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PARSHA INSIGHTS

AMBASSADOR-AT-LARGE

“You shall not have other gods before Me. (lit. to my face)” (20:3)

The temperature on the tarmac must be over 100°. The guard of honor in their splendid crimson uniforms stretches all the way backs to the control tower.

Air Force One begins a long lazy curve as it turns for its final approach. As the wheels bite the tarmac, the squeal of small puffs of burned rubber escape from the tires. Air Force One taxis to a halt in front of the welcoming committee. The main bulkhead swings open and out into the blistering Asian sunshine steps not the President, not even the Vice-President, but the ambassador of the United States of America.

The guard comes to attention with the precision of a well-oiled machine, and the brass band strikes up “The Star Spangled Banner.” A welcome fit for a king. If the president himself had stepped out of that plane he could have no complaints.

There is no word, no letter or no dot that is superfluous in the Torah.

Why, then, does the Torah add the words “before Me” to the end of the above verse? Why didn’t it just write “You shall not have other gods?” Isn’t the message clear enough that idol worship is unacceptable without the words “before Me?”

At the beginning of *Hilchot Avoda Zara*, the Rambam (Maimonides) explains how idol worship started in the world: The ancients knew that G-d runs the world through a series of emissaries. The Divine command

descends through the upper worlds until it reaches the stars and the constellations. The stars are the last link in this chain of command. In the generation of *Enosh*, (Adam’s grandson) people started to surmise that since G-d had created the stars and the constellations as his agents to run the world, G-d wanted the stars to be honored, because to honor them was to honor the King himself. Eventually, this mistake degenerated into the building of temples to these stars, and sacrificing to them, still with the understanding, however, that they were G-d’s envoys. The final step was to disconnect the stars from G-d completely and worship them alone as deities.

It’s clear that the final step in this process, the worshipping of the stars instead of G-d, is what we would call idol worship. However, the Rambam says that even giving honor to the constellations was already fully-fledged idol worship. This is difficult to understand. When you welcome an ambassador, shouldn’t you give him the entire honor befitting the one who sent him? For, in truth, the ambassador represents the king. What was so bad then about giving honor to the ambassadors of the King?

“You shall not have other gods before me (lit. to my face).”

There’s one place where to honor the ambassador of the King is the biggest insult to the King that can be. Where is that?

In the throne-room of the King.

Seeing as G-d fills the world, and there is no place where He is not, the entire creation is G-d’s throne-room.

To bow to an ambassador in front of the King is as big an insult as you can get.

• *Based on the Seforno*

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PARSHA OVERVIEW

Hearing of the miracles G-d performed for *Bnei Yisrael*, Moshe's father-in-law Yitro arrives with Moshe's wife and sons, reuniting the family in the wilderness. Yitro is so impressed by Moshe's detailing of the Exodus from Egypt that he converts to Judaism. Seeing that the only judicial authority for the entire Jewish nation is Moshe himself, Yitro suggests that subsidiary judges be appointed to adjudicate smaller matters, leaving Moshe free to attend to larger issues. Moshe accepts his advice. *Bnei Yisrael* arrive at Mt. Sinai where G-d offers them the Torah. After they accept, G-d charges Moshe to instruct the people not to approach the mountain and to prepare for three days. On the third day, amidst thunder and light-

ning, G-d's voice emanates from the smoke-enshrouded mountain and He speaks to the Jewish People, giving them the Ten Commandments: 1. Believe in G-d, 2. Don't worship other "gods", 3. Don't use G-d's name in vain, 4. Observe Shabbat, 5. Honor your parents, 6. Don't murder, 7. Don't commit adultery, 8. Don't kidnap, 9. Don't testify falsely, 10. Don't covet.

After receiving the first two commandments, the Jewish People, overwhelmed by this experience of the Divine, request that Moshe relay G-d's word to them. G-d instructs Moshe to caution the Jewish People regarding their responsibility to be faithful to the One who spoke to them.

ISRAEL Forever

UNITED WE STAND

With parliamentary elections in Israel less than six weeks away, the sharp divisions within the populace of the Jewish State are becoming more evident.

