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PARSHA INSIGHTS

CONCRETE TIME

*“And you shall count to yourselves from the day after the Shabbat (which means the day after Pesach begins) from the day of your bringing the Omer offering which is waved, seven Shabbatot — complete and perfect they must be”. (23:15)
“When are they perfect? When they do the will of the Omnipresent.” (Midrash)*

Nothing in this world lasts forever. Everything has its time and then passes. Even the heavens and the earth will pass into nothingness. Nevertheless, everything that comes into the world has a certain period of existence however short or long. However, there is one thing in the world whose existence has no span whatsoever. It is not sooner present than it has already passed, and is no longer.

That thing is time itself.

Every second that emerges into Creation is gone in the blink of an eye. Time passed is no longer, and every second becomes immediately and at once the past.

Time can be made substantive, however. Man's actions in time can give time itself an eternal existence. Every action gives the time in which that action is done the substance and

the character of the action itself. Therefore, if we use our time to do a mitzvah, a kind act, or to learn Torah, then because mitzvot are eternal they in turn eternalize man's time.

This is what the Midrash means when it says “When are they (the weeks) perfect? When they do the will of the Omnipresent.” The Counting of The Omer is a paradigm for the years of the life of man. The “Seven Shabbatot” allude to “The days of our years have in them seventy years.” (Tehillim). The mitzvah of Counting The Omer demands that “complete and perfect they must be.”

When those hours do the will of G-d, then time itself stays eternally concrete and substantial.

• Source for ‘Concrete Time’: Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Zevin

BORED WITH BREATHING

“And you will bring a new ‘mincha’ offering to G-d”

Are you “burned out”? You seem to hear that phrase a lot these days. “I’m burned out from this; I’m burned out from that.” “I’m bored with this; It’s just lost its excitement for me.”

Why do people burn out?

Take two people working hard, one self-employed, the other working for a salary. There’s a big difference between them. Usually, when we work for a salary, our interest in the company is because it provides us with a living. If the company doesn’t do well and there is no bonus to look forward to, our apathy, rather than our enthusiasm, tends to grow.

When we are self-employed, on the other hand, we put

our very soul into our work. We are the company. We enjoy our moments of triumph and we grieve over our disasters, but bored and burned out? Never.

Unlike the salaried employee whose remuneration is fixed from the beginning with only limited scope for profit participation, a self-employed person knows that the sky’s the limit. The company’s success is our success.

When we learn Torah we should think of it like it was our own business. In your own business, if things aren’t going right, who is there to put them right? Only yourself. If it takes extra time at the office, we would certainly, and gladly, put in the extra hours.

continued on page two

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POB 18103, Jerusalem 91180, Israel • Tel: +972-2-581-0315 • Email: info@ohr.edu • www.ohr.edu

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PARSHA OVERVIEW

The *kohanim* are commanded to avoid contact with corpses in order to maintain a high standard of ritual purity. They may attend the funeral of only their seven closest relatives: father, mother, wife, son, daughter, brother, and unmarried sister. The *kohen gadol* (High Priest) may not attend the funeral of even his closest relatives. Certain marital restrictions are placed on the *kohanim*. The nation is required to honor the *kohanim*. The physical irregularities that invalidate a *kohen* from serving in the Temple are listed. *Terumah*, a produce tithe given to the *kohanim*, may be eaten only by *kohanim* and their household. An animal may be sacrificed in the Temple after it is eight

days old and is free from any physical defects. The nation is commanded to sanctify the Name of G-d by insuring that their behavior is always exemplary, and by being prepared to surrender their lives rather than murder, engage in licentious relations or worship idols. The special characteristics of the holidays are described, and the nation is reminded not to do certain types of creative work during these holidays. New grain may not be eaten until the *omer* of barley is offered in the Temple. The Parsha explains the laws of preparing the oil for the menorah and baking the *lechem hapanim* in the Temple. A man blasphemes G-d and is executed as prescribed in the Torah.

ISRAEL Forever

THE ULTIMATE FREEDOM

This week's Torah portion, which includes the sacrifices offered during the Festivals of Pesach and Shavuot, is always read in the period between those two holidays.

There is an interesting connection between the two festivals. On Pesach we relive the liberation of our ancestors from Egyptian bondage. On Shavuot we virtually return to Sinai to re-experience the receiving of the Torah. The message of this connection is that true freedom is not achieved

by merely removing the shackles of slavery. Only when Jews received the Torah as a Divine prescription for life did they achieve the ultimate freedom from enslaving human passions.

