

O H R N E T

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PARSHA INSIGHTS

CHANGING TO STAY THE SAME

“...and do not follow their traditions” (18:3)

An immigrant Jew decided to change his name to something less obviously Semitic. He goes to the clerk in the relevant government bureau and changes his name to Riley. The following week he returns to the same clerk and asks to change his name again.

“But you already changed your name once,” says the clerk, “What was wrong with that one?”

“Nothing,” replies the Jew, “It’s just that when someone asks me what did I change my name from I can say “Riley.”

Czar Nikolai the First decreed the Jews of Russia were obliged to wear the same distinctive hats as his non-Jewish subjects. This decree was the subject of heated debate amongst the Jews, for Jewish law states that during a time of forced conversion any infringement of the Torah’s laws obliges one to forfeit one’s life rather than succumb. Did this mean that the Jews would have to give up their lives rather than wear this particular hat?

In the *Beit Midrash* (Study Hall) of the *Kotzker* Rebbe, the debate was raging as intensely as anywhere. Entering his *Beit Midrash*, the Rebbe enquired, “Why the noise? What happened?” The *chassidim* explained that the government had decreed that Jews must forsake their Jewish clothing and wear non-Jewish apparel. To which the Rebbe replied, “*Jewish clothing means tallit and tefillin — and that’s it.*” And with that he closed the door.

Certainly, a cursory view of current dress codes amongst the Jewish People shows that this debate is far from ended. Even though Chassidic dress owes much to the Polish

nobility of the 17th Century, nowadays, a *shtreimel* is as Jewish as chicken soup and *lockshen*.

In the middle of the 20th century no self-respecting adult male would be seen in public without a hat. Nowadays were it not for the Lithuanian style of Judaism, the *fedora* would be a footnote in the history of haberdashery, and the Borsolino family would be treading grapes for a living.

The Jewish People were deemed worthy of redemption from Egypt because they didn’t change their names, the language or their dress.

Today, *Spivack* has become *Sinclair* and *mamaloshen* is more likely to be the Queen’s English than the King’s Holy Tongue. The genius of Judaism, however, is that it has always changed enough to stay the same.

Walk into a Sephardic synagogue. The carpets may be from the *shuk* in Fez, the sound of the prayers reminiscent of the Sahara, and the smell of the coffee redolent of a Bedouin’s tent. The Judaism, however, will be as authentic as Sinai. Any Brooklyn boy can walk into a shul in the Bucharian quarter of Jerusalem and *daven*. The wrapping may be different, but the contents are still genuine.

The Jew has always lived in the world without being “of the world”. There’s a narrow line that divides the flavor from the essence, but however we dress, and whatever our surname is, what makes the difference is remembering from where we have come, and to where we are going.

• Source: *Kotzker Rebbe story from Iturei Torah*

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PARSHA OVERVIEW

ACHAREI MOT

G-d instructs the *kohanim* to exercise extreme care when they enter the *Mishkan*. On Yom Kippur, the *kohen gadol* is to approach the holiest part of the *Mishkan* after special preparations and wearing special clothing. He brings offerings unique to Yom Kippur, including two identical goats that are designated by lottery. One is “for G-d” and is offered in the Temple, while the other is “for *Azazel*” in the desert. The Torah states the individual’s obligations on Yom Kippur: On the 10th day of the seventh month, one must afflict oneself. We abstain from eating and drinking, anointing, wearing leather footwear, washing, and marital relations. Consumption of blood is prohibited. The blood of slaughtered birds and undomesticated beasts must be covered. The people are warned against engaging in the wicked practices that were common in Egypt. Incest is defined and prohibited. Marital relations are forbidden during a woman’s monthly cycle. Homosexuality, bestiality and child sacrifice are prohibited.

KEDOSHIM

The nation is enjoined to be holy. Many prohibitions and positive commandments are taught. *Prohibitions:* Idolatry; eating offerings after their time-limit; theft and robbery; denial of theft; false oaths; retention of someone’s property; delaying payment to an employee; hating or cursing a fellow Jew (especially one’s parents); gossip; placing physical and spiritual stumbling blocks; perversion of justice; inaction when others are in danger; embarrassing; revenge; bearing a grudge; cross-breeding; wearing a garment of wool and linen; harvesting a tree during its first three years; gluttony and intoxication; witchcraft; shaving the beard and sideburns; tattooing. *Positive:* Awe for parents and respect for the elderly; leaving part of the harvest for the poor; loving others (especially a convert); eating in Jerusalem the fruits from a tree’s fourth year; awe for the Temple; respect for Torah scholars, the blind and the deaf. Family life must be holy. We are warned again not to imitate gentile behavior, lest we lose the Land of Israel. We must observe *kashrut*, thus maintaining our unique and separate status.

