

OHRNET

SHABBAT PARSHAT DEVARIM • 4 AV 5766 • JULY 29, 2006 • VOL. 13 NO. 42

PARSHA INSIGHTS

THE RISE OF SEMITISM

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

A few years ago, I happened to be on a late-afternoon flight out of Guatemala City, 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 the past few years, 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 parsha, 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 Betar 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 on which all anti-Semites agree is that the world would be an infinitely better place without Jews. What exactly the Jews' 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?"* (Megilla 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?

Sixty-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*

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PARSHA OVERVIEW

This Parsha 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 *Bnei Yisrael* during the last five weeks of his life, as they prepared to cross the Jordan into *Eretz Yisrael*. Moshe reviews the *mitzvot*, 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*. The Parsha opens with Moshe alluding to the sins of the previous generation who died in the desert. He describes what would have happened if they hadn’t 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. He 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; 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 wouldn’t listen when he told them not to go, that they no longer merited vanquishing their enemies miraculously. They 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.

ISRAEL Forever

LEARNING FROM THE PAST

Those who refuse to learn from the past, it has been wisely said, are doomed to relive it. The *Chumash Devarim*, which we begin reading in our synagogues this Shabbat, contains the most important history lesson ever learned by our ancestors and ourselves, taught by the greatest educator of all time, Our Teacher Moshe. As our ancestors stood on the threshold of entering *Eretz Yisrael*, Moshe, only five weeks before his passing, reviews all the mistakes they made from the time he led them out of Egyptian bondage.

The purpose of this reproof was to prepare the nation for

their transformation from a supernatural existence in the wilderness to the challenges of a natural one in their own Land. In a later chapter in *Devarim* he spells out the disasters that will befall them if they fail to learn the lesson taught by history about those who abandon their G-d.

As we prepare for the Fast of the Ninth of Av, recalling the destruction of the *Beit Hamikdash* and exile from our Land, we must recall the mistakes made in the past and their tragic consequences. Only then will we draw from the past the wisdom to deal with the future and thus secure Israel forever.

LOVE OF THE LAND - THE WISDOM

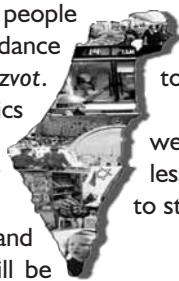
Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and *Eretz Yisrael*

“THERE ARE FOUR TYPES OF PEOPLE IN REGARD TO FREQUENTING THE BEIT MIDRASH. ONE WHO GOES BUT FAILS TO DO IS REWARDED FOR GOING. ONE WHO DOES BUT FAILS TO GO IS REWARDED FOR DOING. ONE WHO GOES AND DOES IS EXCEEDINGLY RIGHTEOUS. ONE WHO NEITHER GOES NOR DOES IS A SINNER.” — (AVOT 5:14).

The “Beit Midrash” of this Mishna is where people come to learn ethical teachings and to gain guidance in how to behave, and how to perform *mitzvot*.

One who goes there to hear guiding words of ethics will be rewarded for his effort even if he has not yet managed to live up to what he has heard, for there is hope that he will eventually do so.

The one who does his own bit of self-discipline and feels no need to hear the counsel of the sages will be



rewarded only for his deeds but will be missing out on the greater level he could have achieved by going to the Beit Midrash.

The exceedingly righteous man is the one who is well versed in what he is supposed to do but nevertheless goes to the Beit Midrash to hear the lecture in order to strengthen himself in the service of G-d.

• Tiferet Yisrael

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PARSHA Q&A ?

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 Refa'im?
20. What was the advantage of Reuven and Gad leading the way into battle?

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 – 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 Tzlofchad 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.

- The bullock of the *kohen gadol* – who pays for it and who receives atonement through it
- The curtains at the entry to the *kodesh hakedoshim* and the status of the space between them
- The route of the *kohen gadol* to the *kodesh hakedoshim*
- How the incense was offered on Yom Kippur
- Why the sons of Aaron died
- Respectful leave taking
- Prayer of the *kohen gadol*
- What happened to the Holy Ark of the *Beit Hamikdash*
- The *keruvim* and their symbolism
- From where Earth was formed
- The spraying of the blood and the counting that accompanied it
- The shofar-shaped collection boxes in the *Beit Hamikdash*
- The issue of *bereira*
- Preventing a mix-up in regard to two bloods

THE FOUNDATION STONE

A high point in the Yom Kippur service of the *kohen gadol* was the placing of the special incense on the Holy Ark. Since this Ark was not around during the time of the Second *Beit Hamikdash*, the incense was placed on the *even shetiah* — the foundation stone.

This stone, three fingers high above the floor of the *kodesh hakedoshim*, was so called because it was where the world's formation began. This view of how Creation began is based on the passage (*Tehillim* 50:1-2) in which the psalmist speaks of G-d "calling to the earth" to initiate Creation, and goes on to describe how "out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, did G-d shine forth."