Moving from physical freedom to spiritual freedom is a challenging process. This is why we count the days – *sefirat ha'omer* – as we move forward to reach this goal, which makes the People of Israel free 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

SHAZUR – TOMB OF A TANNA

Many of the Talmudic Sages were identified by the place from which they originated. One such example is the Tanna Rabbi Shimon Shazuri who lived and died in Shazur.



His tomb is located at the edge of what is today the Druze village of Sajur about three miles northeast of Carmiel. Tradition has it that his son Eliezer, about whom little is known, is buried next to him.

Bored With Breathing...continued from page one

When we sit down to learn Torah do we mentally “punch in”? Are we waiting for the next coffee break? Or do we feel the exuberance and challenge of our learning as though it was ‘our own business’?

How does the Torah refer to the monumental event of its giving at Sinai?

“And you will bring a new ‘mincha’ offering to G-d.”

Why is the reference so oblique? It's true that at the Festival of Shavuot we do bring a “new mincha offering to G-d,” but is that the most conspicuous aspect of Shavuot? How about the giving of the Torah itself? Wouldn't it have been more appropriate to spell out that on this day the Torah was given at Sinai? And yet it is with these few covert words that the Torah hints to the central event of Judaism.

Why?

The Torah doesn't specify the date of its giving because it doesn't want us to feel that it was given as a “one-off” event. Rather, it wants us to feel it's being given to us every day. G-d wants us to receive the Torah every day as though we were hearing it for the first time on Sinai

The Torah is our life's breath.

We breathe millions of times in our lifetime, but no one gets tired of breathing. Why not? Since we understand that our life depends on breathing it's not a subject for boredom. Boredom can only set in when a person sees something as optional; Breathing isn't optional, it's obligatory.

We should feel the same way about the Torah, for it is our life's breath.

• Sources for 'Bored With Breathing': *Kli Yakar, Moser Derech, Rabbi Simcha Wasserman, Rabbi Yaakov Niman, Rabbi Meir Chadash*

PARSHA Q&A ?

1. Which male descendants of Aharon are exempt from the prohibition against contacting a dead body?
2. Does a *kohen* have an option regarding becoming ritually defiled when his unmarried sister passes away?
3. How does one honor a *kohen*?
4. How does the Torah restrict the *kohen gadol* with regard to mourning?
5. The Torah states in verse 22:3 that one who “approaches holy objects” while in a state of *tumah* (impurity) is penalized with excision. What does the Torah mean by “approaches”?
6. What is the smallest piece of a corpse that is able to transmit *tumah*?
7. Who in the household of a *kohen* may eat *terumah*?
8. If the daughter of a *kohen* marries a “zar” she may no longer eat *terumah*. What is a *zar*?
9. What is the difference between a *neder* and a *nedavah*?
10. May a person slaughter an animal and its father on the same day?
11. How does the Torah define “profaning” the Name of G-d?
12. Apart from Shabbat, how many days are there during the year about which the Torah says that work is forbidden?
13. How big is an *omer*?
14. On what day do we begin to “count the *omer*”?
15. Why do we begin counting the *omer* at night?
16. How does the *omer* differ from other *minchah* offerings?
17. The blowing of the shofar on Rosh Hashanah is called a “*zichron teruah*” (sound of remembrance). For what is it a reminder?
18. What is unusual about the wood of the *etrog* tree?
19. Who was the father of the blasphemer?
20. What is the penalty for intentionally wounding one’s parent?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week’s Questions!

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

1. 21:1 - *Challalim* — those disqualified from the priesthood because they are descended from a relationship forbidden to a *kohen*.
2. 21:3 - No, he is required to do so.
3. 21:8 - He is first in all matters of holiness. For example, a *kohen* reads from the Torah first, and is usually the one to lead the blessings before and after meals.
4. 21:10-12 - He may not allow his hair to grow long, nor attend to his close relatives if they die, nor accompany a funeral procession.
5. 22:3 - Eats.
6. 22:5 - A piece the size of an olive.
7. 22:11 - He, his wife, his sons, his unmarried daughters and his non-Jewish slaves.
8. 22:12 - A non-*kohen*.
9. 22:18 - A *neder* is an obligation upon a person; a *nedavah* is an obligation placed upon an object.
10. 22:28 - Yes. The Torah only prohibits slaughtering an animal and its mother on the same day.
11. 22:32 - Willfully transgressing the commandments.
12. 23:7-36 - Seven.
13. 23:10 - One tenth of an *eipha*.
14. 23:15 - On the 16th of Nissan.
15. 23:15 - The Torah requires counting seven complete weeks. If we begin counting in the daytime, the seven weeks would not be complete, because according to the Torah a day starts at nightfall.
16. 23:16 - It was made from barley.
17. 23:24 - The *akeidat* (binding of) Yitzchak.
18. 23:40 - It has the same taste as the fruit.
19. 24:10 - The Egyptian killed by Moshe (*Shemot* 2:12).
20. 24:21 - Death.

