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PARSHA INSIGHTS

A NATION OF PRESIDENTS

*"I have seen this people, and behold! it is a stiff-necked people."
(22:9)*

A former President of the United States once asked his Israeli counterpart how things were going. "I have many problems," said the Israeli. Replied the American President, "You think you have problems? You are the President of 8 million people, while I am President of 180 million."

To which the Israeli President replied, "Mr. President, you are President of 180 million people. I, however, am the President of 8 million Presidents."

"I have seen this people, and behold! it is a stiff-necked people."

The Torah itself calls the Jewish People a stiff-necked people. Sometimes this obstinacy can be for the good and sometimes for the not so good.

Stubbornness can be an extremely dangerous trait, for it can foil any attempt to improve our situation. Stubbornness enters a person's mind and blinkers him from any possibility other than the one on which he has set his mind.

Thus, in the incident with the golden calf with all its severity, the Torah doesn't focus on the sin itself, rather on the obstinacy that it revealed. A negative action can always be atoned for and repaired, whereas implacable

wrong-headedness allows no place for the way of return.

However, there is also a positive side to being stubborn:

In a certain concentration camp, there was one particularly sadistic Nazi officer. One day he ordered a Jew to follow him to the top of a nearby hill. He indicated a cloud of dust rising on the distant eastern horizon. "Do you know what that is?" "No," replied the Jew. "That is the Russian Army. In a couple of hours they will be at the gates of the camp. The war is over for you. I want you to eat this piece of ham now, or I will shoot you." The Jew refused on the spot without batting an eyelash. And the Nazi shot him also without batting an eyelash.

Edward Gibbon in his "Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire" writes that of all the nations that Rome subjugated, the only people that clung successfully to its beliefs was the Jewish People. All Rome's other vassal states managed to segue the Roman gods into their pantheon without batting an eyelash. The Jews, however, were prepared to make the ultimate sacrifice rather than abandon their faith.

It is this intransigence, imbued in the spiritual genes of our people by our forefathers, that has preserved Jewish identity to this day.

• Based on Rabbi Simcha Zissel from Kelm

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PARSHA OVERVIEW

Moshe conducts a census by counting each silver half-shekel donated by all men age twenty and over. Moshe is commanded to make a copper laver for the Mishkan. The women donate the necessary metal. The formula of the anointing oil is specified, and G-d instructs Moshe to use this oil only for dedicating the Mishkan, its vessels, Aharon and his sons. G-d selects Betzalel and Oholiav as master craftsmen for the Mishkan and its vessels. The Jewish People are commanded to keep the Sabbath as an eternal sign that G-d made the world. Moshe receives the two Tablets of Testimony on which are written the Ten Commandments. The mixed multitude who left Egypt with the Jewish People panic when Moshe's descent seems delayed, and force Aharon to make a golden calf for them to worship. Aharon stalls, trying to delay them. G-d tells Moshe to return to the people immediately,

threatening to destroy everyone and build a new nation from Moshe. When Moshe sees the camp of idol-worship he smashes the tablets and he destroys the golden calf. The sons of Levi volunteer to punish the transgressors, executing 3,000 men. Moshe ascends the mountain to pray for forgiveness for the people, and G-d accepts his prayer. Moshe sets up the Mishkan and G-d's cloud of glory returns. Moshe asks G-d to show him the rules by which he conducts the world, but is granted only a small portion of this request. G-d tells Moshe to hew new tablets and reveals to him the text of the prayer that will invoke Divine mercy. Idol worship, intermarriage and the combination of milk and meat are prohibited. The laws of Pesach, the first-born, the first-fruits, Shabbat, Shavuot and Succot are taught. When Moshe descends with the second set of tablets, his face is luminous as a result of contact with the Divine.

ISRAEL Forever

HOLY COW AND THE CONSTITUTION

Parshat Para, the supplementary reading of the Torah which Jews throughout the world will hear this Shabbat in their synagogues, begins with the words "This is the *chuka* of the Torah."

The word *chuka* has been adopted by Israeli legislators as the term for the constitution they wish to draft and approve in the first session of the newly elected Knesset.

The opposition of the religious community to this *chuka* underscores the paradoxical nature of the ashes of the Red Heifer, which is the subject of this Torah chapter.

While those who had the ashes sprinkled upon them became purified from the ritual impurity suffered from contact with the dead, those who dealt with the ashes became impure. Secular legislators who have abandoned the Torah as the only genuine constitution of our Chosen People mistakenly assume that their man-made *chuka* will cure all the problems of Israel's parliamentary system. However, on the contrary, they will be causing serious problems for those Jews who view our G-d-given constitution as the only guarantee for Israel forever.

