is now our G-d, but not [accepted as] G-d of the other nations, will eventually be [accepted as] the one and only G-d.
14. 6:5 - 1) With everything you own. 2) Whether Hashem treats you with kindness or harshness.
15. 6:7 - If asked a Torah question, one should be able to reply quickly and clearly.
16. 6:8 - Tot means two in Caspi. Fot means two in Afriki. Together they allude to the four sections of tefillin.
17. 6:13 - One who serves Hashem and reveres His name.
18. 7:7 - B'nei Yisrael are the humblest nation.
19. 7:9 - 2,000.
20. 7:10 - So that they get no reward in the next world.

Questions

1. What must the Jewish People do to ensure that Hashem will fulfill His promise to do good for us?
2. What were the:
 - a. wonders
 - b. strong hand
 - c. outstretched arm that the Jewish People saw in Egypt?
3. When a group performs a mitzvah, whose name is attached to the mitzvah?
4. How did the Jewish People do their laundry in the midbar?
5. How did the Jewish People obtain clothing for their growing children in the midbar?
6. How many days did Moshe spend on Mount Sinai altogether?
7. On what day did Moshe come down from Mount Sinai having received complete forgiveness for the Jewish People?
8. How was Aharon punished for his role in the golden calf?
9. Who made the ark in which Moshe placed the second set of tablets? What special function did it later serve?
10. Which sin of the Jewish People was prompted by the death of Aharon?
11. Why were the levi'im chosen by Hashem?
12. Why do the levi'im have no portion in the Land?
13. All aspects of man's life are in Hashem's "hands" except one. What is this?
14. What is the "added benefit" of observing the mitzvot?
15. What is meant by circumcising one's heart?
16. What are the sources of water for the fields of Egypt and Eretz Yisrael?
17. What path does the Torah prescribe for gaining new knowledge?
18. Which activity is "serving Hashem with the heart"?
19. When the Jewish People sin, why are they considered worse than the generation of the flood?
20. How does one "cleave to Hashem"?

Answers

1. 7:12 - Guard even the "light" commandments.
2. 7:19 -
 - a) Plagues;
 - b) Pestilence;
 - c) Slaying of the firstborn.
3. 8:1 - The person who finishes it.
4. 8:4 - The *ananei kavod* (clouds of glory) cleaned and bleached their clothes.
5. 8:4 - As their children grew, their clothing grew with them.
6. 9:18 - 120 days.
7. 9:18 - The tenth of Tishrei, Yom Kippur.
8. 9:20 - His two sons died.
9. 10:1 - Moshe. This ark would accompany the Jewish People into battle.
10. 10:6-7 - When Aharon died the *ananei kavod departed* causing many Jews to fear war with the King of Arad and to retreat toward Egypt.
11. 10:8 - Because they did not participate in the sin of the golden calf.
12. 10:9 - Since they served in the Temple, they were not free to work the land.
13. 10:12 - Fear of Heaven, which is dependent upon the person.
14. 10:13 - There is reward.
15. 10:16 - To remove those things that block the words of Torah from entering.
16. 11:10 - Egypt is irrigated by manually carrying water up from the Nile. *Eretz Yisrael* is supplied by rainwater requiring no work on the part of its inhabitants.
17. 11:13 - By repeatedly reviewing what one knows, one more easily acquires new knowledge.
18. 11:13 - Prayer.
19. 11:17 - Because the generation of the flood had no one from whom to learn.
20. 11:22 - Attaching oneself to Torah scholars.

