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PARSHA INSIGHTS

Devarim

STORMY WEATHER

“The L-rd, your G-d, has multiplied you and behold! You are like the stars of heaven in abundance.” (1:10)

The stars are only visible when the sky is clear. On a cloudy night, they fade from view and shed no light on this world.

A flame, on the other hand, shines through mist and cloud and fog. It penetrates the gloom to make itself seen.

Thus it is with the Jewish People.

When we dwell in tranquility we shine like the stars. However, when the storm clouds of history blacken our skies, then our luster is dimmed and fades to black.

This is the picture we see today.

Have you ever seen Orthodox Jews look anything other than weird in the media? Why is that? Why is it that only Muslims look exotic and picturesque against all those Lawrence of Arabia sand dunes? Why is it that the lens loves every Eastern cult, whereas the People of the Book are singularly unphotogenic? Why do we seem parochial and rather shabby when exposed to the glare of the TV's gaze?

Our Sages teach that the Jewish People will experience four exiles. These exiles are hinted to in the very opening lines of the Torah. “And the Land was formless (Babylon) and void (Persia/Medea) and darkness (Greece) on the face of the deep (Rome).” Since the Torah is the blueprint of the world, something written at the very beginning of the blueprint indicates that these exiles are a fundamental process in the history of the world.

The first of these four kingdoms took the kingship from the Jewish People. Each empire has successively grabbed the mantle of power from its predecessor. Ultimately the fourth empire, the empire of Esav/Rome and its current heirs, will return kingship to the Jewish People. Until that time, however, the fourth kingdom has the power of the kingship and all its trappings: It writes the songs of the world, for music is a scion of kingship: King David, the

prototype of all kings, is called the ‘sweet singer of Israel’. But the lyre of David breathes the songs of majesty no more.

When the Jewish People went into this last exile, the exile of Rome, the Temple songs of the *Levi'im* were silenced. The Romans took that music and made it serve a new master. It resurfaced hundreds of years later as the Gregorian chants of the church.

If music and religion are but two aspects of imperial cultural domination, television is the ultimate form of this thrall. Television is the dream factory that allows the ruling power to foist its world-view on its vassal states. It places the minds of its subjects in a cultural iron mask. Wherever you can put up a satellite antenna and beam down a Big Mac from the sky — there the empire rules.

The Romans built the best roads in the world. But if they were alive today, they would be producing sitcoms. Television is an instrument of kingship. The kingship is not ours at the moment. This is not just a physical reality; it's a mystical reality. It means that when we attempt, as the Jewish People, to take hold of the reins of kingship, be that music or the television, we must inevitably look ridiculous and fail.

The Kingdom of Heaven is mirrored in the kingdom of Earth. The Jewish People are in their darkest exile and the Divine Presence is in that exile with us. This is an exile of such totality that most of us don't even realize that we are in exile. We have almost totally accepted upon ourselves the yoke of the empire, its icons and its ideas. We are glued to their visions. We wear their clothes. We think their thoughts.

Very soon, however, the Jewish People will be a torch; nothing will prevent our radiance from breaking through the gloom to light up the world. No power will be able to extinguish our light and no decree will be able to stifle the brilliance of our love for our Father in Heaven.

• Sources: Based on the *Midrash Rabba* and *Divrei Sha'arie Chaim*

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Devarim

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.

Va’etchanan

Although Moshe is content that Yehoshua will lead the nation, Moshe nevertheless prays to enter the Land of Israel in order to fulfill its special *mitzvot*. Hashem refuses. Moshe reminds *Bnei Yisrael* of the gathering at Sinai when they received the Torah — that they saw no visual representation of the Divine, but only the sound of words. Moshe impresses on *Bnei Yisrael* that the Sinai revelation took place before an entire nation, not to a select elite, and that only the Jews will ever claim that Hashem spoke to their entire nation. Moshe specifically enjoins *Bnei*

Yisrael to “pass over” the Sinai event to their children throughout all generations.

Moshe predicts, accurately, that when *Bnei Yisrael* dwell in *Eretz Yisrael* they will sin and be scattered among all the peoples. They will stay few in number but will eventually return to Hashem.

Moshe designates three “refuge cities” to which an inadvertent killer may flee. Moshe repeats the 10 Commandments and then teaches the *Shema*, the central credo of Judaism, that there is only One G-d. Moshe warns the people not to succumb to materialism and thus forget their purpose as a spiritual nation. The *parsha* ends with Moshe exhorting *Bnei Yisrael* not to intermarry when they enter *Eretz Yisrael*, as they cannot be a treasured and holy nation if they intermarry, and they will become indistinguishable from the other nations.

Ekev

If *Bnei Yisrael* carefully observe even those “minor” *mitzvot* that are usually “trampled” underfoot, Moshe promises them that they will be the most blessed of the nations of earth. Moshe tells *Bnei Yisrael* that they will conquer *Eretz Canaan* little by little, so that the land will not be overrun by wild animals in the hiatus before *Bnei Yisrael* are able to organize and settle the whole land. After again warning *Bnei Yisrael* to burn all carved idols of Canaanite gods, Moshe stresses that the Torah is indivisible and not open to partial observance. Moshe describes the Land of Israel as a land of wheat, barley, grapes, figs, and pomegranates, a land of oil-yielding olives and date-honey. Moshe cautions *Bnei Yisrael* not to become haughty and think that their success in *Eretz Yisrael* is a result of their own powers or vigor; rather, it was Hashem who gave them wealth and success. Nor did Hashem drive out the Canaanites because of *Bnei Yisrael*’s righteousness, but rather because of the sins of the Canaanites; for the road from Sinai had been a catalogue of large and small sins and rebellions against Hashem and Moshe. Moshe details the events after Hashem spoke the 10 Commandments at Sinai, culminating in his bringing down the second set of Tablets on Yom Kippur. Aharon’s passing is recorded as is the elevation of the *levi’im* to Hashem’s ministers. Moshe points out that the 70 souls who went down to Egypt have now become like the stars of the heaven in abundance. After specifying the great virtues of the Land of Israel,

Moshe speaks the second paragraph of the *Shema*, conceptualizing the blessings that accompany keeping *mitzvot* and the curse that results from non-observance.