The traditional struggle between the Right and the Left has become overshadowed by the emergence of a "Centrist" party threatening both extremes. The conflict between religious and secular parties continues, although the tone is considerably milder since the virtual disappearance of a violently anti-religious party which played a major

role in the government formed after the last elections.

All of this is a far cry from the solidarity shown by our ancestors as they stood at Mount Sinai "like one man with one heart". Perhaps this scene, described by Rashi in his commentary on this week's Torah portion, serves as a reminder that the only way Jews can ever be truly united is when they share a common commitment to the eternal values of Torah.

Only such a commitment can create the unity we need to protect Israel forever.

לע"נ

הרב חיים משה ז"ל בן ר' דוד עמנואל נ"י

נלב"ע א' שבט תשס"ו

ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

In Memory of

RABBI MOSHE DOMBEY ז"ל

PARSHA Q&A ?

1. Yitro had 7 names. Why was one of his names Yeter?
2. News of which two events motivated Yitro to come join the Jewish People?
3. What name of Yitro indicates his love for Torah?
4. Why was Tzipora with her father, Yitro, and not with Moshe when *Bnei Yisrael* left Egypt?
5. Why does verse 18:5 say that Yitro came to the desert — don't we already know that the *Bnei Yisrael* were in the desert?
6. Why did Moshe tell Yitro all that G-d had done for the Jewish People?
7. According to the *Midrash* quoted by Rashi, how did Yitro respond when he was told about the destruction of Egypt?
8. Who is considered as if he enjoys the splendor of the *Shechina*?
9. On what day did Moshe sit to judge the Jewish People?
10. Who is considered a co-partner in Creation?
11. "Moshe sat to judge the people, and the people stood before Moshe...." What bothered Yitro about this arrangement?
12. Why did Yitro return to his own land?
13. How did the encampment at Sinai differ from the other encampments?
14. To whom does the Torah refer when it uses the term "*Beit Yaakov*"?
15. How is G-d's protection of the Jewish People similar to an eagle's protection of its young?
16. What was G-d's original plan for *Matan Torah*? What was the response of the Jewish People?
17. How many times greater is the "measure of reward" than the "measure of punishment"?
18. How is it derived that "Don't steal" refers to kidnapping?
19. In response to hearing the Torah given at Sinai, how far backwards did the Jewish people retreat in fear?
20. Why does the use of iron tools profane the altar?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

1. 18:1 - Because he caused a parsha to be added to the Torah. *Yeter* means addition.
2. 18:1 - The splitting of the sea and the war against Amalek.
3. 18:1 - Chovav.
4. 18:3 - When Aharon met Moshe with his family on their way down to Egypt, Aharon said to Moshe: "We're pained over the Jews already in Egypt, and you're bringing more Jews to Egypt?" Moshe, hearing this, sent his wife and children back to Midian.
5. 18:5 - To show Yitro's greatness. He was living in a luxurious place; yet he went to the desert in order to study the Torah.
6. 18:8 - To draw Yitro closer to the Torah way of life.
7. 18:9 - He grieved.
8. 18:12 - One who dines with Torah scholars.
9. 18:13 - The day after Yom Kippur.
10. 18:13 - A judge who renders a correct decision.
11. 18:14 - Yitro felt that the people weren't being treated with the proper respect.
12. 18:27 - To convert the members of his family to Judaism.
13. 19:2 - The Jewish People were united.
14. 19:3 - The Jewish women.
15. 19:4 - An eagle carries its young on top of its wings to protect them from human arrows. So too, G-d's cloud of glory separated between the Egyptians and the Jewish camp in order to absorb Egyptian missiles and arrows fired at the Jewish People.
16. 19:9 - G-d offered to appear to Moshe and to give the Torah through him. The Jewish People responded that they wished to hear the Torah directly from G-d.
17. 20:6 - 500 times.
18. 20:13 - Since it is written immediately after "Don't murder" and "Don't commit adultery," it is derived that "Don't steal" refers to a crime carrying the same penalty as the first two, namely, the death penalty.
19. 20:15 - They backed away from the mountain twelve *mil* (one *mil* is 2000 cubits).
20. 20:22 - The altar was created to extend life; iron is sometimes used to make weapons which shorten life.