LOVE OF THE LAND - THE SAGES

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

“DO NOT SAY ‘WHEN I HAVE FREE TIME I WILL LEARN’, FOR YOU MAY NEVER HAVE THAT FREE TIME” — HILLEL (AVOT 2:4)

This is a warning to busy leaders and to anyone preoccupied with his activities. When he finds a little free time let him not say; “What can I learn in such a short time? When I have a big break, then I will sit down to learn”.



That break may never come. In the meantime, those fifteen minutes, a small fraction of your life that is only a long chain of such moments, has been lost to you forever.

• Tiferet Yisrael

PARSHA Q&A ?

1. How many “geira” are in a shekel?
2. What was the minimum age of military service in the Jewish army?
3. What were the three different types of *terumah* donated?
4. The Jews were counted after Yom Kippur and again after Pesach. Both times they numbered the same amount. How can this be? Didn't some 19-year olds turn 20 during that six month period?
5. How many ingredients comprise the incense of the *Mishkan*?
6. According to Rashi, why are sailors called “*malachim*?”
7. What is the difference between *chochma* (wisdom), *bina* (understanding), and *da'at* (knowledge)?
8. Shabbat is a “sign.” What does it signify?
9. When did the Jewish People begin to give contributions for the building of the *Mishkan*?
10. How many books are there in Tanach?
11. From where did the men take the earrings that they donated to make the calf?
12. Why did Aharon build the altar for the golden calf by himself?
13. Why did Moshe break the Tablets?
14. How can two brothers belong to two different tribes?
15. Why did Moshe ask that his name be erased from the Torah?
16. How has the sin of the golden calf affected the Jewish People throughout history?
17. In verse 33:2, G-d says that the inhabitants of *Eretz Canaan* would be driven out of the Land. In that verse, only six of the seven Canaanite nations are mentioned. What happened to the seventh?
18. How did G-d show that He forgave the Jewish People?
19. How did Moshe become wealthy?
20. How do the light rays shining from Moshe's face show us the powerful effect of sin?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

1. 30:13 - Twenty.
2. 30:14 - Twenty.
3. 30:15 - For the *adanim* (sockets), for the purchase of communal sacrifices, and for the building of the *Mishkan*.
4. 30:16 - Their ages were calculated based on Rosh Hashana, not based on their individual birthdays.
5. 30:34 - Eleven ingredients were used making the incense.
6. 30:35 - Because they stir (*malach*) the water with their oars.
7. 31:3 - *Chochma* is knowledge acquired from others. *Bina* is the deduction of new knowledge from what one has already learned. *Da'at* is holy inspiration.
8. 31:13 - It is a sign between G-d and the Jewish People that He has chosen them and a sign to the nations of the world that He has sanctified the Jewish People.
9. 31:18 - The 11th of Tishrei.
10. 31:18 - 24.
11. 32:2,3 - From their ears.
12. 32:5 - He hoped that by building it by himself it would take longer and in the interim Moshe would return.
13. 32:19 - Moshe reasoned: If the Torah forbids those who have estranged themselves from the Torah to partake in even a single commandment (Pesach sacrifice), surely the entire Torah cannot be given to a whole nation which has estranged itself from G-d!
14. 32:27 - Half-brothers, sharing the same mother.
15. 32:32 - So people shouldn't say “Moshe was unworthy to plead for mercy on behalf of the Jewish people.”
16. 32:34 - Whenever G-d punishes the Jewish People, part of that punishment comes as payment for the sin of the golden calf.
17. 33:2 - The seventh nation, the Girgashites, voluntarily emigrated.
18. 33:14 - He agreed to let His *Shechina* dwell among them.
19. 34:1 - Moshe carved the Tablets out of precious stone. G-d commanded Moshe to keep the leftover fragments.
20. 34:35 - Before the sin of the golden calf, the people would not have been afraid to look at the light rays, but after the sin they were afraid.

- What time of the day are the daily sacrifices and the Pesach sacrifice offered?
- The daily sacrifice as the first and last offering to be burned on the altar
- The exceptions to this rule
- The eating of sacrificial flesh as an indispensable factor of atonement
- Slaughtering the Pesach sacrifice with improper intentions
- Slaughtering an animal designated as Pesach sacrifice during the rest of the year
- Slaughtering the Pesach sacrifice before the daily sacrifice or in the morning
- In whose behalf can the Pesach sacrifice be slaughtered and its blood offered?
- The role of the uncircumcised or spiritually impure as members of company for Pesach sacrifice
- The curious Sage and the scholarly woman
- Slaughtering the Pesach or daily sacrifice while in possession of *chametz*
- Procedure of offering the Pesach sacrifice
- The three groups of offerers and how the gates closed
- How the king conducted a census through the Pesach sacrifice
- Who did the slaughtering and how was blood applied to the altar?