Re’eh

Moshe presents to the nation the blessing of a spiritually oriented life, and the curse of becoming disconnected from Hashem. When the nation enters *Eretz Yisrael* they must burn down any trees that had been used for idol-worship, and destroy all idolatrous statues. Hashem will choose only one place where the Divine Presence will dwell. Offerings may be brought only there; not to a private altar. Moshe repeatedly warns against eating animal blood. In the desert, all meat was slaughtered in the Mishkan, but in *Eretz Yisrael* meat may be shechted anywhere. Moshe lists the categories of food that may only be eaten in Jerusalem. He warns the nation against copying ways of the other nations. Since the Torah is complete and perfect, nothing may be added or subtracted from it. If a “prophet” tells the people to permanently abandon a Torah law or indulge in idol worship, he is to be put to death. One who entices others to worship idols is to be put to death. A city of idolatry must be razed. It is prohibited to show excessive signs of mourning, such as marking the skin or making a bald spot. Moshe reiterates the classifications of kosher and non-kosher food and the prohibition of cooking meat and milk. Produce of the second tithe must be eaten in Jerusalem, and if the amount is too large to carry, it may be exchanged for money with which food is bought in Jerusalem. In certain years this tithe is given to the poor. *Bnei Yisrael* are instructed to always be open-hearted, and in the seventh year any loans must be discounted — Hashem will bless the person in all ways. A Jewish bondsman is released after six years, and must be sent away with generous provisions. If he refuses to leave, his ear is pierced with an awl at the door post and he remains a bondsman until the Jubilee year. The Parsha ends with a description of the three pilgrimage festivals of Pesach, Shavuot and Succot.

Shoftim

Moshe tells *Bnei Yisrael* to appoint judges and officers in their cities. A bribe of even an insignificant sum is forbidden. Trees are not to be planted near Hashem’s altar, as was the way of idolaters.

- The disqualification of the merciless Givonites
- Status of the *sariss* (eunuch) regarding *yibum*
- Rabbi Akiva's position on who is considered a *mamzer*
- The late maturing boy or girl and the physical signs of a *sariss* and *ailonit* (female eunuch)
- The status of the wife of a *kohen* who is a *sariss* or whose gender is in doubt
- Whether *terumah* today is required by Torah or rabbinical law
- When something loses its halachic status because it is mixed with a large quantity of permissible matter
- Status of the *androgenes* (hermaphrodite) and the *tumtum* (whose gender is undetermined)
- Grafting of trees before the *shemittah* year
- Women permitted to their husband but forbidden to the *yavam* and vice versa
- Feminine "equality" in regard to forbidden marriages and the exception for daughter of a *kohen*
- What rights has the woman who is a partner to a forbidden marriage
- Who is considered the inciter of a forbidden marriage and why

INNATE OR ENDOWED?

“There are three characteristics which distinguish the Jewish People — they are merciful, they are bashful and they are performers of acts of kindness.”

This is how King David described his people to the Givonites who demanded the execution of seven sons of King Saul as revenge for their suffering at his hand.

“Only one who has these three characteristics,” he concluded, “is fit to attach himself to our people.”

Since the unreasonable demand of the Givonites demonstrated that they lacked these characteristics, David ruled that they would have the special status of *netinim* and would be limited in their marriage eligibility within the Jewish People.

Although the impression gained here is that all these characteristics are in the “genes” of the Jews, it is pointed out by Maharsha that this is not the case. It is true that G-d testified that the Patriarch Avraham would pass on to his posterity a legacy of lovingkindness (*Bereishet* 18:19) but the other attributes were unique gifts of G-d to His chosen people. “He will endow you with a capacity for being merciful”

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WHAT THE Sages SAY

“When it was seen that was done to appease the Givonite converts for the harm done to them, 150,000 non-Jews decided upon conversion to Judaism.”

• Rabbi Shimon ben Yehatzodok - *Yevamot* 79a

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Blemishes in animals designated for offerings and other points of disqualification are listed. The Great Sanhedrin is to make binding decisions on new situations according to Torah criteria to prevent the fragmentation of the Torah. A very learned scholar who refuses to accept the Halachic decisions of the Sanhedrin incurs the death penalty. A Jewish king may only have possessions and symbols of power commensurate with the honor of his office, but not for self-aggrandizement. He is to write for himself two *sifrei Torah*, one to be kept with him wherever he goes, so that he doesn't become haughty. Neither the *kohanim* nor the *levi'im* are to inherit land in the Land of Israel, rather they are to be supported by the community by a system of tithes. All divination is prohibited. Hashem promises the Jewish People that He will send them prophets to guide them, and Moshe explains how a genuine prophet may be distinguished from a false one. Cities of refuge are to be provided

an accidental killer to escape the blood-avenger from the deceased's family. However, someone who kills with malice is to be handed over to the blood-avenger. Moshe cautions *Bnei Yisrael* not to move boundary markers to increase their property. Two witnesses who conspire to “frame” a third party are to be punished with the very same punishment that they conspired to bring upon the innocent party. A *kohen* is to be anointed specifically for when Israel goes to war, to instill trust in Hashem. Among those disqualified from going to war is anyone who has built a new house but not lived in it yet, or anyone who is fearful or fainthearted. An enemy must be given the chance to make peace, but if they refuse, all the males are to be killed. Fruit trees are to be preserved and not cut down during the siege. If a corpse is found between cities, the elders of the nearest city must take a heifer, slaughter it, and wash their hands over it, saying that they are not guilty of the death.

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(*Devarim* 13:18) was a special gift from G-d, as was the bashfulness that came along with the gift of Torah (*Shmot* 20:17).

• *Yevamot* 79a

PROHIBITION OR NULLIFICATION

The prohibition against a *yivamah* marrying an outsider is phrased in a manner that lends itself to two interpretations.

“The wife of the deceased” says the Torah (*Devarim* 25:5) “shall not be married outside the family to a stranger.”

The interpretation of the Sage Rav is that this is the Torah’s way of saying that any marriage with an outsider will be null and void with no divorce required to end it. Although the general rule, according to the majority position of the Sages, is that a marriage forbidden by a prohibition punishable only by lashes is considered as having force and requiring a divorce to end it, an outsider marrying a *yivamah* is an exception.