ISRAEL Forever

NEVER IN ISRAEL

We occasionally need a reminder of how much easier it is for a Jew in Israel to live as a Jew. The latest such reminder is the case of Laurie Richter in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. When she moved into her rented condominium she hung a mezuzah on her front doorpost. The condo management ordered her to take it down because residents are forbidden to display any objects in common spaces.

This order, which smacks of religious discrimination,

has been challenged by Richter, who is herself a lawyer, and by the congressperson in whose district she resides.

Whatever the outcome, and we certainly hope that the condo management will reverse its position, it is impossible to imagine something like this happening in the Jewish State where all public buildings have *mezuzot*, as do the overwhelming majority of private dwellings.

May the merit of mezuzah observance protect Israel forever!

LOVE OF THE LAND - THE PLACES

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

THE CAVE OF TZIDKIYAHU

The long tunnel underneath the walls of the Old City of Jerusalem, known as the Cave of Tzidkiyahu, recalls the destruction of the first *Beit Hamikdash* and the end of the Davidic dynasty.

As the Babylonian armies carried out the destruction of Jerusalem, the last king of Judah, Tzidkiyahu, fled through a secret tunnel that ran from his palace to the plains of Jericho. But Heaven



had marked him for destruction as well, and a deer was sent to run on top of the tunnel. The enemy soldiers pursued the deer and caught up with it at the other end of the tunnel just as Tzidkiyahu and his sons were exiting. They slaughtered the king’s sons before his eyes and then blinded him and carried him off in chains to imprisonment in Babylon.

It is told that it was from this tunnel that stones were quarried for the building of the *Beit Hamikdash*.

PARSHA Q&A ?

ACHAREI MOT

1. Why does the Torah emphasize that *Parshat Acharei Mot* was taught after the death of Aharon's sons?
2. How long did the first *Beit Hamikdash* stand?
3. What did the *kohen gadol* wear when he entered the Holy of Holies?
4. How many times did the *kohen gadol* change his clothing and immerse in the *mikveh* on Yom Kippur?
5. One of the goats that was chosen by lot went to *azazel*. What is *azazel*?
6. After the Yom Kippur service, what is done with the four linen garments worn by the *kohen gadol*?
7. What is the penalty of *karet*?
8. Which categories of animals must have their blood covered when they are slaughtered?
9. What is the difference between "*mishpat*" and "*chok*"?
10. May a man marry his wife's sister?

KEDOSHIM

1. Why was *Parshat Kedoshim* said in front of all the Jewish

People?

2. Why does the Torah mention the duty to honor one's father before it mentions the duty to honor one's mother?
3. Why is the command to fear one's parents followed by the command to keep Shabbat?
4. The Torah obligates one to leave the "*leket*" for the poor. What is "*leket*"?
5. In *Shemot* 20:13, the Torah commands, "Do not steal." What does the Torah add when it commands in *Vayikra* 19:11 "Do not steal"?
6. In verse 19:13, the Torah commands, "Do not wrong your neighbor." To what "wrong" is the Torah referring?
7. When rebuking someone, what sin must one be careful to avoid?
8. How does one fulfill the command "*v'hadarta p'nei zakein*"?
9. What punishment will never come to the entire Jewish People?
10. When the Torah states a death penalty but doesn't define it precisely, to which type of death penalty is it referring?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

ACHAREI MOT

1. 16:1 - To strengthen the warning not to enter the Holy of Holies except on Yom Kippur.
2. 16:3 - 410 years.
3. 16:4 - Only the four linen garments worn by an ordinary *kohen*.
4. 16:4 - Five times.
5. 16:8 - A jagged cliff.
6. 16:23 - They must be put into *geniza* and not be used again.
7. 17:9 - The person's life is shortened and his offspring die.
8. 17:13 - Non-domestic kosher animals and all species of kosher birds.
9. 18:4 - A "*mishpat*" conforms to the human sense of justice. A "*chok*" is a law whose reason is not given to us and can only be understood as Hashem's decree.
10. 18:18 - Not during his wife's lifetime.