WHO WAS THE KING WHO MADE THE CENSUS?

When King Agripas wished to conduct a census of the Jews in Eretz Yisrael he asked the *Kohen Gadol* to confiscate a kidney from every animal offered as a Pesach sacrifice. Since this kidney had to be burned on the altar, the person bringing the sacrifice

would be compelled to redeem it by giving some other object. When all of these objects were counted it was calculated that 1,200,000 sacrifices had been offered. Since there were at least ten Jews subscribing to each sacrifice, and there were people who could not offer a sacrifice, either because they were spiritually impure or far away from the *Beit Hamikdash* on that day, this means that there were well over 12 million Jews!

Who was the king who made this discovery?

Rashi, in his commentary on *Mesechta Sotah* (41a), writes that he was the son of a Jewish mother and a descendant of Hurdus (Herod), the slave who murdered his Hasmonean masters and usurped the throne. It was during his reign that the Second *Beit Hamikdash* was destroyed by the Romans.

Tosefot, however, takes issue with this position of Rashi regarding the genealogy of Agripas. The *gemara* (*Bava Batra* 3b) related that Hurdus wished to marry the one surviving member of the royal family he had slaughtered. She, however, declared from a rooftop that anyone who in the future would declare that he is a descendant of the Hasmoneans will be known to have the status of a slave, for no one remained from that family except herself, and she then leaped to her death. Had the descendants of Hurdus married Jewish women, their offspring would be full-fledged Jews without the limitations of slave status, since the halacha establishes matrilineal descent. It must therefore be concluded that they did not marry Jewish women, only those of slave status like themselves, so that their children inherited that status.

This, Tosefot concludes, explains why Agripas wept when he publicly read the passage in the Torah disqualifying one who is not “from among your brothers” as a king, and why it was considered a serious sin of flattery for the Jews who heard him to encourage him with the cry of “You are our brother!”.

WHAT THE Sages SAY

“Once a mitzvah presents itself to you it must not be bypassed (even for the sake of another mitzvah).”

• Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish - Pesachim 64b

PHARAOH WAY FROM HOME

From: Uriel

Dear Rabbi,

I seem to remember something in the Torah about Jews not being allowed to return to Egypt. It occurred to me that if this is true, how were Jewish communities living there for so many years, including great rabbis? Wasn't Maimonides also from Egypt? Thanks for explaining this.

Dear Uriel,

Your memory hasn't failed you. The Torah prohibits returning to Egypt in three different verses: "You shall never see the Egyptians anymore" (Ex. 14:13); "You shall not return on that way anymore" (Deut. 17:16); "You shall not see Egypt again" (Deut. 25:65). The following excerpt from the Talmud is a poignant example of the severity of this prohibition:

Whoever has not seen the Double Colonnade of Alexandria in Egypt has not seen the glory of Israel. It was like a huge basilica that contained twice the number of men who went out from Egypt [2 times 600,000], and there were seventy-one golden armchairs for seventy-one Sages, and each chair was no less than twenty-one talents of gold. And a wooden pulpit was in the middle of the palace where the attendant of the congregation stood with a scarf in his hand, and when the time came in the prayer to respond "Amen," he raised the flag, [to enable those who couldn't hear on account of the great crowd to see when to respond] and the whole people said "Amen." And they did not sit mixed; rather the goldsmiths, silversmiths, blacksmiths, copper-smiths and weavers all sat separately. And when a poor man went in, he recognized his fellow-tradesmen and went to them, and received work to support himself and his family. Said Abaye: And they were all killed by [Trajan]. Why were they so punished? Because they transgressed the passage, "You shall not return on that way [to Egypt] any more" (Succah 51b).

The Jews of Alexandria were punished despite their apparent commitment to *mitzvot* and charity, solely on account of being in Egypt. If this is the case, how did loyal Jews throughout the centuries, including leading rabbis, justify moving to and remaining in Egypt?

Regarding the verse, "You shall not see Egypt again", our Sages explained, "to dwell there you may not return, but for the purpose of business or to conquer you may return" (Jerusalem Talmud, Sanhedrin 10:7). Accordingly, all those Jews who initially moved to Egypt did so not with the inten-

tion of staying there permanently, but only temporarily for the purpose of making a living. Once they were successful, they should have left. But since at that point staying entailed only a minor infraction, logistic difficulties in leaving and lack of significantly greater economic opportunities elsewhere resulted in their staying (Radbaz).

