

OHRNET

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PARSHA INSIGHTS

A LEGEND IN OUR OWN LUNCHTIME

"In the desert..." (1:1)

It's easy to get upset. You smile at someone on the way to work, wish him "Good Morning!" and he looks through you as though you didn't exist. You're waiting in line at the Post Office, and three other people barge in front of you claiming that the person in front of you was "saving" their place. You get back to the car and find that someone has neatly boxed you in so that you have to wait for 15 minutes before he comes back to the car.

Life can be so full of really annoying things. Sometimes they're even more than annoying. Sometimes you can really let rip and let the other person know exactly what you think of him. How do you combat the feeling of annoyance and even anger that so much of our everyday life can engender?

The basis of all anger is conceit.

What makes me think that things are supposed to go the way I want them to? Where is it written that I am supposed to be constantly fulfilled emotionally, financially, aesthetically and vocationally? We live in a society that constantly teaches us that our own self-fulfillment is the yardstick of success in life.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

The yardstick of success in life is how little these things annoy us. And the only person whom these things don't annoy is someone who is humble. A humble person doesn't expect. He accepts everything that comes his way because he has no pre-judged conditions for his happiness. His happiness doesn't depend on other people's recognizing him or his talents. He is satisfied with his lot. A humble person is always ready to listen to constructive criticism and thereby constantly improve himself. A hum-

ble person makes friends easily. A self-admiring person finds it difficult to align himself with anybody that he doesn't see as adding to the luster of his prestige. A humble person is difficult to insult because he doesn't see himself as someone to whom people need to give honor. A conceited person is always on the brink of being insulted because he sees himself as so great.

"In the desert..." Why did G-d give us the Torah in the desert? Because just as the desert is free for all to step on, so too a Jew must be humble.

To be learned in Torah, one must seek great Torah scholars and be prepared to follow their direction. A conceited person finds it difficult to believe that anyone knows better than him.

Someone who is convinced of how great he is will give scant attention to *mitzvot* that he considers to be insignificant, nor will he exert himself to fulfill the detailed requirements of those *mitzvot* that he condescends to do.

Nothing pleases G-d more than someone who is humble. The reason that Moshe was selected to receive the Torah was because he was the humblest of men. In fact, no one will ever reach that level of humility. If he would, then he would be able to receive the Torah in its totality, like Moshe.

Avraham was extremely humble. He said "I am dust and ash." But Moshe went even further "What are we?" In Hebrew, this phrase is literally, "We – what?" Our very existence never rises above the interrogative. We are never more than a question. Not the answer, and certainly not the answer to everything.

Yes, it's so easy to be a legend in one's own lunchtime.

Sources:

• Rashi on Nedarim 55a, Ruach Chaim

PARSHA OVERVIEW

The Book of Bamidbar — “In the desert” — begins with G-d commanding Moshe to take a census of all men over age twenty — old enough for service. The count reveals just over 600,000. The *levi'im* are counted separately later because their service will be unique. They will be responsible for transporting the *Mishkan* and its furnishings and assembling them when the nation encamps. The 12 Tribes of Israel, each with its banner, are arranged around the *Mishkan* in four sections: east, south, west and north. Since Levi is singled out, the tribe of Yosef is split into two tribes, Ephraim and Menashe, so there will be four groups of three. When the nation travels, they march in a formation similar to the way they camp. A formal transfer is made between the

firstborn and the *levi'im*, whereby the *levi'im* take over the role the firstborn would have had serving in the *Mishkan* if not for the sin of the golden calf. The transfer is made using all the 22,000 surveyed *levi'im* from one month old and up. Only *levi'im* between 30 and 50 will work in the *Mishkan*. The remaining firstborn sons are redeemed with silver, similar to the way we redeem our firstborn today. The sons of Levi are divided in three main families, Gershon, Kehat and Merari (besides the *kohanim* — the special division from Kehat's family). The family of Kehat carried the *menorah*, the table, the altar and the holy ark. Because of their utmost sanctity, the ark and the altar are covered only by Aharon and his sons, before the *levi'im* prepare them for travel.

ISRAEL Forever

COUNTING THE SURVIVORS

With all due credit to those who erect memorials to the six million Jews who perished in the Holocaust, and who try to educate the world regarding the dangers of anti-Semitism which can cause such a tragedy, perhaps not enough attention is being paid to those who survived.