- What to do on Pesach with clay pots used for *chametz*
- Bread baked in an oven smeared with meat fat
- Kashering *chametz* vessels for Pesach use
- *Chametz* of a Jew serving as security for loan from a non-Jew, and vice versa
- When lender assumes ownership of mortgaged property
- *Chametz* found in Jewish owned store with non-Jewish workers, and vice versa
- *Chametz* buried beneath a collapsed wall
- Payment for involuntary eating of *terumah* and of *terumah* that is *chametz*
- Why the atonement for *me'ilah* (misuse of Sanctuary property) is limited to involuntary violation
- How to make use of foods that have become spiritually impure
- The products of *terumah* that has been planted
- The status of *teumah* that has not been guarded against contamination
- Grains that qualify as material for matzah
- Which halachic status of matzah can disqualify it for use of the mitzvah
- Limitations on the baking of matzah

TOO RICH FOR MATZAH, TOO POOR FOR CHAMETZ

We are accustomed to thinking that if flour is turned into dough it becomes either matzah or *chametz* depending on the manner in which it is baked. It therefore came as a surprise when Rabbi

Shimon ben Lakish ruled that one is not liable for the punishment of extirpation due to the consumer of *chametz* on Pesach if what he ate was bread formed from flour mixed with a liquid such as wine, oil or honey rather than water. Such a product is called *lechem ashirah* – rich bread – and cannot qualify as matzah – which is called the “bread of poverty” (*Devarim* 16:3) – even if baked in the proper fashion.

This places such a product in a category all by itself, neither *chametz* nor matzah!

An attempt was made by Rabbi Papa to explain why this product is not considered *chametz*. The mention of matzah and *chametz* in the same above-mentioned passage can be seen as an equation instructing us that whatever does not qualify as matzah cannot be considered *chametz*. Since *matzah ashirah* does not meet the requirement of “bread of poverty” it is also not considered *chametz*.

This approach is challenged, however, from the law which states that if one swallows liquefied matzah he does not fulfill the mitzvah of eating matzah, but if he swallows liquefied *chametz* he has sinned. This demonstrates that there is no equation between matzah and *chametz*. It was Rabbi Idi bar Avin who supplied the true explanation of why flour combined with any liquid other than water does not qualify as *chametz*. All liquids other than water, he pointed out, are chemically incapable of creating the leavening action which creates *chametz*. Such a produce is therefore too rich for matzah and too “poor” for *chametz*.

• Pesachim 36a

WHAT THE Sages SAY

“Why is matzah called *lechem oni* (*Devarim* 16:3)? Because many things are declared (*onim* means to declare) in connection with it (Hallel and Haggadah are said at the Seder – Rashi).”

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TU B'SHEVAT

SPREADING BRANCHES, BEARING FRUIT

From: Ariel in NY

Dear Rabbi,

Tu B'shevat is coming and it has always had a special place in my heart, thanking G-d for fruits and trees. But I realize that I don't know much about the spiritual side of the day. I know that it is the "Rosh Hashana" for trees, but this seems to be more of a physical understanding. What is the spiritual meaning?

Dear Ariel,

The winter months are a time when in most places it is cold, rainy or snowy. Most people limit activities that are generally outside the home and direct their focus inward: for example, studying, strengthening relationships, developing latent talents or pursuing hobbies. It is a time when we all naturally undergo some degree of hibernation from physical activity, and "dig-in" to weather the long winter.

The Torah likens man to a tree, "For man is a tree of the field" (Deut. 20:19). At the onset of winter a tree sheds its leaves and branches, diminishing its influence in the outer surroundings, and strikes its roots deep into the soil — on the one hand in order to withstand the coming inclement weather, and on the other hand to be

able to soak up as much water as possible from the rain-soaked earth. So too, during winter a person should retract from external interaction with his environment and should strike roots in spiritual soil.

For a Jew, this means making sure one is firmly rooted in some mode of Torah learning: a yeshiva, seminary, shul, or regular Torah class. This connection will ensure that one "weathers" any "inclement weather" that naturally arises in the course of the winter and will enable one to soak up as much Torah as possible during this season so auspicious for spirituality.