The Maharsha notes that although this source cited in our *gemara* serves to identify Zion as the foundation of Creation, there is no specific mention of a stone. In the

Midrash, however, we find a reference to the stone that the Patriarch Yaakov utilized to serve G-d.

On his way from Eretz Yisrael to find his mate in the home of Lavan, Yaakov stopped off at the site where the *Beit Hamikdash* would eventually stand. After 14 years of learning Torah in the Yeshiva of Eiver, during which he never lay down on a bed to sleep, he took stones from the area and placed them under his head and went to sleep. Upon awakening he took the stones that had miraculously been fused into a single stone, and set up a pillar on which he poured a libation to G-d. "And this stone," he declared, "shall be a House for G-d." (*Bereishet* 28:22)

This very stone, suggests the Midrash, was the stone where the world began and where the purpose of Creation became fulfilled in the House of G-d.

• Yoma 54b

WHAT THE Sages SAY

"How beloved are the People of Israel that G-d did not require them to have an agent (and that everyone of them is able to pray for himself – Rashi)."

• Rabbi Yossi - Yoma 52a

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LOVE of the LAND

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IDOL BASHING

From: Mike in Madison, WI

Dear Rabbi,

Jews are prohibited from worshiping idols. They also have to destroy them. Does this mean that we should be breaking archeological artifacts of great value, or destroy idols we encounter in restaurants or during travel? I don't think that would go over so well with those who value the idols!

Dear Mike,

You're probably aware of the Midrash relating that Abraham's father traded in idols. One day while his father was out of the store, Abraham took a hammer and destroyed all the idols except for the biggest one, in whose hand he placed the hammer. When his father returned he demanded, "Who smashed all the idols?" Abraham replied that a brawl broke out among the idols until the largest one destroyed all the others. His father jeered, "Idols can't even move!" to which Abraham retorted, "So why do you worship them?"

Just as the first Jew Abraham did, so too all Jews are required to eradicate all idols in every time and place. But before you take up a hammer, it's imperative that you consider the following explanation of the rule and its qualifications.

The source for this commandment is from the verse, "You shall utterly destroy all the places where the nations that you shall possess worshipped their gods, upon the lofty mountains and upon the hills, and under every lush tree. And you shall tear down their altars, smash their monuments, burn their [trees of worship] with fire, cut down the graven images of their gods, and destroy the names of those gods from that place" (Deut. 12:1-3).

As it turns out, though, not all idols have to be broken. For example, if an idolater nullifies the idol by either renouncing it, or by damaging or breaking it, the idol need not be broken any further, and a Jew who later finds it or

comes to own it, may derive benefit from it by selling it or melting it down to use its metal, etc. Even if an idolater fled in war and left his idols behind when he could have taken them with him, or if he could have returned for them but didn't, this also constitutes nullification.

However, a Jew cannot nullify an idol even if he made it or worships idols himself. Therefore, if an idolater did not nullify the idol, it remains forbidden forever. If such an idol comes into the possession of a Jew, he or she must completely destroy it or throw it into the sea in a way that it cannot be retrieved. For this reason, even if an idol had been buried under rubble, debris or underground for a long time, it is still forbidden and must either be nullified by a non-Jew or destroyed by a Jew. This is because there is no reason to assume it was nullified before being buried.

This applies not only to idols found in the Land of Israel, but also to idols found in any land conquered and controlled by Jews. The only difference is that whenever Jews throughout history conquer and control the Land of Israel, they are required to search for and destroy any idols in the Land. But in areas controlled by Jews outside of the Land, they need not search for idols, but if found, they must be destroyed. However, herein lies an important qualification on account of which you better lay down your hammer.

As implied above, this commandment applies only in a situation where Jews have complete control, such that the idol bashing will be free of retaliation or punitive measures from the non-Jews. For this reason, even if Israel were interested in purging the Land of idols, it would probably be exempt in light of the probable world-wide objection to the destruction of archeological "treasures" belonging to humanity. For the same reason, an individual is not required to smash such "treasures" he encounters in restaurants or during travel, in Israel or anywhere else.

Sources:

- Deuteronomy 12
- Rambam, *Avodat Kochavim*, chapters 7 & 8
- Shulchan Aruch, *Yoreh Deah* 146
- Sefer HaChinuch, *Mitzvah* 436

WHAT'S THE RIGHT THING TO DO?

REAL-LIFE QUESTIONS OF SOCIAL AND BUSINESS ETHICS

TELLING HIM OFF!

Question: A reckless driver makes a dangerous turn to pass my car but we end up side by side at a red traffic light. I am really upset by his behavior and am sorely tempted to tell him off. What is the right thing to do?

Answer: Anger is at least as dangerous as passing on the road. Shouting through your window at the other guy is not only a serious violation of the prohibition against losing one's temper,

but also presents a danger both to you and the object of your outburst. Such a temperamental explosion can cause a disorientation, which creates difficulties for safe driving.