In his opening commentary on the Torah portion which will be read this week in the synagogue, Rashi calls attention to the three times when G-d counted His people. The first was when they left Egyptian bondage and were about to receive the Torah. After the sin of the Golden Calf the Torah mentions the number who died because of that betrayal in order to know how many survived. The third counting was the one mentioned here at the beginning of the fourth of the five *chumashim* (books) of the Torah and which took place

when G-d caused His Presence to rest in the *Mishkan* which His people had built.

The lesson which emerges from this sequence of counting is that the purpose of survival is to function as a people who long for the Divine Presence to dwell within their community. This cannot be accomplished by a society which does not respect Jewish tradition and whose highest secular court issues judgments which make a mockery of how one can become a Jew and benefit from the privileges offered by the Jewish State.

This State, which is a living refutation of Hitler's “final solution”, can only pay true honor to that evil man's victims by assuring that we, the survivors, create a society in which the Divine Presence is welcome. Only thus can we see Israel as the symbol of Jewish survival forever.

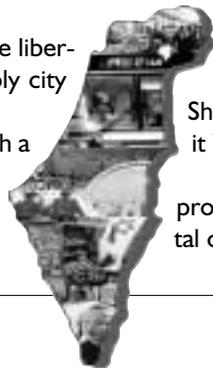
LOVE OF THE LAND - THE LEGENDS

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

YOM YERUSHALAYIM

As Israel celebrates the 38th anniversary of the liberation of Yerushalayim we recall how this holy city got its name.

When G-d wished to endow His chosen city with a name, He recalled that Malki-Tzedek, who was Shem, the son of Noach, had called it Shalem and that Avraham had called it Yireh.



“If I call it Yireh as did Avraham, the righteous Malki-Tzedek (Shem) will feel slighted, and if I call it Shalem, Avraham will be offended. I will therefore call it Yireh-Shalem, combining both of their names.”

And so was born the name Yireh-Shalem which we pronounce Yerushalayim and revere as the eternal capital of Israel.

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PARSHA Q&A ?

1. Why were the Jewish People counted so frequently?
2. What documents did the people bring when they were counted?
3. What determined the color of the tribal flags?
4. What is the difference between an “ot” and a “degel”?
5. How do we see that the Jews in the time of Moshe observed “*techum Shabbat*” - the prohibition against traveling more than 2,000 *amot* on *Shabbat*?
6. What was the signal for the camp to travel?
7. What was the sum total of the counting of the 12 tribes?
8. Why are Aharon’s sons called “sons of Aharon and Moshe”?
9. Who was Nadav’s oldest son?
10. Which two people from the Book of Esther does Rashi mention in this week’s Parsha?
11. Why did the *levi'im* receive *ma'aser rishon*?
12. Which groups of people were counted from the age of one month?
13. Name the first descendant of Levi in history to be counted as an infant.
14. Who assisted Moshe in counting the *levi'im*?
15. Why did so many people from the tribe of Reuven support Korach in his campaign against Moshe?
16. Why did so many people from the tribes of Yehuda, Yissachar and Zevulun become great Torah scholars?
17. In verse 3:39 the Torah states that the total number of *levi'im* was 22,000. The actual number was 22,300. Why does the Torah seem to ignore 300 *levi'im*?
18. The firstborn males of the Jewish People were redeemed for five *shekalim*. Why five *shekalim*?
19. During what age-span is a man considered at his full strength?
20. As the camp was readying itself for travel, who was in charge of covering the vessels of the *Mishkan* in preparation for transport?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week’s Questions!

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

1. 1:1 - They are very dear to G-d.
2. 1:18 - They brought birth records proving their tribal lineage.
3. 2:2 - Each tribe’s flag was the color of that tribe’s stone in the breastplate of the *kohen gadol*.
4. 2:2 - An “ot” is a flag, i.e., a colored cloth that hangs from a flagpole. A *degel* is a flagpole.
5. 2:2 - G-d commanded them to camp no more than 2,000 *amot* from the *Ohel Mo’ed*. Had they camped farther, it would have been forbidden for them to go to the *Ohel Mo’ed* on *Shabbat*.
6. 2:9 - The cloud over the *Ohel Mo’ed* departed and the *kohanim* sounded the trumpets.
7. 2:32 - 603,550.
8. 3:1 - Since Moshe taught them Torah, it’s as if he gave birth to them.
9. 3:4 - Nadav had no children.
10. 3:7 - Bigtan and Teresh.
11. 3:8 - Since the *levi'im* served in the *Mishkan* in place of everyone else, they received tithes as “payment.”
12. 3:15, 40 - The *levi'im*, and the firstborn of *B'nei Yisrael*.
13. 3:15 - Levi’s daughter Yocheved was born while the Jewish People were entering Egypt. She is counted as one of the 70 people who entered Egypt.
14. 3:16 - G-d.
15. 3:29 - The tribe of Reuven was encamped near Korach, and were therefore influenced for the worse. This teaches that one should avoid living near the wicked.
16. 3:38 - The tribes of Yehuda, Yissachar and Zevulun were encamped near Moshe, and were therefore influenced for the good. This teaches that one should seek to live near the righteous.
17. 3:39 - Each *levi* served to redeem a firstborn of the Jewish People. Since 300 *levi'im* were themselves firstborn, they themselves needed to be redeemed, and could therefore not redeem others.
18. 3:46 - To atone for the sale of Yosef, Rachel’s firstborn, who was sold by his brothers for five *shekalim* (20 pieces of silver.)
19. 4:2 - Between the ages of 30 and 50.
20. 4:5 - The *kohanim*.