Your mention of Maimonides may serve as a case in point. Rambam was not born in Egypt, but moved there later in life. Born in Cordova, Spain in 1135, he learned Torah from his father Rabbi Maimon who was in the chain of disciples of the great Rabbi Alfasi (the Rif). In 1148, his family fled the Inquisition, eventually reaching Fez, Morocco. There, as a result of helping the Marranos, his family was endangered and they fled to the Land of Israel. The dire living conditions they found there resulted in the family's moving to Cairo. There he served as rabbi for the Jews of Egypt until his death; but as a result of his family's loss of estate, he was forced to earn a living as a doctor, eventually becoming the Sultan's court physician.

Rambam himself writes about the prohibition to settle permanently in Egypt, and implies that remaining after the initial permission to do business is not just a minor infraction but an outright transgression. If so, according to his opinion, how was he able to stay there? Radbaz explains, "He was forced to stay by the government, since he was the doctor of the king and the ministers. And I also settled there for a long time in order to learn Torah, to teach it, and to build a Yeshiva, which is permitted, and then I returned to Jerusalem." Despite this explanation, and perhaps more to express his longing for the Land of Israel, Rambam purportedly signed his name, "Moshe ben Maimon, he who transgresses the prohibition 'You shall not return on that way anymore'".

Sources / Notes:

- *Rambam, Mishna Torah, Hilchot Melachim 5:7-8; Hagahot Maimoniot 2, 3; Radbaz 7.*
- *The Babylonian Talmud (Succah 51b) says it was Alexander of Macedon (the Great) who killed the Jews of Alexandria. But the commentaries note that he lived in Greek times and actually encouraged Jewish settlement in Egypt. Abarbanel writes it refers to a different Alexander in Roman times. The Gr"a writes that it should say "Trocinus", based on the same account brought in the Yerushalmi (Succah 5:1) referring to the massacre of the Jews in Alexandria under Trajan in 116 recorded by Eusebius.*
- *Other well-known rabbis who lived in Egypt were Rabbi Saadya Gaon (b. 882, Egypt) and Rabbi Ya'akov Beirav (b. Spain). Rabbi Betzalel Ashkenazi (Shita Mekubetzet) and the Arizal (b. Jerusalem) learned in the yeshiva established by Radbaz.*
- *Kaftor v'ferach (ch. 5, 'v'Omer') writes that Rabbi Shmuel, a descendant of Rambam, said he signed as mentioned above. However, Sede Chemed, vol. 3, maarechet yod, klal 46, doubts this.*

DETECTIVE STORY

Question: A theft took place in the class that I teach, and I suspect that some of my pupils are aware of the identity of the thief. I am tempted to demand of those who have this information to share it with me but I am afraid that this may encourage them to become malicious talebearers. What is the right thing to do?

Answer: Your concern about developing the wrong traits in your pupils is shared by one of the great halachic authorities of the previous generation. Since you wish to protect the other pupils from becoming victims of theft and to also help rehabilitate the young thief, you must resort to other methods to uncover this thief.

Various suggestions have been made, ranging from controversial entrapment to the imaginative insisting on each

pupil's declaring before the *Aron Hakodesh* that he was not guilty of the theft. Perhaps we can learn a lesson in detective work from what the Talmud (*Bava Metzia 24a*) tells us of the Sage Mar Zutra Chasida.

A silver goblet was stolen from the home of this Sage's host and the suspicion was that the thief was one of the young men studying in the yeshiva. One day this Sage noticed a student drying his freshly washed hands on the coat of another student. He immediately suspected that a person with such disregard for someone else's property was probably the thief. Subsequent interrogation of the suspect vindicated his suspicion.

A teacher who keeps a sharp eye open on the casual behavior of his pupils will usually discover which of them has the tendency to steal from his classmates.

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY _____

YESHIVA OF NO RETURN

How did the Chief Rabbi of the Israeli Air Force get to Israel from his hometown of Seattle? During a *shiva* visit several months ago to the family of Rabbi Dov Cohen, of blessed memory, we heard the fascinating answer to this question.

Dov's older brother had been sent by his parents from Seattle to a yeshiva in New York. When he returned home after a while he was reluctant to go back to yeshiva because he longed to be with his family. When Dov became Bar Mitzvah his saintly mother was determined

to bring him to a yeshiva from which it would be much more difficult to come home. She took him to Eretz Israel and enrolled him in the famous yeshiva in Hebron. No one his age from outside of the city was ever admitted to the yeshiva but the mother's determination succeeded in having him accepted.

He miraculously survived the Arab massacre in 1929, went on to become a distinguished Torah scholar and served for many years as Chief Rabbi of the Israeli Air Force.

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