If you feel that the offending driver must somehow be reprimanded so that he will not repeat his misbehavior, you need only wave a scolding finger at him. This will achieve the purpose of calling his attention to his offense without paying the price of a lost temper.

A HEROINE'S HOSPITALITY

“White or rye? Creamy or chunky?” This was the response of the late Rebbetzin Yocheved Wein, o.b.m., to the strange request for Shabbat hospitality from an American studying in Jerusalem. This former student of her husband, the renowned Torah scholar and historian Rabbi Berel Wein, had indicated that he only ate bread and peanut butter.

Not at all flustered by this rejection of her cuisine, this extraordinary practitioner of *hachnasat orchim* (inviting guests) prepared for her unusual guest the most exquisite plate of a peanut butter sandwich surrounded by the most delicious vegetables and appetizers. He enjoyed this meal so much that he asked to be invited for the next Shabbat as well.

This touching story was part of a moving talk given by Rabbi Wein in Yeshivat Ohr Somayach, where he teaches Talmud and Jewish history on a regular basis. It took place a month after the *shiva* visit to Rabbi Wein, where the heads of the yeshiva heard from him that the day his wife suddenly passed away she was scheduled to visit Ohr Somayach to see the Sefer Torah that she and her husband had dedicated to the yeshiva in memory of their parents. Although that visit never took place, the yeshiva decided to do something symbolic about it. The morning after the aforementioned talk, Rabbi Wein was given an *aliya* in the Ohr Somayach Beit Midrash so that he could make a blessing on the very Sefer Torah that his unforgettable wife had inspired him to find a home for in Ohr Somayach where he teaches.

PARSHA INSIGHTS

continued from page one

live in peace!” A sea of voices swelled behind him chanting, “*Seig Heil! Seig Heil!*”

The young man was shaken to the depths of his soul; he had never heard such a statement. He ran immediately 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 down throughout the generations.

But it was not always so.

When G-d 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 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 G-d’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!*”

WHILE THE MISSILES FLY

RABBI MENDEL WEINBACH

What does a Jew in Israel think as the missiles shot by terrorists in Lebanon keep coming closer to the center of the country?

First of all there is profound sympathy for the families whose loved ones have already been victims of these barbaric attacks upon innocent civilians. There is sincere empathy with those recovering from wounds suffered in those bombings and for all the people whose normal routine has been radically disturbed because of the need to seek shelter.

But as murderous missiles fly in the direction of one Israeli community after another there are other life-saving missiles flying in the direction of Heaven. These are the prayers which are being said in synagogues and yeshivot throughout Israel and the world. Prayers for the success of our brothers in their heroic efforts to defeat the enemies pledged to the destruction of the Jewish State. Prayers for the quick and complete recovery of all the wounded. Prayers for the speedy return home of our kidnapped soldiers.

This is the truly Jewish way of responding to danger. When war comes to your land, says the Torah, you must cry out to G-d so that you will be remembered by Him and be saved from your enemies. (*Bamidbar 9:9*)

The purpose of crying out to G-d in prayer when danger faces us, explains Rambam, is to demonstrate our belief that everything that happens is determined by G-d and not the result of circumstances or coincidences. Attributing our perils to natural causes alone, he adds, is an exercise in masochism for ignoring the early warning from Heaven to improve our ways and invites further tragedy.

All of us who live in the holy land of Eretz Yisrael and who have lived through several wars have been privi-

leged to see the merciful Hand of G-d save us from our enemies time and again. We feel a powerful debt of gratitude to the soldiers risking and sometimes giving their lives to defend our homes and families. But we are fully aware that their success will also be determined by what is done on the home front. The courage of people resisting the natural desire to flee from their communities is certainly to be admired. Even more important, however, is our response of sending missiles Heavenward in the form of teshuva resolutions to become better Jews and in our prayers and increased Torah study.

On this last note, we must recall the words of the Talmud commenting on the passage (*Tehillim 122:2*) "Our feet stood in the gates of Jerusalem." King David, the author of the statement who was an expert on warfare thus explained his military success:

"What made it possible for our feet to stand victorious in war — the Torah, which was studied in Jerusalem!"

As I look upon my hundreds of students in their Beit Midrash, their "gates of Jerusalem," studying without interruption as the missiles fly all over the country, I am comforted. For it is the missiles of Torah study along with prayer and a resolution to become better Jews which they send heavenward, together with the heroic military efforts of the Israel Defense Forces that will surely bring a satisfactory end to this hour of crisis.

We conclude with the traditional prayer said at such times.

"Our brothers, the entire family of Israel, who are delivered into distress and captivity, whether they are on sea or dry land – may G-d have mercy on them and remove them from stress to relief, from darkness to light, from subjugation to redemption now, speedily and soon."