A digest of the topics covered in the seven weekly pages of the Talmud studied in the course of the worldwide Daf Yomi cycle along with an insight from them.

TALMUDigest

SHABBAT 30 - 36

- Extinguishing a lamp on Shabbat
- A live dog better than a dead lion!
- King David's vindication and death
- Reconciling the conflicts in King Shlomo's statements
- The importance of *simcha* to Torah study and other matters
- Dealing with cynics
- The patience of Hillel
- Conversion candidates by Shammai and Hillel
- The importance of fear of G-d to Torah study
- Sins which cause premature death and other tragedies
- Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai in the cave
- Three reminders before Shabbat
- Twilight zone of *Bein Hashmashot*
- Shofar sounds to announce Shabbat
- Cooking for Shabbat

MAN'S REAL BEST FRIEND

A gentile came before the Sage Hillel with a strange proposition. "Convert me to Judaism," he said, "but only on the condition that you teach me the entire Torah while I stand on one foot."

This conversion candidate had already been rejected by the Sage Shammai but was trying his luck with this Sage

renowned for his legendary patience.

"Do not do to your friend that which is hateful to you," Hillel answered him as he consented to convert him. "This is the entire Torah. All the rest is elucidation; so now go and learn."

This Talmudic "golden rule", asks Rashi in his commentary, is certainly a rule of thumb for all the commandments dealing with relations of man to man such as theft and infidelity, but how does it apply to the commandments dealing with man's relations to G-d?

"Your friend," explains Rashi is not a mere reference to another human but to G-d Himself. "Do not forsake your friend, the friend of your father," we are cautioned by the wisest of men, King Shlomo (*Mishlei 27:10*). G-d is described in those words as an old family friend whose only interest is in helping you, with no thought of personal profit. Hillel was suggesting that a person should imagine the agony he would suffer if someone he was only trying to help would betray him with disobedience of the guidance he provided. This would indeed be the classical "unkindest cut of all", and merely reflecting on it should be enough to deter anyone from the betrayal of disobeying any of the commandments of his Best Friend in Heaven.

• *Shabbat 31a*

WHAT THE Sages SAY

"This is the answer to your question as to whether one may extinguish a lamp on Shabbat in order to save a life. A lamp is called a light and the soul of man is called a light — the soul of man is the light of G-d (*Mishlei 20:26*) — so it is preferable to extinguish the light of mortals to preserve the light of G-d."

• *Rabbi Tanchum of Navi, Shabbat 30a*

OHR BITS

Witty Advice for Circling Life

"If people knew how good the truth really is, they would use it more often."

• RABBI MORDECHAI YAFFE

THE HEALING SERPENT

From: Yehudah S.

*Dear Rabbi,
I'd like to know if there are any Jewish origins to the symbol of a single snake wrapped around a single staff being used as a medical symbol. Although this is usually attributed to Greek gods, I'm wondering if they just copied something from us. I'm thinking of the event where Aaron goes about the camp with a staff with a snake wrapped around it to cure the people struck by the plague. Is that the true meaning of the symbol, or am I just grasping at straws? Please note that I'm not talking about the two-snake version. Either way, would either of these symbols be considered idol worship, or maybe not, since few people these days know the origins of these symbols? Thank you.*

Dear Yehuda,

The snake and staff symbol traditionally associated with the healing arts is often attributed to Greek mythology — either as the single-snake emblem of Asklepios, or as the double-snake emblem representing the caduceus (magic wand) of Hermes (Mercury).

The Asklepiion emblem of a single snake coiled around a staff has been associated with curing since the 5th century BCE, when Asklepios became accepted by the Greeks as the god of healing. Whether he was also an historical figure as healer in earlier ages is not certain.