In the Land of Israel, a majority of the winter's rain has fallen by Tu B'Shevat. This day marks, then, the turning point from hibernation to rejuvenation. From this point on, the trees begin to realize the life potential they absorbed over the winter, first slowly stretching out, and eventually bursting forth with color, fragrance and taste — leaf, blossom and fruit — into Spring and Summer. So too, by this time, we should have internalized and renewed much Torah and spirituality and we should be preparing and planning how to realize, express and share this energy pleasantly and productively with our surroundings during the coming months of action and activity.

In this way, we glean another meaning of the verse, "Those who sow in tears, with rejoicing shall they reap" (Psalms 126:5). Meaning, those who sow the seeds of Torah and spirituality during the winter months of rain will reap the benefits of their efforts in the summer months of harvest, as they rejoice and gladden others with their pleasant, fragrant and luscious spirituality-laden boughs of Torah.

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

THE MISSING PHOTO

The current craze among Jewish children of collecting picture cards of Torah scholars and leaders will probably remind many of their American parents and grandparents of the days when they collected cards of sports stars. There was, however, one youngster of that generation who collected photographs of great rabbis and pasted them into an album.

One place in that album was left blank and in it was written:

"Mordechai, if you learn seriously, some day your picture will be here with the other *gedolim*."

The youngster took his self-imposed challenge seriously and eventually became the Rosh Hayeshiva of Yeshivat Telshe in Cleveland, Rabbi Mordechai Gifter of blessed memory.

A QUESTION OF PRIORITIES

Question: Does a terminally ill father with no one to care for him except his engaged daughter have a right to ask her to postpone her wedding in order to care for him in what may be his last year?

Answer: Such a case actually came before Rabbi Yitzchok Zilberman, rav of the Ramat Elchanan community in Bnei Brak, and he recorded his experience in his very popular *Aleinu Leshabeiach* volume of *Sefer Bereishet*.

While his own inclination, based on halachic considerations, was to rule that the daughter had an obligation to fulfill the mitzvah of honoring her father, Rabbi Zilberstein decided to consult his venerable brother-in-law Rabbi Chaim Kanievsky. This Torah giant concurred with the halachic considerations but presented a surprising consideration for going through with the wedding on schedule for the greater benefit of the ailing father.

In the Talmud we find that the mother of the *kohen gadol* would bring treats of food to those Jews confined

to the cities of refuge because they were guilty of unintentional manslaughter. Since these people could return to their homes only upon the death of the *kohen gadol* there was fear that they might pray that he would soon perish. The gifts brought by his mother were intended to bribe them against such an appeal to Heaven.

If the young man engaged to the daughter feels that his wedding is being delayed by her father, concluded Rabbi Kanievsky, it can be assumed that deep down in his heart he will be praying for this obstacle to be removed. It is therefore in the father's greater interest that the wedding take place as scheduled.

Upon hearing this sage advice, Rabbi Zilberstein went to see the father. In diplomatic fashion he omitted mention of the suspicion that there might be prayers for his death, but rather stressed that if the wedding was held on schedule his new son-in-law would join the rest of the family in praying for his good health.

The happy ending was that the father gave in and the wedding took place on time.

LOVE OF THE LAND - THE SAGES

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

“BE PATIENT IN JUDGING, HAVE MANY TALMIDIM,
AND PUT A PROTECTIVE FENCE AROUND THE TORAH”

ANSHEI KNESSET HAGEDOLAH (AVOT 1:1)

Although the main thrust of this counsel is to the judges and leaders of Israel, there is a message in it for every Jew as well.

“Be patient” before making any decision, whether in regard to passing judgment on someone's righteousness or in regard to doing business. “Have many *talmidim*,” because assuring that you and your family are



doing the right thing is not enough. You must also reach out to others because you may have a greater impact on them than all those who lecture him. “Put a protective fence” around yourself to guard you from situations where you will easily come to sin. Every man is a judge, a teacher and a legislator.

• Tiferet Yisrael