Q & A – Re'eh

Questions

1. What were the sites designated for the "blessings and the curses" to be pronounced by the people?
2. On what condition will Bnei Yisrael receive the blessings from Hashem?
3. Why does the Torah use idolatry as an example when describing one who strays from the path that Hashem commanded?
4. What was to be the sign for the Jewish People that they would inherit the Land?
5. During the 14 years of the conquest and division of the Land, what types of offerings were permitted on private altars?
6. What must one do with consecrated animals that develop a blemish?
7. In what ways does a consecrated animal that develops a blemish retain a degree of kedusha (holiness) even after it has been redeemed?
8. Why was the tribe of Yehuda not permitted to conquer Jerusalem?
9. In consecutive verses, the Torah repeats the prohibition against eating blood. What two types of blood are referred to?
10. Why were the Jewish People allowed to see the extermination of the Canaanites?
11. What forms of idol worship are punishable by death?
12. If a person performs miracles in the name of Hashem and then says that the laws of the Torah have been revised, what is done to this person?
13. The Torah says, "To Him (Hashem) you shall cleave." How does one fulfill this command?
14. The trial of a person accused of encouraging others to worship idols differs from the trial of other capital cases. How?
15. Who has the primary responsibility of inflicting the punishment on one who tried to entice others to worship idols?
16. What is the "source" of the Jewish People being an *am kadosh* (holy nation)?
17. How should the Jewish People maintain themselves as an *am kadosh*?
18. What is the order of priority regarding to whom one should give charity?
19. What mitzvah recalls the Exodus from Egypt?
20. Which four individuals are under Hashem's "special protection"?

Answers

1. 11:26 - Mt. Gerizim and Mt. Eval, respectively.
2. 11:27 - On condition that they listen to Hashem's commandments.
3. 11:28 - Because those who worship idols are considered as if they have strayed from the entire Torah.
4. 11:31 - The miracles that would occur while crossing the Jordan River.
5. 12:8 - Vow offerings or free-will offerings.
6. 12:15 - They must be redeemed and may then be eaten.
7. 12:15 - Eating it is permitted, but use of its milk or fleece is forbidden.
8. 12:17 - When Avraham bought ma'arat hamachpelah, he made a covenant of peace with the Hittites who sold it. His descendants honored this pact regarding the Hittite descendants in Jerusalem.
9. 12:24-25 - Blood that seeps slowly from the incision as soon as the cut is made and again after it no longer gushes. Blood absorbed into the limbs of the animal.
10. 12:30 - To learn not to follow in their depraved ways.
11. 12:30 - Slaughtering or burning a sacrifice on an altar, pouring libations, prostrating oneself, and any normal manner of worshipping that idol.
12. 13:2-6 - He is put to death.
13. 13:5 - One should emulate Hashem's actions by performing good deeds, assisting in burying the dead and visiting the sick.
14. 13:10 - If he was acquitted and new information of a condemning nature arises, he is retried. If he was judged guilty, he is not returned to court to plead in his favor.
15. 13:10 - The person whom the guilty one attempted to entice.
16. 14:2 - The kedusha is inherited from the avot.
17. 14:21 - By avoiding excesses even in permitted matters.
18. 15:7 - The most needy, a brother from one's father, a brother from one's mother, the poor of one's city, the poor of another city.
19. 16:3 - Eating the korban pesach and the matzah on the night of Pesach.
20. 16:10 - A levi, convert, orphan and widow.

Q & A – Shoftim

Questions

1. What is the role of shoftim? What is the role of shotrim?
2. What qualifications should one look for when appointing a judge?
3. May a judge accept a bribe if only for the purpose of judging fairly?
4. What is the source for the concept "seek out a good beit din"?
5. Although the avot built matzevot, the Torah later forbade doing so. Why?
6. "You will come to...the judge who will be in those days." It's impossible to visit a judge living at a different time, so why must the Torah add these apparently extra words?
7. What does Hashem promise a king who doesn't amass much gold, doesn't raise many horses and doesn't marry many wives?
8. How many Torah scrolls must the king have?
9. How was King Shaul punished for disobeying a minor command of the Prophet Shmuel?
10. Certain kosher animals are not included in the law of "chazeh, shok and keiva." Which ones?
11. Families of kohanim served in the Beit Hamikdash on a rotational basis. When was this rotation system established?
12. Which three categories of false prophets are executed?
13. What does it mean to "prepare the way" to the cities of refuge?
14. How many witnesses are meant when the Torah writes the word eid (witness)?
15. "Through the mouth of two witnesses" What types of testimony does this verse invalidate?
16. If witnesses in a capital case are proven to be *zomemim* (false-conspirators) before their intended victim is executed, how are they punished?
17. Why does the section about going to war follow the laws governing witnesses?
18. The Jewish army is warned of four "scare-tactics" the enemy might employ. What are they?
19. When a murder victim is found in a field, who determines which city is closest?
20. What happens if the murderer is found after the calf's neck was broken?