This position is disputed by the Sage Shmuel who rules that such a marriage may indeed have force and that a divorce is required to end it. The explanation of his position is that he is in doubt as to whether the words “shall not be married” are to be understood like Rav’s position that this is a nullification of the force of such a marriage or merely a prohibition against such a marriage which would leave it in the general category of forbidden marriages which are in force and require a divorce.

Tosefot (*Yevamot* 49b) points out that, contrary to the impression gained from the words of Rashi, Rav agrees that there is definitely a prohibition against a *yivamah* marrying an outsider but the phrasing of the prohibition also indicates

that such a marriage has no force and requires no divorce.

• *Yevamot* 92b

THE DANGER OF ANGER

The failure of his disciple, Rabbi Elazar, to cite him as the source for an important ruling that he publicly announced caused great anguish to Rabbi Yochanan.

In an effort to calm his anger at what he saw as an inappropriate act by his disciple, a couple of Rabbi Yochanan’s other leading disciples reminded him of a tragedy that had resulted from a lack of peaceful relations between the Sages.

It took place in a synagogue in Tiveriah where there was a heated debate concerning some halachic matter. So passionate were Rabbi Elazar and Rabbi Yossi in expounding their conflicting positions that the Sefer Torah from which they were studying became torn as a result of each one pulling it towards himself.

When Rabbi Yossi ben Kisma saw this he prophetically commented that he would not be surprised if that synagogue eventually turned into a house of idol worship. And so it was!

Maharsha explains that this was a vindication of what our Sages say (*Nedarim* 22b) that “One who becomes angry gives no recognition to the Divine Presence.” Once the Divine Presence is thus removed, the path is cleared for idol worship.

It may be suggested that this incident, which dramatically teaches a vital lesson regarding the danger of anger, is also an expression of the oft-quoted equation made by our Sages in the Zohar and *midrashim* between anger and idol worship.

• *Yevamot* 96b

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TWO PILLARS FOR A LONGER LIFE

“I have therefore sworn concerning the House of Eli that the sin of the House of Eli will never be atoned for through animal sacrifice or meal offering.” (*Shmuel* 13:14)

This was the severe judgment passed by Heaven on the descendants of the *Kohen Gadol* Eli because of the disgraceful manner in which his two sons conducted themselves in regard to the sacrifices offered in the Sanctuary at Shiloh. The result was that all of his descendants passed away at a very young age.

Two exceptions were the Sages Rabbah and Abaye. The first lived more than double the age of the other descendants and passed away at the age of forty while the latter lived until sixty.

“Sacrifices and meal offerings cannot achieve atonement,” explained Rabbah, “but the study of Torah can.”

Abaye gave a similar explanation for his comparative longevity but added to Torah study the merit of doing acts of lovingkindness.

Maharsha calls our attention to the *mishna* in *Pirkei Avot* (1:2) which states that “The world stands on three things: the study of Torah, the offering of sacrifices and the acts of lovingkindness.” Since the sons of Eli profaned the sacrifices it was impossible for such service to atone for their sin because the prosecutor cannot serve as a defender. This left the other two pillars — Torah study and lovingkindness — as the remaining channels for achieving atonement.

While Rabbah put a greater stress on Torah study than on

lovingkindness, he was given only twenty extra years. His disciple Abaye managed to excel in both Torah study and lovingkindness and thus gained a prolongation of forty years.

• *Yevamot 105a*

STUDYING, DOING AND TEACHING

“One who declares that he serves G-d only with his Torah study has nothing more to his credit than Torah study.”

This seemingly simplistic statement of Rabbi Yossi is explained by the *gemara* in two radically different ways.

One approach is based on Rabbi Papa’s interpretation of the passage (*Devarim* 5:11) “You shall learn them (the laws of the Torah) and keep and do them” as indicating that only one who acts in accordance with his learning is considered as having acquired the merit of Torah. It follows then that one who limits his service of G-d to only Torah study lacks the merit of that service as well.

Another approach is that Rabbi Yossi was addressing the fellow who teaches others to fulfill the commandment that he does not and assumes that he will be credited with their performance. According to this more generous approach he will indeed receive credit for his Torah study but not for the actual performance of the *mitzvot* that he expects to be credited to him.

We might add that if he does those same *mitzvot* as well as teaching about them he will be credited as well with the performance of his students.

• *Yevamot 109b*

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

GET A SWEATER

A funny thing happened to me on the way out of the synagogue. A fellow worshipper came over to me to apologize for what he imagined had been an offense to me.

“If you heard me loudly say the name ‘Weinbach,’” he said, “let me explain what it was about.”

To appreciate his delightful explanation I must mention that my rebbetzin runs the very active “Begged

Yad Leyad” used clothing *Gemach* centers to enable needy families to acquire good quality second-hand clothes with token payments.

“Someone was complaining that the air-conditioning was making the synagogue too cold,” my neighbor continued, “so I told him ‘if you are too cold just go over to the Weinbach place and get a sweater’.”

LEST WE FORGET

BY RABBI MENDEL WEINBACH

What do we get from Tisha B'Av? We Jews have a long memory. Something that happened almost two thousand years ago comes back to haunt our collective consciousness as if it happened yesterday.

This is what so impressed the French ruler Napoleon Bonaparte when he looked in on a synagogue in Paris on Tisha B'Av and saw Jews sitting on the floor chanting lamentations and shedding tears. After inquiring about the cause for their mourning and hearing that it was the destruction of their Holy Temple in Jerusalem he expressed astonishment that he had heard nothing about this tragedy from his reliable intelligence sources. When it was explained that this event took place close to 1800 years earlier he reportedly declared that a people who can still mourn for their Temple and their homeland after so many years have a real hope for regaining them.

Napoleon distinguished something unique about the long memory of the Jewish people but could not truly understand its meaning.

A Jew mourns the fall of Jerusalem, the destruction of the *Beit Hamikdash* and the two thousand year exile that followed not out of a sense of nostalgia for the glory and prosperity of bygone days. For a Jew loyal to his conviction that he is the proud member of “a nation of priests and a holy people” who were chosen to receive the Torah at Sinai and to serve as “a light unto the nations” there is much more involved in remembering the past.