לע"נ

מרת ביילא בת ר' דוד ע"ה
ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

A digest of the topics covered in the seven weekly pages of the Talmud studied in the course of the worldwide Daf Yomi cycle along with an insight from them

- Decay of a corpse or detached parts as source of ritual impurity
- How much of a dead rodent is capable of causing ritual impurity
- How much of a corpse does contact with it compel a *nazir* to interrupt his *nezirut*
- Whether parts of two bodies combine to form the amount of ground-up bones from a corpse needed to cause impurity of a *nazir*
- The sources of impurity which do not cause a *nazir* to interrupt his *nezirut*
- The ritual impurity of entering land outside Eretz Yisrael
- The *nazir* afflicted with leprosy
- Entering the Sanctuary in a state of ritual impurity
- Doubt arising which of two *nezirim* became ritually impure
- Forbidden haircutting of a minor

THE CONSOLING TOOTH

When one comes into contact with a human corpse he becomes ritually impure, even if the contact is with only a portion of the corpse. The exceptions to this rule are the teeth, hair and fingernails and toenails that have become detached from the corpse.

The rule regarding teeth helps explain what Rabbi Yochanan did when he went to comfort mourners. In order

to express his empathy with their grief he pulled out of his pocket a small object that he said was a remnant of the tenth son he had buried in his lifetime.

Rashi (*Berachot* 5b) understood this object to be a bone, but of so tiny a size that it did not cause one to become ritually impure. The *Sefer Aruch*, however, defines the object as a tooth which, once detached from the corpse, no longer causes such impurity.

• *Nazir* 51a

What the SAGES Say

“His teeth became black from fasting.”

- *The gemara's description of the long fasting of Rabbi Shimon in penitence for speaking irreverently about his departed master Rabbi Akiva*

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DEVOTIONAL DIVIDE

From: Ryan in Philadelphia

Dear Rabbi,

When I first started becoming religious I became aware of the difference between Ashkenazi and Sefardi Jewry. At first, it seemed strange to me that there should be differences among Orthodox Jews, but I have come to understand it in terms of the great geographical distance separating the communities over such a long time. However, I recently found out about a divide in Ashkenazi Jewry itself between regular Orthodox and Chasidim. Why should there be such a difference, and why does there seem to be tension between these two groups? Thanks for any light you can shed on this problem.

Dear Ryan,

Your sensitivity to this issue demonstrates your sincere love for the Jewish people and your intuitive understanding of the importance of Jewish unity.

To adequately explore all the historical and spiritual factors that gave rise to this division would be beyond the scope of this forum. So I'll just outline the general development of this divide in order to put things in context and to provide a framework within which to organize details you'll glean from your own study.

The dispersal of the Jews throughout the Diaspora resulted in great geographical distances between communities. Many social, cultural and even religious differences evolved between the far-flung communities. As you mention, this is particularly so regarding the Ashkenazi communities of Europe and the Sefardi communities of the near East and North Africa. While the communities within each larger group were basically similar, of course, for similar reasons, there were differences between them as well.

Among Ashkenazi Jewry, such a geographical/social/cultural distinction existed between the Jews of the countries identified as Western and Eastern Europe.

In addition, over the many centuries of religious, political and economical persecution, particularly in the countries of Eastern Europe, there developed a strong and growing rift between what became the religious/rabbinic elite and the masses of Jews whose dire situation barely enabled them the most rudimentary Jewish education, let alone advanced Torah study. This simultaneously effectively cut off the Jewish masses from the Torah leaders and undermined their appreciation of Judaism and the Jewish way of life.

It was in this context that the Rabbi Israel ben Eliezer, referred to as the Baal Shem Tov (meaning Master of the Good Name) introduced a brand of Orthodoxy intended to speak to the materially and spiritually impoverished masses and infuse even the simple folks' observance with enthusiasm and meaning. The Baal Shem Tov and his disciples, all pious Torah giants, spread these teachings and approach to Orthodoxy throughout Europe in a movement which came to be called Chasidism — path of piety.