Questions

1. 16:18 - Shoftim are judges who pronounce judgment. Shotrim are officers who enforce it.
2. 16:18 - That he is expert in the law and that he is righteous.
3. 16:19 - No, because it will sway his judgment.
4. 16:20 - "Tzedek tzedek tirdof. "
5. 16:22 - Because the Canaanites used them for idolatry.
6. 17:9 - To teach that although a judge may not be as eminent as judges of previous generations, we must obey him nevertheless.
7. 17:18 - That his kingdom will endure.
8. 17:18 - Two. One stays in his treasury and one he keeps with him.
9. 17:20 - He lost his kingship.
10. 18:3 - Chayot (non-domestic-type animals).
11. 18:8 - During the time of David and Shmuel.
12. 18:20 - One who prophesies something he didn't hear, something told to another prophet, or prophecies in the name of an idol.
13. 19:3 - To post direction signs saying "refuge" at the crossroads.
14. 19:15 - Two, unless otherwise specified.
15. 19:15 - Written testimony and testimony translated from a language which the judges don't understand.
16. 19:19 - They are put to death.
17. 20:1 - To teach that if the Jewish People execute fair judgment they will be victorious in war.
18. 20:3 -
 - a) Changing their shields
 - b) Making their horses stomp and whinny
 - c) Shouting
 - d) Blowing horns.
19. 21:2 - The Sanhedrin.
20. 21:9 - He is tried and, if found guilty, executed.

COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

KRIAT SHEMA AL HAMITAH (PART 22)

“The amount of sleep required by the average person is five minutes more.”

Wilson Mizener – American Playwright

Kriat Shema al Hamitah continues: “Behold, the Guardian of Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps.” (Tehillim 121:4)

The acclaimed American author, F. Scott Fitzgerald (1896-1940) wrote, “The worst thing in the world is to try to sleep and not to.”

I am not sure that the “worst thing” is accurate but there are definitely many things that can keep a person up at night. One of the talmidim of the legendary Ponovezh Yeshiva in Bene Berak noticed that after the revered Rosh Yeshivah, Rabbi Elazar Menachem Man Shach (1899-2001), turned off the lights for the night he would turn them back on after about half an hour and then turn them off a few minutes later. This went on throughout the night. The talmid assumed that it was a one-time occurrence but later he realized that almost every night Rabbi Shach’s lights were going on and off. The talmid, consumed with curiosity, decided to try and find out what was happening. He was determined to work out what it was that was causing the Rosh Yeshivah to continuously keep waking up throughout the night. So, one night he decided that he would hide himself outside the window that looked into the room where Rabbi Shach slept and each time that the lights went back on he would try to uncover the mystery. What he discovered was entirely unexpected. Each time the same thing repeated itself, Rabbi Shach would suddenly get up from his sleep and run to look into a sefer, and then return again to his bed. He was so immersed in his learning that even in his sleep his mind was at work!

We all have our reasons for not sleeping well at times. But, Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch, on explaining our verse, writes that knowing that Hashem never sleeps and He is constantly guarding over His chosen nation should soothe a person’s worries and let them sleep peacefully.

However, the Midrash Sifri points out that the verse in Sefer Iyov (12:10) reads, “In whose hand is the soul of every living thing and the breath of mankind?” The inference of the verse is that Hashem is constantly guarding over everyone and He

is not just the “Guardian of Israel.” The Midrash explains that Hashem’s focus is to sustain and guard us, but in order to do so He must watch over the other nations of the world to ensure that they do not fulfil their evil plans to destroy us. Consequently, Hashem’s supervision of the other nations is not the same as is His supervision over us.

Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto, universally known as the Ramchal, an acronym of his name, writes at great length in his seminal work, *Da’at Tevunot*, about how Hashem runs His world using different levels of Divine Providence. He describes how the level of Divine Providence for the Jewish Nation is not comparable to that for the other nations because ours is individualized whereas the other nations are treated to a more generalized approach.

The Malbim explains that the Hebrew word ‘yanum’ [slumber] refers to a very light sleep whereas the word ‘yishan’ [sleep] refers to deep sleep. Hashem, the “Guardian of Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps”. Our verse is teaching us that Hashem watches over us at all times. Never resting and never moving His focus from us.

And what could be more comforting than knowing that.

To be continued...

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

Synonyms in the Hebrew Language

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

Devarim: The Sharp River

Although the Book of Numbers delineates the Holy Land’s eastern border as following the Jordan River (Num. 34:12), the Book of Deuteronomy envisions a Greater Israel that stretches in the east all the way to the Euphrates River — “until the Great River, the River Euphrates” (Deut. 1:7). The Book of Exodus likewise implies this more expansive vision, stating that the land that the Jews are destined to conquer should reach “until the river” (Ex. 23:31), which Targum Onkelos and Rashi identify as referring to the Euphrates. As is well-known, the center of the Ancient World and the so-called “cradle of civilization” was Mesopotamia, a

Greek term that literally means “the country between two rivers” — the land between the Euphrates and the Tigris. The Tigris River is known in Biblical Hebrew as Chidekel, but in later Hebrew is referred to as Diglat. In this essay, we explore these two synonyms for the mighty river that defines the eastern border of Mesopotamia, looking at their etymological bases and seeing how the terms came into being.

Let’s talk about the hydronym (that is, a technical onomastic term for the name of a body of water, like a river) Chidekel. The river-name Chidekel (sometimes rendered Hiddekel in English) appears twice in the Bible: The first time is in the Creation Narrative, wherein the Bible reports that four rivers exited from Eden, the third of which was named Chidekel — that is, the river east of Assyria (Gen. 2:14). The other time this river appears is in the Book of Daniel, as Daniel relates that one of the visions he saw was presented to him "when I was next to the Great River that is Chidekel" (Dan. 10:4). In that second verse, the name of the river is actually vocalized slightly differently as Chidakel, but that results from a grammatical consideration pertaining to segolite words that appear at the end of a verse, whose cantillation calls for morphing the segol into a kamatz.

Rabbi Aharon Marcus (Keset HaSofer to Gen. 2:11 and Barzilai p. 127) contends that the name Chidekel is an ancient Hebrew quadriliteral, even though, in general, Hebrew words only use roots comprised of three letters or less. He further conjectures that the root of Chidekel is actually CHET-DALET-KUF, with the additional LAMMED at the end as radical to the core root. He lists other examples of four-letter roots in Hebrew that are really comprised of a three-letter core and a final LAMMED, including barzel (“iron”), karsul (“ankle”), chanamal (“grasshoppers/hail”), arafel (“darkness”), carmel (“orchard/fresh ears of grain”), chargol (“grasshopper”), and givol (“bud”). His exact way of explaining the meaning of the trilateral CHET-DALET-KUF and how it relates to the Tigris River is not so clear.

That said, the rabbis use different hydronyms in reference to the Tigris River: Diglat. For instance, Targum Onkelos (to Gen. 2:14) renders the Biblical Hebrew word Chidekel as Diglat. This Aramaic name Diglat also appears in Targum to Nah. 1:12 (even though Chidekel does not appear in the Bible’s original Hebrew text there). Likewise, in the various places where the Talmud refer to the Tigris River, it is always known as the Diglat: The Talmud (Bava Kamma 30a) relates that pious men would make sure to dispose of glass shards and thorns in a way that they do not post a public hazard. In that context, it is related that Rava used to throw such things into the Diglat River. When Rava prayed for rain, the rain fell

in such abundance that the water-gutters of Mechoza flooded all the way to the Diglat River (Taanit 24b). There are several other instances in which the Talmud mentions the river Diglat in conjunction with the Amoraic sage Rava (Eruvin 57b, Moed Katan 25b, Yevamot 121a). The Talmud (Kiddushin 71b) also mentions the river Diglat when delineating the borders of Babylonia for the purposes of yuchasin (“genealogical lineage”) and again when discussing the laws of erubin (Eruvin 22b).