The caduceus of Hermes, portrayed by two snakes intertwined around a staff topped by wings, is related to the mythological messenger of the gods who guided souls to the underworld, and was seen as protector of travelers, shepherds, merchants and thieves. During the Middle Ages the caduceus became a symbol of pharmacy and alchemy, and, eventually, although “mythologically” incorrect, came to be associated with medicine.

The event you refer to occurred in the desert after the Exodus in approximately 1300 BCE. The Torah states (Numbers 21:5-9):

“The people spoke against G-d and against Moses, ‘Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in this desert, for there is no bread and no water, and we are disgusted with this rotten bread.’ And the Lord sent fiery

serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and many people of Israel died. Therefore the people came to Moses and said, ‘We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord, and against you; pray to the Lord, that He take away the serpents from us.’ And Moses prayed for the people. And the Lord said to Moses, ‘Make a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass that everyone that is bitten, when he looks upon it, shall live.’ And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived.”

This event would seem to predate Greek mythology and may, as you suggest, be a source for what came to be the association of a single snake and staff with healing.

Regarding the cause of the plague, our Sages taught, “Let the snake, which was smitten for speaking evil to Eve come and punish those who spread slander about the manna. Let the snake, for which all types of food taste the same, come and punish those ingrates who complain about the manna which miraculously has many tastes” (Rashi, from Midrash Tanchuma, Chukat 19, Num. Rabbah 19:22).

Regarding the healing through the snake on the staff, our Rabbis commented, “Could a snake [on the pole] cause death [by not looking at it] or give life [by looking at it]? Rather, at the time Israel would look upward and subject their heart to their Father in Heaven, they would be cured; but if not, they would waste away” (Rashi, from Rosh HaShanah 29a). Their healing consisted solely in comprehending that a Jew is to live above the natural order of things. By looking at the snake and then upward, they repented and then re-affirmed their trust in G-d and His healing power, and were cured.

To the extent that these symbols are based on Greek mythology, they are to be associated with paganism and idolatry. Unfortunately, over time even Moses’ snake on the staff was worshipped as an idol. When the righteous king Hezekiah rose to the throne of Judah in the late 8th century BCE, the verse records: “He removed the high places, and broke the images, and cut down the groves, and broke in pieces the brazen serpent that Moses had made, for in those days the children of Israel burned incense to it, and he called it *Nechushtan*” (2 Kings 18:4).

One must not deify doctors nor mythologize medicine, but rather one must enlist their help knowing that it is G-d which enables them and their methods to heal.

DEALING WITH THE DAF

Question: After witnessing the celebration of hundreds of thousands of Jews throughout the world upon completion of the Talmud in the “Daf Yomi” cycle, some of my more learned friends have joined the participants in the new cycle by learning a daf each day. My weaker background and shortage of time make this a virtual impossibility for me. What is the right thing to do?

Answer: Every Jew should set aside some specific time of the day to study Torah. When he reaches Heaven after 120 years and stands before the Heavenly Court, the first question he is going to be asked is whether he indeed did so.

There is no requirement, however, to cover a whole daf each day. When Daf Yomi was conceived by Rabbi Meir Shapiro, the idea was to unite all of Jewry in learning the same material in order to increase the spiritual power of their sacred effort. Neither he nor any of the Torah giants who gave his plan their enthusiastic approval meant to set a daf a day as a universal standard. There are, in fact, communities which have established shiurim to cover an *amud* (half a daf) a day.

What you should do is try to find a shiur or at least a *chavruta* (learning partner) to cover whatever you can in the time available to you. In time you will hopefully reach the level of a daf a day as well.

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY _____

THEY CALL THEIR BOSS A HERO

It happened almost ten years ago but there are a lot of people who will never forget it. Aaron Feuerstein, the CEO of the Malden Mills manufacturing plant in northern Massachusetts, was invited to sit next to President Bill Clinton's family as he delivered his State of the Union address. This was a gesture of appreciation for what this observant Jew did that year when a catastrophic fire nearly destroyed all of the textile company's plant in Lawrence. In contrast to what almost every other businessman would have done, Feuerstein announced that he would keep all of his

3,000 employees on his payroll while he rebuilt his 90-year old family business. Although it cost him several million dollars, he paid his employees for the three months until they could return to full employment.

In an article titled “They Call Their Boss a Hero”, the September 8, 1996 edition of Parade Magazine did a write-up on this remarkable man who quoted the Sage Hillel as saying, “In a situation where there is no righteous person, try to be a righteous person.” This was the motto of a man who was a hero to his employees, his people and the entire world.

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