Rambam points out (Laws of Fasting 5:1) that the purpose of the fast days which were ordained by our Prophets is to reflect on the mistakes made by our ancestors which were the catalysts for the tragedies which took place on those days mistakes which we perpetuate in our own days. By learning the lesson of history we can hope to avoid repeating it as we take to heart the need to correct those mistakes and fully return to the lofty spiritual level with which we once served our Creator.

Such a full return requires the return of all of our people to our Holy Land and the return of a *Beit Hamikdash* in which we can encounter the Divine Presence and beam its rays of holiness to an entire world. As long as we lack these indispensable ingredients for our spiritual perfection we feel the pain of being unfulfilled in regard to our historic destiny and we weep!

But weeping and fasting are only the beginning of what Rambam calls “an opening of the heart” to a correcting of

the mistakes of past and present. On Tisha B'Av both the first *Beit Hamikdash* and the second one were destroyed. Reflecting on those tragedies leads to an analysis of the sins that were responsible for both of those tragedies.

The first *Beit Hamikdash*, say our Talmudic Sages, was lost because of the grave sins of idol worship, sexual immorality and murder. These are sins that repeat themselves in every generation in gross or subtle forms. We may not be living in a time when Jews bow down to actual idols, but how many of our people have abandoned their ancient faith for other religions, cults or political ideologies? And do we share in their guilt by failing to properly reach out and educate them? Immorality parades before us in the permissiveness of dress and unrestrained interaction of the sexes. Have we done enough to condemn this mode of behavior that is wreaking havoc on so many families and society in general? Murder is the extremist form of violence but its subtler forms of physical and verbal abuse are so prominent that even in the secular schools in our Jewish state there is so much violence by pupils towards teachers and fellow pupils, and the number of battered wives and abused children keeps growing.

Are our government and our educational system doing enough to control this modern form of murder?

During the second *Beit Hamikdash* period these mistakes were corrected because the trauma of a 70-year exile shocked our ancestors into repentance. But something else went wrong. The rebuilt *Beit Hamikdash* was once again destroyed and we were once again exiled because of the sin of “unjustified hatred” of one Jew for another. Two millennia of fasting for this mistake have still not completely cured us. Lack of tolerance, aggressive competitiveness and destructive dissension continue to plague our families and our communities. The lesson we must learn from our fasting on this Tisha B'Av if we wish to build a glorious future rather than relive the consequences of ignoring history is that we must individually and collectively eliminate from our lives all of the aforementioned sins. Faith, morality and concern for human life and dignity must eradicate the sins that caused the first destruction. Unlimited love for our fellow Jew must replace the intolerance and hatred that caused our present exile.

If we do our part in committing ourselves to this goal we can be sure that G-d will do His part and send *Mashiach* to return all of us to our land, build the *Beit Hamikdash* and turn the sad day of Tisha B'Av into a day of celebration.

THE CATALYST

The purpose of fasting on Tisha B'Av, which falls this week, writes Rambam, is to inspire us to mend our ways. This is achieved, he points out, by recalling what happened on this day and why. By recalling the sins of our ancestors that brought about the destruction of the *Beit Hamikdash* we are shocked into an awareness that we are perpetuating their sinful ways in some manner. The realization that this could lead to tragedy in our own day is the expected catalyst for a return to G-d.

It has already been observed that those who refuse to learn from history are condemned to relive it. We fast on Tisha B'Av and on the other three days connected with national tragedy in order to apply the lessons of the past to securing our future.

Lest we forget what happened, we starve our bodies on these days to feed our souls and gain the inspiration to improve and to secure Israel forever.

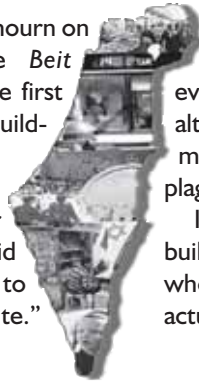
LOVE OF THE LAND - THE PLACES

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

GOREN ARAVNA – BEGINNING OF THE BEIT HAMIKDASH

As Jews throughout the world prepare to mourn on Tisha B'Av the destruction of the *Beit Hamikdash*, our attention is drawn to the first step taken for the establishment of that sacred building.

When a plague struck the Jewish people as punishment for the census conducted by their king, a message from G-d was conveyed to David by the Prophet Gad: "Go up and build an altar to G-d on the threshing floor of Aravna the Jebusite."



(Shmuel II 24:18)

King David was welcomed by Aravna who offered everything he needed for building and equipping such an altar. But David insisted on purchasing the site and the animals that were sacrificed upon it, bringing an end to the plague.

It was on this purchased site that the *Beit Hamikdash* was built by David's son. This is one of three sites, say our Sages, whose Jewish ownership cannot be disputed since it was actually purchased.

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PARSHA Q&A ?

Devarim

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 Devarim'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.

PARSHA Q&A ?

Va'etchanan

1. "And I prayed to G-d at that time." Why "at that time"?
2. What characteristic trait is represented by G-d's "strong hand"?
3. What is ha'levanon?
4. What did G-d tell Yehoshua after the battle of Ai?
5. What will happen if the Jewish People fail to keep the mitzvot properly?
6. How did the decree that Moshe not enter the Land affect him even in death?
7. What is hinted by the word *v'noshantem*?
8. Why were the Jewish People exiled two years earlier than indicated by Moshe's prophecy?
9. "You'll serve man-made gods." Is this literal?
10. Why is east called mizrach?
11. "Keep the Shabbat day as I have commanded you." When had G-d previously commanded us to keep Shabbat?
12. Where did the Jewish People first receive the command to honor parents?
13. What is meant by "The L-rd, our G-d, the L-rd is One"?
14. What are two meanings of loving G-d "with all your might"?
15. How well-versed must one be in Torah?
16. Where does the word *totafot* come from?
17. Who is fit to swear in G-d's name?
18. What does it mean that the Jews are the "smallest nation"?
19. When someone serves G-d with love, how many generations receive reward?
20. Why are evil-doers rewarded in this world?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to Va'etchanan's Questions!