In case it is not yet clear that the Aramaic/Rabbinic Hebrew term Diglat refers to the same river as the Biblical Hebrew Chidekel, Rashi in his comments to the Talmud (to Taanit 24b, Moed Katan 25b, Bava Kamma 30a) makes that point explicit, writing that the Diglat River referred to in the Talmud is the same thing as the Chidekel River mentioned in the Bible.

The Talmud (Brachot 59b) also states that upon seeing certain parts of the river Diglat, one should recite the blessing “Blessing... who makes ‘bereishit’.” This is because only certain places along the river’s current are part of its original path from when Hashem first created the world, while other parts of the river are man-made diversion from the river’s original path. Immediately after stating this Halacha, the Talmud then asks about the Biblical hydronym Chidekel and expounds on that name as a portmanteau of the words chad (“sharp/pointy”) and kal (“light/swift”). Afterwards, the Talmud records that Rava (who obviously had some special connection to this river) commented that the people of Mechoza were especially “sharp” because they drink from the waters of the Diglat.

Interestingly, the Talmud’s exegetical explanation of the name Chidekel is also cited by Josephus (Antiquities of the Jews, Book 1 ch. 1:3), who writes that the river-name Tigris/Diglat signifies what is “swift, with narrowness.” This exegesis also appears in the Midrash (Bereishit Rabbah §16:4), which discusses how the Four Rivers that flow from Eden allude to the Four Kingdoms that will rule over the Jewish People before the End of Days. In that context, the Midrash states that Chidekel alludes to the Greeks, whose decrees against the Jewish People were said to be especially “swift and sharp.” [By the way, Jewish philosophers like Rabbi Levi ben Avraham and Rabbi Nissim of Marseilles connect the Four Rivers to the four elements of Hellenistic natural science (fire, water, earth, and air), saying that the Chidekel alludes specifically to the element of water.]

Although the Talmud seems to present its exegesis as a seemingly straightforward expounding of the Biblical name Chidekel, Rabbi Naftali HaKohen Katz (author of Semichat Chachamim) in his work Kedushah U’Brachah (to Brachot 59b)

explains that the Talmud actually meant to answer the following unspoken question: Why is it that the popular, in-use geographical placenames were used in the Creation narrative for places like Kush and Ashur, yet when it comes to the Tigris River, the Bible uses an obscure term (Chidekel) instead of the more popular term (Diglat)? To this, the Talmud answers that the Bible specifically used the name Chidekel as an allusion to the features of that river.

Rabbi Baruch HaLevi Epstein (Torah Temimah to Gen. 2:14) explains that the basis for the Talmud's exegesis is the fact that Chidekel is a quadrilateral word (meaning, its root seems to be comprised of four letters), which are rare in Hebrew. Because of that, the rabbis sought to explain the word as a portmanteau of two biliteral words, rather than as a single four-letter word. Either way, he writes that the Talmud means that the waters from the Tigris River have a "sharp" taste to them, and they are especially "light" in the sense that they are not hard on the body and they actually weigh less than water from other places (perhaps there are less minerals in its waters?).

Rabbi Refael Mamo (in Shevo V'Achlamah to Brachot 59b) explains that Chidekel and Diglat are related to the word dekel ("palm tree"), as Chidekel includes the word dekel, and diglat is likewise related because the letters KUF and GIMMEL are interchangeable. He further explains that this connected is because the area around the Tigris River is fertile ground for palm trees, and even today there are many palm trees there. Accordingly, he explains that when the Talmud asked "What is Chidekel?," it was not actually asking about the meaning of that name, but was rather seeking to understand the implication of the initial CHET added to the beginning of dekel to become Chidekel. To this, the Talmud answered that the CHET alludes to the "sharpness" of the river (chad). Furthermore, Rabbi Mamo explains that when the Talmud says that the river is "sharp," this refers to the fact that the Tigris River flows very fast, as opposed to the Euphrates River which flows at a much slower speed. Accordingly, he explains that anything that works fast is called "sharp" in Chazalic parlance, just like a sharp knife can be used to cut something very quickly.