KEDOSHIM

1. 19:2 - Because it contains the fundamental teachings of the Torah.
2. 19:3 - Since it is more natural to honor one's mother, the Torah stresses the obligation to honor one's father.
3. 19:3 - To teach that one must not violate Torah law even at the command of one's parents.
4. 19:9 - "*Leket*" is one or two stalks of grain that are accidentally dropped while harvesting.
5. 19:11 - The Torah in *Vayikra* prohibits monetary theft. In *Shemot* it prohibits kidnapping.
6. 19:13 - Withholding wages from a worker.
7. 19:17 - Causing embarrassment.
8. 19:32 - By not sitting in their seat nor contradicting them.
9. 20:3 - "*Karet*" — the entire Jewish People will never be "cut off."
10. 20:10 - "*Chenek*" (strangulation).

- Immersion of vessels for purification while one is in the other
- Are there ten or eleven different levels of purity in the Mishna
- Maintaining peaceful relations between the learned and unlearned
- Borrowing a vessel from one not careful re laws of purity
- Rabbi Yehoshua's criticism of Beit Shammai and his subsequent contrition
- Degree of credibility of the unlearned in regard to purity
- Parts of a vessel and how the impurity of one affects the entire vessel
- Which decrees were made because of what once happened on a boat crossing the Jordan River
- Why a vessel completed in purity requires purification for sacred use
- The Sages versus the Tzedukim separatists on the issue of the Red Heifer
- When the entire contents of a vessel become impure because of a part of it
- How far can impurity be transferred both in sacrificial matter and *terumah*
- One impure hand affecting the other
- When and where everyone can be relied upon re purity of wine and oil
- The contaminating corridor between Judea and Galilee
- Checking a field for remnants of a grave
- Where clay vessels may be acquired with no fear of impurity
- Starting a sale during Festival and continuing afterwards
- Purifying the Sanctuary after Festival and the status of the altar
- Miracle of the ever-fresh showbreads
- The table of today like the altar of old
- The resistance to Gehinnom fire of the scholar and sinner

CONTRITE SAGE AT THE GRAVE

When Rabbi Yeshoshua expressed sharp disapproval of a halachic ruling of an earlier generation of the Beit Shammai sages, he used the term "I am ashamed of your words Beit Shammai." The rationale for that ruling was subsequently explained to him by one of the contemporary sages of that Talmudic academy. A contrite Rabbi Yehoshua then prostrated himself before the graves of the Beit Shammai sages and begged for forgiveness.

This scene of a contrite sage at the grave recalls an incident related in the previous *perek* of the *mesechta*. The Sage Yehuda ben Tabai sentenced to death a witness whose testimony in a capital case had been totally discredited by witnesses who testified that he had been with them elsewhere at the time he claimed to have seen the crime committed. This sage was implementing the Torah command to punish such a false witness with the penalty he had attempted to inflict on the defendant. He was particularly anxious to make this implementation despite the fact that a defendant had not

been executed in order to demonstrate the true Torah position of the sages in opposition to the view of the Tzedukim separatists who held that the punishment was due only if the defendant had been executed on the basis of false testimony.

In his haste, however, he overlooked the fact that no false witness is liable for such retribution unless the entire witness team was discredited, which was not so in this case. Accused by a fellow sage of shedding innocent blood, he would prostrate himself before the grave of the executed witness and beg forgiveness. At such times a wailing voice was heard, which people assumed was that of the dead witness. The Sage Yehuda ben Tabai, however, insisted that it was his own voice and would continue to be heard until he died.

In the case of Rabbi Yehoshua, there seems to also have been a lifelong effort to gain forgiveness from the Beit Shammai sages. It was said that his teeth had turned black from the fasting he did as repentance for his sharp words.

• *Chagigah* 22b

WHAT THE Sages SAY

"When there was a *Beit Hamikdash* the altar achieved atonement for sin, but now it is a person's table (through hospitality to the needy – Rashi) which atones for him."

• *Rabbi Yochanan and Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish - Chagigah* 27a

DIVIDED WE STAND

From: Bruce Hammer in Manti, Utah

Dear Rabbi,
I noticed the divider at the Kotel through the Western Wall camera. What is the purpose of this division? Why is the wall divided into two sections? Thanks.

From: David Salvadori in Italy

Dear Rabbi,
Please tell me, why can men and women not stay near each other in the synagogue? Somebody told me that it is because women can disturb men during the prayer with their voices. Is this the answer or there are other matters? Where in the Torah is such a rule written?