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

1. 3:23 - Defeating Sichon and Og, whose lands were part of Eretz Canaan, Moshe thought perhaps Hashem had annulled the vow against his entering the Land.
2. 3:24 - His willingness to forgive.
3. 3:25 - Ha'levanon means the *Beit Hamikdash*, which makes "white" (*lavan*), i.e., atones for, the Jewish People.
4. 3:28 - Yehoshua must lead the army into battle.
5. 4:9 - The non-Jewish world will regard them as foolish.
6. 4:22 - Even his remains weren't buried in the Land.
7. 4:25 - The gematria of *v'noshantem*, 852, hints at the number of years until the first exile.
8. 4:25 - So that the rest of the prophecy "that you shall utterly perish" would not be fulfilled.
9. 4:28 - No. It means you'll serve others who serve idols.
10. 4:41 - It's the direction from which the sun shines (mizrach means shining).
11. 5:13 - Before Matan Torah, at Marah. (Shmot 15:25)
12. 5:16 - At Marah. (Shmot 15:25).
13. 6:4 - The L-rd, who is now our G-d, but not [accepted as] G-d of the other nations, will eventually be [accepted as] the one and only G-d.
14. 6:5 - 1) With everything you own. 2) Whether G-d treats you with kindness or harshness.
15. 6:7 - If asked a Torah question, one should be able to reply quickly and clearly.
16. 6:8 - Tot means two in Caspi. Fot means two in Afriki. Together they allude to the four sections of tefillin.
17. 6:13 - One who serves G-d and reveres His name.
- 7:7 - B'nei Yisrael are the humblest nation.
- 7:9 - 2,000.
- 7:10 - So that they get no reward in the next world.

Ekev

1. What must the Jewish People do to ensure that G-d will fulfill His promise to do good for us?
2. What were the: a. wonders b. strong hand c. outstretched arm that the Jewish People saw in Egypt?
3. When a group performs a *mitzvah*, whose name is attached to the *mitzvah*?
4. How did the Jewish People do their laundry in the *midbar*?
5. How did the Jewish People obtain clothing for their growing children in the *midbar*?
6. How many days did Moshe spend on Mt. Sinai altogether?
7. On what day did Moshe come down from Mt. Sinai having received complete forgiveness for the Jewish People?
8. How was Aharon punished for his role in the golden calf?
9. Who made the ark in which Moshe placed the second set of tablets? What special function did it later serve?
10. Which sin of the Jewish People was prompted by the death of Aharon?
11. Why were the *levi'im* chosen by G-d?
12. Why do the *levi'im* have no portion in the land?
13. All aspects of man's life are in G-d's "hands" except one. What is this?
14. What is the "added benefit" of observing the *mitzvot*?
15. What is meant by circumcising one's heart?
16. What are the sources of water for the fields of Egypt and *Eretz Yisrael*?
17. What path does the Torah prescribe for gaining new knowledge?
18. Which activity is "serving G-d with the heart"?
19. When the Jewish People sin, why are they considered worse than the generation of the flood?
20. How does one "cleave to G-d"?

Answers to Ekev's Questions!

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

1. 7:12 - Guard even the "light" commandments.
2. 7:19 - The: a. Plagues; b. Pestilence; c. Slaying of the firstborn.
3. 8:1 - The person who finishes it.
4. 8:4 - The *ananei kavod* (clouds of glory) cleaned and bleached their clothes.
5. 8:4 - As their children grew, their clothing grew with them.
6. 9:18 - 120 days.
7. 9:18 - The tenth of Tishrei, Yom Kippur.
8. 9:20 - His two sons died.
9. 10:1 - Moshe. This ark would accompany the Jewish People into battle.
10. 10:6-7 - When Aharon died the *ananei kavod* departed, causing many Jews to fear war with the King of Arad and to retreat toward Egypt.
11. 10:8 - Because they did not participate in the sin of the golden calf.
12. 10:9 — Since they served in the Temple, thus they were not free to work the land.
13. 10:12 - Fear of Heaven, which is dependent upon the person.
14. 10:13 - There is reward.
15. 10:16 - To remove those things that block the words of Torah from entering.
16. 11:10 - Egypt is irrigated by manually carrying water up from the Nile. *Eretz Yisrael* is supplied by rainwater requiring no work on the part of its inhabitants.
17. 11:13 - By repeatedly reviewing what one knows, one more easily acquires new knowledge.
18. 11:13 - Prayer.
19. 11:17 - Because the generation of the flood had no one from whom to learn.
20. 11:22 - Attaching oneself to Torah scholars.

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PARSHA Q&A ?

Re'eh

1. What were the sites designated for the “blessings and the curses” to be pronounced by the people?
2. On what condition will *Bnei Yisrael* receive the blessings from G-d?
3. Why does the Torah use idolatry as an example when describing one who strays from the path that G-d commanded?
4. What was to be the sign for the Jewish People that they would inherit the Land?
5. During the 14 years of the conquest and division of the Land, what types of offerings were permitted on private altars?
6. What must one do with consecrated animals that develop a blemish?
7. In what ways does a consecrated animal that develops a blemish retain a degree of *kedusha* (holiness) even after it has been redeemed?
8. Why was the tribe of Yehuda not permitted to conquer Jerusalem?
9. In consecutive verses, the Torah repeats the prohibition against eating blood. What two types of blood are referred to?
10. Why were the Jewish People allowed to see the extermination of the Canaanites?
11. What forms of idol worship are punishable by death?
12. If a person performs miracles in the name of G-d and then says that the laws of the Torah have been revised, what is done to this person?
13. The Torah says, “to Him (G-d) you shall cleave.” How does one fulfill this command?
14. The trial of a person accused of encouraging others to worship idols differs from the trial of other capital cases. How?
15. Who has the primary responsibility of inflicting the punishment on one who tried to entice others to worship idols?
16. What is the “source” of the Jewish People being an *am kadosh* (holy nation)?
17. How should the Jewish People maintain themselves as an *am kadosh*?
18. What is the order of priority regarding to whom one should give charity?
19. What *mitzvah* recalls the Exodus from Egypt?
20. Which four individuals are under G-d’s “special protection”?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to Re'eh's Questions!