In a 1937 letter written to Rabbi Chawita Kohen of Djerba, Rabbi Matzliach Mazuz (Vaya'an Shmuel vol. 12 p. 76, also appears in Shayarei Kehunah HaChadash, Orach Chaim §47) wondered why the rabbis preferred using the term Diglat when referring to the Tigris River, instead of the Biblical term Chidekel. He resolves this question by assuming that it must be that by the time of the rabbis, people no longer called the river Chidekel and instead it became commonplace to call it Diglat, so the rabbis used the more familiar term. We can somewhat expand

on this answer by presuming that the two names are from two different languages, Chidekel is Hebrew and Diglat is Aramaic.

The truth is that Shadal (to Gen. 2:14) already notes that the Hebrew Chidekel and the Aramaic Diglat are actually cognates, with the Aramaic name for the Tigris dropping the initial CHET from the Hebrew word and switching out the KUF for a GIMMEL (as those two letters are often interchangeable). In fact, if we look at other Semitic languages, we will notice that their words for the river are also variants of Chidekel/Diglat. For example, the closest variant to the Biblical Hebrew Chidekel is the Akkadian term Idiqlat/Idiglat. Rabbi Aharon Marcus claims that the Akkadian form of the word is a corruption of the original Hebrew form, noting that initial CHET is often hard to pronounced, so that letter was replaced with a softer initial ALEPH, plus a final TAV was added to become Idiqlat. But modern linguists say that this Akkadian name for the river actually derives from the Sumerian word Idigna (meaning, “the river that goes”) adapted to Akkadian phonology.

Likewise, the Arabic name for the Tigris River is dijlah, which sounds a lot like Diglat (this name for the river can be found in Rabbi Saadia Gaon’s Tafsir to Gen. 2:14). Targum Neofiti (to Gen. 2:14) and the Peshitta (a Syriac translation of the Bible) translate the Hebrew Chidekel as Tiklat (with a KUF, instead of a GIMMEL as in Diglat). The Turkish name for the river, Dicle, is also used as a given name in that language.

Interestingly, the Samaritan Bible (in its parallel to Gen. 2:14) refers to the Tigris River as ha’dekel (often rendered “addeqel” in English) instead of Chidekel. Perhaps the Samaritans somehow thought that the CHET in the beginning of the word Chidekel in the Masoretic Text was a typo, so they had the audacity to change it to a HEY.

Even more interestingly, the root of Diglat would seem to be DALET-GIMMEL-LAMMED (as in degel, “flag”) and the root of ha’dekel would likewise be DALET-KUF-LAMMED (as in dekel, “palm tree”). Without mentioning about the river in question, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (to Num. 1:52) notes a similarity between those two roots (especially because GIMMEL and DALET are often interchangeable), explaining that the “flag” is a special symbol that can be seen from afar and a “palm tree” is likewise a tall tree that can be seen from a distance. We might add that perhaps the Tigris River connects to DALET-KUF-LAMMED, and maybe even DALET-GIMMEL-NUN (dagan, as in “grain”)

because that river was what supplied the water to allows those products to grow in the fertile crescent.

If we're looking for appearances of Chidekel/Diglat as part of given names, it makes sense that we would look to the Assyrians who are so closely associated with the Tigris River. In fact, the Assyrian King who started the process of destroying and exiling the Jews from the Northern Kingdom of Israel was named Tiglat-Pileser (II Kgs. 15:29, 16:10), Tiglat-Plessar (II Kgs. 16:7), or Tiglat-Pilnesser (I Chron. 5:6, II Chron. 28:20). His name is sometimes spelled in archaic English source as "Theglathphalasar." The German philologist Wilhelm Gesenius understood that the Tiglat- element of the king's given-name serves as a reference to the Diglat, which was so important to the Assyrians. Needless to say, this connection is based on that interchangeability of the letters TAV and DALET. Because of this, Gesenius translates the Assyrian king's name as "Lord of the Tigris."