Dear Bruce and David,

The division at the Kotel, as well as in the synagogue, is to separate between men and women during prayer. The purpose of this division is to ensure that both men and women focus on the purpose of their being there — to nurture their relationship with G-d through prayer — without possible distractions resulting from the social nature of mixed gatherings of men and women.

The law requiring such a separation, called a “*mechitzah*”, is mentioned in the Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Succah 51b, 52a. There are a number of reasons given for this separation between men and women during prayer:

One: In order not to cause those who are unmarried to feel left out. If the prayer was mixed, married couples would naturally sit together, and since married people are by nature of their situation fixed in the community, the service would be more “couple friendly” which might alienate singles.

Separate seating eliminates this marital bias.

Two: We come to synagogue to relate to G-d as members of the Jewish people to our Creator, not as fathers or mothers, husbands or wives, sons or daughters, brothers or sisters. The “*mechitzah*” ensures that entire families do not sit together, thereby minimizing a more limited familial affiliation to Judaism and emphasizing the larger dimension of congregation and peoplehood.

Three: To prevent an atmosphere of socializing and conversation during prayer. As much as there is a tendency for socializing *among* the sexes, there is an exponentially greater tendency for socializing *between* the sexes. The separation between men and women helps keep the natural human need to socialize to a minimum during times devoted to the Divine.

Four: To ensure modesty and purity of intent during prayer. Both men and women are likely to be distracted from prayer in the presence of members of the opposite gender, to whom there is a natural attraction. Sometimes this may be the case regarding even married people, but it is certainly applicable regarding singles. The holy rituals of the synagogue and of the services are not to be intermingled with courting rituals, which can push their way even into such a context if allowed. The “*mechitzah*” therefore enables people to cultivate an intimate relationship with G-d during prayer, without being distracted by an interest in relationships with the opposite gender.

After communing with G-d in the synagogue — independent of marital status, as a people, in prayer, and focused without distractions — we then return to our homes, which is the place where the appropriate mixing of men and women occurs, namely that of the family. Perhaps this dual decorum — that of the house of prayer and that of the home — is alluded to in the verse, “How goodly are your tents, Jacob; your dwelling places, Israel.” It is this decorum that ensures the spiritual and physical purity of the Jewish people.

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

THE PRICE OF PEACE

Closing in a porch with metal bars is a common practice in Israel in buildings with many apartments. Such a fence keeps little children in and cats out.

When a family on the ground floor in the Torah-observant town of Kiryat Sefer decided to close in its porch, it ran into opposition from the neighbor on the second floor. He expressed fear that the fence would enable a thief to climb up to his porch and break into his home.

This standoff led to a breakdown in the otherwise friendly neighborly relations. To the rescue came the neighbor on the third floor who offered to share with his protesting neighbor the cost of closing in his own porch to protect his

home against burglars. Thus came to a happy end the battle of the porches.

But this is not the end!

A short while after the porches on the first and second floors were completed, a fire broke out on the third floor in the apartment of the fellow who brought peace to his building. The firemen who arrived on the scene were unsuccessful in breaking down the security door to the apartment but found an alternate route by climbing up the bars surrounding the porches of the two apartments below. The peace initiative of the resident of that third floor apartment thus saved his home from destruction.

DANGEROUS COMPANY

Question: I sometimes find myself in the company of colleagues or friends who begin talking derisively about other people. Since I try to avoid transgressing the Torah ban on *lashon hara*, what is the right thing to do in such a case?

Answer: In his book "Give Us Life" Rabbi Mendel Weinbach tells this story about the saintly Chafetz Chaim (Rabbi Israel Meir Kagan, 1838-1933), whose writings had such a great impact on getting people to guard their tongues:

"Traveling incognito as was his custom while selling books he had authored, the Chafetz Chaim once shared a carriage with butchers and horse traders on their way to a fair. While they spoke of the animals, which was their business, he sat immersed

in his thoughts. But when one of them began to speak derisively about another trader, the Chafetz Chaim reproved them about the sin of lashon hara and urged them to continue discussing animals rather than people. Despite their insults he continued to reprimand them, for he consoled himself that while they insulted him they were not indulging in gossip. But when all else failed to quiet them, he asked the driver to let him off in the middle of the way so that he would not have to hear them talk about people."

You may not be in the same position as the Chafetz Chaim to do the required reprimanding, but you can take a hint from him and find a way to change the subject or come up with an excuse to leave their company.

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