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

1. 11:26 - Mt. Gerizim and Mt. Eval, respectively.
2. 11:27 - On condition that they listen to G-d's commandments.
3. 11:28 - Because those who worship idols are considered as if they have strayed from the entire Torah.
4. 11:31 - The miracles that would occur while crossing the Jordan River.
5. 12:8 - Vow offerings or free-will offerings.
6. 12:15 - They must be redeemed and may then be eaten.
7. 12:15 - Eating it is permitted, but use of its milk or fleece is forbidden.
8. 12:17 - When Avraham bought *ma'arat hamachpelah*, he made a covenant of peace with the Hittites who sold it; his descendants honored this pact regarding the Hittite descendants in Jerusalem.
9. 12:24-25 - Blood that seeps slowly from the incision as soon as the cut is made and again after it no longer gushes. Blood absorbed into the limbs of the animal.
10. 12:30 - To learn not to follow in their depraved ways.
11. 12:30 - Slaughtering or burning a sacrifice on an altar, pouring libations, prostrating oneself, and any normal manner of worshipping that idol.
12. 13:2-6 - He is put to death.
13. 13:5 - One should emulate G-d's actions by performing good deeds, assisting in burying the dead and visiting the sick.
14. 13:10 - If he was acquitted and new information of a condemning nature arises, he is retried. If he was judged guilty, he is not returned to court to plead in his favor.
15. 13:10 - The person whom the guilty one attempted to entice.
16. 14:2 - The *kedusha* is inherited from the *avot*.
17. 14:21 - By avoiding excesses even in permitted matters.
18. 15:7 - The most needy, a brother from one's father, a brother from one's mother, the poor of one's city, the poor of another city.
19. 16:3 - Eating the *korban pesach* and the *matzah* on the night of Pesach.
20. 16:10 - A *levi*, convert, orphan, and widow.

PARSHA Q&A ?

Shoftim

1. What is the role of *shoftim*? What is the role of *shotrim*?
2. What qualifications should one look for when appointing a judge?
3. May a judge accept a bribe if only for the purpose of judging fairly?
4. What is the source for the concept “seek out a good *beit din*”?
5. Although the *avot* built *matzevot*, the Torah later forbade doing so. Why?
6. “You will come to...the judge who will be in those days.” It’s impossible to visit a judge living at a different time, so why must the Torah add these apparently extra words?
7. What does G-d promise a king who doesn’t amass much gold, doesn’t raise many horses and doesn’t marry many wives?
8. How many Torah scrolls must the king have?
9. How was King Shaul punished for disobeying a minor command of the Prophet Shmuel?
10. Certain kosher animals are not included in the law of “*chazeh, shok and keiva*.” Which ones?
11. Families of *kohanim* served in the *Beit Hamikdash* on a rotational basis. When was this rotation system implemented?
12. Which three categories of false prophets are executed?
13. What does it mean to “prepare the way” to the cities of refuge?
14. How many witnesses are meant when the Torah writes the word *eid* (witness)?
15. “Through the mouth of two witnesses....” What types of testimony does this verse invalidate?
16. If witnesses in a capital case are proven to be *zomemim* (false-conspirators) before their intended victim is executed, how are they punished?
17. Why does the section about going to war follow the laws governing witnesses?
18. The Jewish army is warned of four “scare-tactics” the enemy might employ. What are they?
19. When a murder victim is found in a field, who determines which city is closest?
20. What happens if the murderer is found after the calf’s neck was broken?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to Shoftim’s Questions!

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

1. 16:18 - *Shoftim* are judges who pronounce judgment. *Shotrim* are officers who enforce it.
2. 16:18 - That he is expert in the law and that he is righteous.
3. 16:19 - No, because it will sway his judgment.
4. 16:20 - “*Tzedek tzedek tirdof...*”
5. 16:22 - Because the Canaanites used them for idolatry.
6. 17:9 - To teach that although a judge may not be as eminent as judges of previous generations, we must obey him nevertheless.
7. 17:18 - That his kingdom will endure.
8. 17:18 - Two. One stays in his treasury and one he keeps with him.
9. 17:20 - He lost his kingship.
10. 18:3 - *Chayot* (non-domestic-type animals).
11. 18:8 - During the time of David and Shmuel.
12. 18:20 - One who prophesies something he didn’t hear, something told to another prophet, or prophecies in the name of an idol.
13. 19:3 - To post direction signs saying “refuge” at the crossroads.
14. 19:15 - Two, unless otherwise specified.
15. 19:15 - Written testimony and testimony translated from a language which the judges don’t understand.
16. 19:19 - They are put to death.
17. 20:1 - To teach that if the Jewish People execute fair judgment they will be victorious in war.
18. 20:3 - a. Clanging their shields b. Making their horses stomp and whinny c. Shouting d. Blowing horns.
19. 21:2 - The Sanhedrin.
20. 21:9- He is tried and, if guilty, executed.

THE TORAH OF MOSHE

From: Michael Flisser in Atlanta

Dear Rabbi,

How can the idea that Moshe received the entire Torah at Sinai seven weeks after the Exodus be reconciled with the fact that the Torah describes events that took place forty years later? Thank you.

Dear Michael,

You ask an excellent question. This is a fascinating subject that has been addressed by the greatest commentaries of all times. Many verses refer to the Torah as “The Torah of Moshe”, yet none of them describe when Moshe actually wrote the Torah (see Deut. 33:4; Joshua 8:31; 2 Kings 14:6; Malachi 3:22; Nechemiah 8:1; 1 Chronicles 34:14).

The basic answer to your question is that when we say that Moshe received the Torah at Sinai, it doesn’t necessarily mean that he received all the historical accounts and events that had not yet occurred. Nor does it mean that he actually wrote what he received while on the mountain.

Regarding the first point, when the Jewish people encamped at the base of Mount Sinai they heard the first two of the Ten Commandments from G-d Himself. The experience was so spiritually electrifying and intense that they told Moshe that they couldn’t bear hearing more. Rather, he should hear the rest and then teach it to them himself.