That said, over the last century, modern Assyriologists have revealed that the king's original Assyrian name was actually Tukultī-apil-Ešarra, which translates into "My trust is in the son of Ashur." Ashur, of course, was the name of the Assyrian nation, which descends from Shem's son Ashur (Gen 10:22), and Ashur was also the name of the chief deity worshipped by the Assyrians. None of this has anything to do with the Tigris River.

Now that we've discussed the names Chidekel/Diglat for the Tigris River, we can start talking about the name Tigris itself. The name Tigris is first recorded in Greek and Latin, but philologists have long argued that it is of Persian origin. The personal name Tigranes was borne by several kings of Armenia during the Roman period.

In fact, some scholars trace the term Tigris to the Old Persian word tigrā- ("sharp, pointed"), which, in turn, derives from the Avestan tighri- ("arrow"). Rabbi Ernest Klein in his etymological dictionary of English traces that Avestan word to the Indo-European root (s)teig- which means "pricking/piercing/sticking," and is said to be the basis for the English word stick. That said, nowadays connecting Tigris to the Avestic word for "arrow" is often understood to be a mere folk etymology. Either way, this etymology is thematically similar to how the Talmud sees the name Chidekel as derived from the Hebrew word for "sharp" (chad).

Rabbi Aharon Marcus surmises that the Persian-based name for the Tigris River is a corruption of the Aramaic name Diglat, with the liquid l-sound turning into a

liquid r-sound as is apparently common in Persian languages (plus the initial d-sound turning into a t-sound, as is also common). According to this, the etymology of Tigris does not differ from the words Chidekel/Diglat that we've been discussing in this essay.

Abarbanel (to Gen. 2:14) takes a different approach to the etymology of Tigris. He writes that the Chidekel is called Tigris because its waters move in a fast-running current just like tigris ("tiger") is the name of a swift-moving wild animal. Now, the English word tiger for the animal comes from the Latin and Greek words tigris (which is also the word for "tiger" in Modern Hebrew). These words are also said to have come from the Persian word for "arrow" (in reference to the tiger's habit of suddenly jumping its prey like an arrow swiftly strikes its victim).

The Talmud (Chullin 59b) states that the tigras is "the Lion of the Upper Forest." Rabbi Binyamin Mussafia in Mussaf HeAruch explains that this refers to the tiger, which is called so because it runs as swiftly as an arrow. Like Abarbanel, he too notes that the Tigris River is called so on account of its fast-moving current. This etymology cited by Abarbanel and Rabbi Mussafia is first found in the Latin work Etymologies by Isidore of Seville (written around the year 600).

But there's another approach to understanding the Talmudic term tigras: Dr. Alexander Kohut (HeAruch HaShaleim) rejects Rabbi Mussafia's understanding, partially because a tiger has nothing to do with a lion. Moreover, he notes that in context, it seems that the Talmud is talking about a mythological animal, not an actual existing creature. Because of this, Kohut explains that the Talmudic tigras refers to what is known as a martichoras ("manticore") in Old Persian mythology, which told of a legendary sphinxlike lion that had the face of a human, the body of a lion and the tail of a scorpion. He implies that the rabbis parsed the name martichoras as though it were composed of mar ("mister/master") and tichoras, with the latter becoming corrupted into tigras.

TAAMEI HAMITZVOS – Reasons behind the Mitzvos

by Rabbi Shmuel Kraines

“Study improves the quality of the act and completes it, and a mitzvah is more beautiful when it emerges from someone who understands its significance.”
(Meiri, Bava Kama 17a)

THE SACRED RESPONSIBILITY OF JUDGMENT

MITZVAH #414

After instructing the Jewish people to appoint only expert and righteous judges, who will not favor the powerful nor ignore the poor, Moshe adds, “because judgment is G-d’s” (Devarim 1:17). In other words, a judge of Torah law is no less than a representative of the ultimate Judge, Hashem, for the Torah is Hashem’s will. He must therefore be very careful not to misrepresent Hashem and desecrate His Name by perverting justice. Perhaps for this reason, judges of Torah law are called “elohim” (Shemos 21:6), a word that can also mean “G-d.” In the event that Hashem’s agent, the judge, fails to uphold justice for His people, Hashem Himself intervenes to right the wrongs and restore properties to their rightful owners (Rashi and Ramban).

The fact that the judge represents Hashem places upon him an overwhelming responsibility. Indeed, a good portion of the 613 Mitzvos, as well as much of Pirkei Avos, pertain to judges. The Sages warn judges with the utmost severity about the seriousness of judging Hashem’s people and the consequences of the slightest error (see Shulchan Aruch, Choshen Mishpat 8:2).

Unlike a judge of civil law, who qualifies based on his knowledge alone, a judge of Torah law must be a person of sterling character and impeccable honesty, and the more pious he is, the more fitting he is to judge. We thus find that Yisro advised Moshe to appoint only judges with four qualities: “wealthy men,” who are not easily tempted to accept bribes; “G-d-fearing men”; “trustworthy men,” whose verdict will be accepted by the losing litigant; and “men who despise profit,” and even more so bribes (see Rashi and Ramban to Shemos 18:21). A judge should also have a pristine reputation and should be well-liked by the public (see Chinuch).

The Shulchan Aruch (Choshen Mishpat 7-8) lists many more prerequisites for becoming a judge. Among them is that a woman cannot serve as a judge (7:4), which

the Talmud Yerushalmi (Yoma 6:1) infers from the fact that women may not bear witness. A possible reason for this restriction may be that the Sages observe in a number of places, “a woman’s mind is easily swayed,” in comparison with men, “who do not change their minds easily” (Pirkei DeRabbi Eliezer, ch. 13 in Warsaw ed.). Rabbi Meir’s wife, Beruriah, a famously wise and erudite woman (see Pesachim 62b), found this principle difficult to accept, but he proved it to her (see Rashi to Avodah Zarah 18b). Since a judge of Torah law has to administer perfect judgment, the Torah requires us to appoint judges whose minds are least likely to be swayed.

The Sages similarly explain that the primordial serpent approached Eve to persuade her to sin and did not even attempt to persuade Adam because it knew that it is not easy to persuade a man and change his mind (Pirkei DeRabbi Eliezer *ibid.*). The serpent may have also intended that once Eve sinned, she would convince her husband to do the same, as indeed occurred, because “men tend to follow their wives’ opinions” (*ibid.*, ch. 41). Incidentally, the opposite occurred by the Giving of the Torah. Hashem told Moshe to offer the Torah to the women before offering it to the men, for this reason (*ibid.*).

As to how the prophetess Devorah was able to judge the nation (Shoftim 4:4), her case was different because she was appointed by Hashem, and it was also an exceptional circumstance due to the scarcity of Torah scholarship in her time. Furthermore, she did not judge in the usual sense; rather, she taught the laws, and the people accepted her words because she was a prophetess (see Tosafos to Niddah 50a, Bava Kamma 15a, Gittin 88b, and Shevuos 29b, cited in Machazeh Elyon ch. 5, and Divrei Tovah).

Our appreciation of the Torah’s concept of justice doubles when we contrast it with the concept of civil justice, which has been developed and improved over millennia to become the still-flawed system of today. The judges, who are chosen because of their knowledge, are often swayed by personal biases. The wealthy are empowered to postpone judgment indefinitely and to trample their less-capable opponents by hiring lawyers who know the loopholes and failings of a code of law with the same limitations as their morality. And the poor cannot afford to even attempt claiming their due remuneration when it does not exceed the exorbitant cost of judgment. This alone is a reason to eagerly await the days when Hashem will rebuild the Beis HaMikdash and dwell among us once again, returning our judges as in the days of yore (Yeshayah 1:26) and reestablishing the world upon its three pillars: justice, truth, and peace (Avos 1:18).