Moshe then rose to the top of the Mount, ascending to an even higher spiritual plane. There he communed with G-d for forty days with no food, drink or sleep. Sustained by soul food alone, his body was elevated above the physical world. Like a glowing, red-hot piece of metal, his body appeared more energy than matter; or like an intensely bright lantern, his inner illumination masked all but a wisp of his physical frame.

In this state G-d revealed to him all the teachings and laws of the entire Torah, including the deepest mystical secrets. While this may have included some insights into future events, the main experience was that of becoming consumed within G-d’s Divine Will. After forty days Moshe came down from the heights of Sinai with knowledge of the entire Torah which he then commenced teaching to Joshua, the Elders and the entire people. These oral teachings consisted of the beliefs, morals and laws of the Torah.

Regarding the second point, the Sages differ as to when Moshe in fact wrote what became the first Torah scroll that included the teachings he received at Sinai, together with the events that took place in the desert: “Rabbi Yochanan said, The Torah was given scroll by scroll. Rabbi Shimon ben

Lakish said, The Torah was given sealed” (Gittin 60a).

What this means is that according to both opinions, the Torah was actually written after Sinai as dictated from G-d to Moshe. However, according to Rabbi Yochanan, it was written section by section as events unfolded, when and in the manner G-d dictated to Moshe. Whereas according to Reish Lakish, G-d dictated the Torah to Moshe at one time, at the end of the forty years in the desert.

Ramban, in his introduction to his commentary on the Torah, summarizes the viewpoints as follows. According to Rabbi Yochanan, when Moshe descended from Mt. Sinai he wrote from the beginning of the Torah until the end of the passages about the Mishkan, i.e. the books of Genesis and Exodus. He then wrote the rest of the Torah at the end of the forty years. According to Reish Lakish the entire Torah was written at that later time.

Both opinions account for how the Torah describes events that occurred after Sinai. However there is one exception: The concluding verses of the Torah describing the death of Moshe, his burial and the people’s mourning. If Moshe wrote these verses, he was alive not dead. If he had died, who wrote them? The Talmud explores this very question:

“‘So Moshe, the servant of G-d, died there’ (Deut. 34:5). Rabbi Yehuda queried, Is it possible that Moshe was alive and wrote, “So Moshe died”? Rather, until this point Moshe wrote, from here on Joshua wrote. Rabbi Shimon said to him, Is it possible that the first Torah scroll was missing even one word? Behold its says “Take this Torah scroll and place it along side the Ark of the Covenant” [implying that it was completed] (Deut. 31:26). Rather, until here G-d dictated and Moshe wrote, from here on G-d dictated and Moshe wrote in tears” (Menachot 30a).

One explanation of this exchange is as follows: Rabbi Yehuda understood that the words of the Torah as transmitted by G-d to Moshe were so powerful and true that if Moshe wrote “So Moshe died”, he would have died on the spot. Therefore the account of his death and the ensuing events that conclude the Torah were dictated by G-d to Joshua.

Rabbi Shimon, on the other hand, is of the opinion that it is inconceivable that Moshe did not write the entire Torah, as verses seem to indicate. Rather, until this point Moshe wrote with ink; from the point G-d revealed his pending death, he dipped his quill into his falling tears and stenciled in the concluding words of the Torah. Joshua filled in the empty words stenciled by Moshe, thereby filling the void that ensued from his death and realizing his dream to wed the Jewish people to G-d through the Torah.

May we merit fulfilling our unrealized potential and to live our lives as outlined by our teacher Moses in the Torah of Moshe!

ONLY THREE MORE NEEDED

Question: I plan to be visiting Israel and will be in Jerusalem on the Fast of Tisha B'Av. I intend to take my young son to the Kotel and am looking for a way to explain its significance on this special day. What is the right thing to do?

Answer: Before you decide on how to explain Tisha B'Av and the Kotel to your son it might be a good idea for you to drop in to Yeshivat Ohr Somayach or another place where talks in English about the meaning of this sad day are given night and day. You will certainly pick up

some valuable insights that you can share with your son.

When you visit the Kotel don't focus only on the grief we feel at nothing remaining of our magnificent *Beit Hamikdash* but one western wall that enclosed the Temple Mount. Point out that Jews anxiously look forward to the day when there will be a *Beit Hamikdash* where now there is a mosque, and that the mountain upon which it rests will be surrounded by four walls. You can then conclude with the optimistic observation that "one wall is already up and only three more are needed".

PARSHA INSIGHTS

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Va'etchanan

HOW TO WIN PEOPLE AND INFLUENCE FRIENDS

"My L-rd, G-d, You have begun to show Your servant Your greatness..." (3:23)

After the Second World War, there was a certain town in which most of the brides were orphaned during the Holocaust. The townspeople decided to bring in a famous and gifted lecturer to inspire the young brides with the importance of family purity.

Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe, *zatzal*, told them that this was not the right way to achieve their purpose: He pointed out that those who were currently uninterested in family purity would be the least likely to attend; the speaker would end up "preaching only to the converted".

Instead, he suggested that they use the money to start a bridal fund to assist young brides with their wedding expenses, and through this kindness the brides would be receptive to the message of family purity.

The people of the town disagreed with Rabbi Wolbe and so he went to the *Gadol Hador*, the Chazon Ish who concurred with his advice.

"My L-rd, G-d, You have begun to show Your servant Your greatness..."

This week's parsha starts with Moshe imploring G-d to let him enter the Land of Israel. Ostensibly, why should Moshe

appeal to G-d's greatness when asking for his request to be granted? Wouldn't it have been better to appeal to G-d's kindness? Rashi explains that G-d's greatness is expressed by His kindness.

Man is created in G-d's image, meaning that just as G-d is kind, so we must be kind; and just as His greatness is expressed through kindness, so will be ours.

True greatness is kindness.

Avraham Avinu was the first person to recognize G-d in the world. In the silent prayer, G-d's greatness is linked to Him being "the G-d of Avraham." Avraham is also the personification of kindness. It was through Avraham's belief in G-d that he realized the greatness of kindness. At that time, the prevalent view of the idol worshippers was that even if there was a god, he was far too lofty to be bothered or be interested in this world and its happenings.

Avraham established an inn where he cared for his guests in every conceivable way. He influenced the world to believe in G-d, not by logical proofs or lectures but by demonstrating through his own example that G-d's kindness extends down through all the worlds to this, the lowliest.

Ekev

STEALTH BOMBER

"And it will be if you hearken..." (3:23)

After the Yom Kippur war Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe flew to Egypt to visit the troops. As the plane prepared to enter Egyptian airspace it began to drop lower and lower until it was but a few meters off the ground. He asked

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the pilot if there was a problem with the engines. The pilot replied that the engines were fine and the reason they were flying so low was so that the Egyptian radar shouldn't pick them up.

In the 1960s, a new form of advertising was discovered and almost immediately made illegal. Madison Avenue realized that inserting one single frame of an advertisement into a movie playing at 25 frames per second left a subliminal message imprinted in the mind of the viewer. Because of its extreme subtlety, the advertisement managed to sneak under the defenses of the consumer and plant itself in his subconscious. And without knowing it, the next time he was shopping, he had this overpowering attraction to buy Fidofeed over his usual brand of dog food.

The hidden persuasion of an advertisement consisting of a single frame in a film running at 25 frames a second is more powerful than a campaign of celebrity endorsements, billboards and prime-time barrage. Why?

Because we can only shield ourselves from that of which we are aware.

The nature of physicality is that it wants to reject spirituality. To sneak spirituality past our physical radar, we must conceal the spiritual like a low-flying plane.

To the untrained eye, the world seems to be made up of vast masses: Oceans, seas, land, and planets. In truth, however, everything in the physical world is made from minute particles.

The same is true of man. We are not built by the grand one-off gesture. Whom we are is the result of a myriad of minute actions and decisions, for the good or the bad. Our negative drive ignores these small good actions; they slip unnoticed beneath his radar.

"And it will be if you hearken..."

Rashi comments that if you do the small *mitzvot* on which people tread, G-d will keep his promise.

This promise is that from small actions, giant spiritual edifices will result.

• Sources: Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe and Shiurei Da'at

Re'eh

INHERITANCE AND BEQUEST

"... you shall not harden your heart or close your hand against your destitute brother...Beware lest there be a lawless thought in your heart." (15:7/9)

Whenever the two poor brothers would come to the rich man for *tzedaka* (charity), he would give them a \$100 bill each. Once, it happened that after a gap of more than a year one of the brothers returned to the rich man alone.

"Where is your brother?" inquired the rich man. "He

passed away two months ago." "I'm so sorry," said the rich man, "May the Omnipresent comfort you among the other mourners of Tzion and Yerushalyim." "Thank you," said the poor man.

The rich man promptly placed a crisp \$100 bill into the poor man's hand.

"Excuse me," said the poor man, "but you forgot my brother's \$100."

"He's dead," replied the rich man,

"Yes," said the poor man, "but I'm his brother; why should you get his inheritance?"

The Torah considers someone who averts his eyes from the needy as though he worshipped idols (Talmud Bavli, Bava Batra 10a).

Ostensibly the connection is difficult to understand; stinginess is a lacking in our relationship with our fellow human beings, whereas idol worship is solely an issue between G-d and us.

Really, every *mitzvah* that involves giving to our fellow beings is a reflection of our relationship with G-d. As it says "Everything is from You, and it is from Your hand that we have given to You." (Divrei Hayamim I 29:14)

We have nothing to give except the giving itself. Everything else belongs to G-d.

As the Rosh says, "Do not make gold and silver your folly, for this is the beginning of idol worship" (Orchot Tzaddikim 29)

When we give *tzedaka* properly we are acknowledging that we are merely the stewards of our wealth; it is not ours. In addition, by using our possessions to serve G-d, we testify to the fact that the world has a purpose, that the point of life is not self-gratification; we acknowledge that we and everything we have is merely one infinitesimal part in G-d's plan to bring this world to a state of perfection.

That is both our inheritance and our bequest.

• Sources: Based on Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe and a story heard from Avraham Falk

Shoftim

CONSTANCY

"Judges and officers shall you appoint in all the gates of your cities..." (16:18)

The Bar Mitzvah boy sat behind the head table, his face shining beneath the brim of his new Borsalino, beaming with the excitement of the big day.

His proud father asked his Rabbi if he would like to hear the *derasha* (exegesis on a Torah theme) that his son had prepared.

"Does he know it well?" asked the Rabbi.

"Yes." Replied the proud father.

"I don't mean does he know it parrot-fashion, I mean does he *understand* it."

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“Yes, he does.” Replied the even prouder father.

“Okay” said the Rabbi.

The father led his Rabbi to sit with his son at the top table and left his son to expound the intricate piece of halachic logic that he had so carefully prepared.

After the bar mitzvah was over, the father asked his son what his Rabbi had said to him.

“After I finished the *derasha*, he asked me a few questions and then he said that if I learn, I will be a *Gadol* (great Torah scholar).”

“And what did you say to that?” asked the father.

“I said, ‘Amen!’ Then he said to me, ‘It’s not a *beracha*’ — it’s a *metziut* (reality).”

The gap between potential and actuality is called hard work.

Many of us are born with gifts, talents and abilities that are given to but a few. Fewer of us, however, develop those talents into real achievement.

“Judges and officers shall you appoint in all the gates of your cities...”

Rashi explains that the judges dictate correct behavior, while the officers ensure that their dictates are obeyed.

In any construction project, there are two stages. First, the architect sets pen to paper, then the contractor takes that blueprint and makes of it a reality. Similarly, a composer sets notes on a staff and the musician takes those hieroglyphics and fills the air with music.

If the Torah is the blueprint of life, its practical application is ethical behavior.

Halacha tells us how to do the *mitzvot* of the Torah, whereas *mussar* (active character refinement) teaches us how to become the kind of person that the Torah demands us to be.

The Rambam (Shemone Perakim) writes that a complete person must constantly review his character, weigh his actions, and examine who he is every day. The work of becoming a great person is achieved in minuscule increments. The grand gesture leaves no imprint. However the constant learning and application of ethics changes our character for the better even without our being aware of it, just like the stone that Rabbi Akiva saw where tiny drops of water had carved a large trough over time.

There is no substitute for nor is anything as powerful as constancy.

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