Chasidism was met with well-intended suspicion and opposition by most of the leaders of what was then established

Orthodoxy (or what you call "regular Orthodox") that came to be called "Mitnagdim" (opposers) or "Litvaks" (insofar as Lithuania was the bastion of Torah scholarship of the day). These righteous pillars of Torah were all too well-aware of past movements which initially intended to provide meaning for the masses but eventually tore many away from Judaism and left many others religiously decimated. Concerned for the continuity of Judaism and with feelings of great responsibility for each Jew, the Mitnagdim leaders were concerned that the rapture and zeal of Chasidism might ultimately do more harm than good.

As it turned out, Chasidism stood the test of time and proved to be not only a vitalizing, but also a stabilizing force in Orthodoxy. Not only did it infuse a new spirit of love for and commitment to Judaism among the masses, but also many great rabbis who initially opposed it were won over to its ranks. In addition, the enthusiasm and meaning that Chasidism engendered in its adherents largely protected them from the tantalizing winks of Enlightenment, whereas many of the descendants of the cerebral-minded Mitnagdim were swept away in the tide of intellectualism.

Nowadays, both groups recognize the strength of arduous Torah study coupled with serving G-d with enthusiasm, joy and meaning. By and large, all groups have fused both approaches to varying degrees. If the differences are divisively used to cast dispersion on one another, that spells our downfall. However, if we respect, value and appreciate the differences, our devotion will be directed Heavenward where the sky's the limit.

I heard a wonderful story from Rabbi Dr. Yitzchak Breitowitz that illustrates this point.

There was once a wealthy Jew who had two daughters whom he wanted to marry Torah scholars. With one son-in-law he stipulated that as long as he learned Torah he would provide his family with a daily meat meal. With the other he similarly pledged a daily dairy meal. After time, he noticed that instead of learning Torah his sons-in-law were bickering over which was the better deal — the meat or the dairy meal. Having slacked in the stipulation, the father decided to reduce their portion to potatoes. However, he decided that if he wasn't going to give either meat or dairy, he would at least cook the one's potatoes in a meat pot and the other's in a dairy pot. Not much time passed before he heard them bickering over whose potatoes were more important, the meaty or the dairy. Astonished, the father cried in anguish: "You fools! Even when each of you was getting either nutritious meat or dairy meals it was wrong of you to argue, but at least there was something of substance to argue about. But now that you're both only getting potatoes anyway, just that these are from a meat pot and these from a dairy, there's not even anything of substance to argue about!"

So too regarding the historical tension between the Mitnagdim and the Chasidim. G-d stipulates and desires the service of both. In the old days, when a Litvak was a real Litvak and a Chasid was a real Chasid, even though G-d disapproved of the argument, at least the differences were substantial enough to argue about. However, nowadays, when a Litvak is no longer a real Litvak and a Chasid is no longer a real Chasid, rather each is only 'like a potato' with such a taste or such a taste, there's nothing substantial to bicker about, and it must end now!

THE INVITATION DILEMMA

Question: I am about to arrange a wedding for my daughter and am faced with the dilemma of deciding on how many people to invite. What is the right thing to do?

Answer: Your dilemma is shared by anyone who begins making a long list of relatives, neighbors, friends and business associates. Some people try to solve the problem by sending invitations to everyone on the list but limiting the number of those who are invited to the dinner so that the others understand that they are only welcome to the reception and the chupah.

Perhaps an even better idea is to give serious consideration as to who should really be on your list. Keep in mind that many of your invitation receivers view attending your simcha as a great inconvenience because they don't feel that your casual or antiquated relationship with them justifies the effort they must make only to avoid hurting your feelings. A careful scrutiny of your initial list will enable you to substantially reduce the number of invitations and cut down the number of impositions you are making on people's time. In this way your personal simcha will extend to the simcha of all the invited and uninvited.

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY _____

THE DISHWASHER SCHOLAR

Behind every tragedy there is a heartbreaking story that adds to the pain. Such is the case of 26-year old Doron Maharela of blessed memory, one of the eight students of Yeshivat Mercaz Harav who died at the hands of an Arab terrorist on March 6th.

Doron's early schooling in Ethiopia hardly qualified him for admission to the yeshiva he wished to enter. When his application was rejected he asked for a job as dishwasher in the dining room. For a year and a half he washed dishes and spent most of his nights and all of his Shabbatot learning

gemara until he felt he was ready to try again for admission.

The Rosh Yeshiva's initial reluctance to test him soon gave way when Doron initiated a Torah discussion and the next day he was transformed from a dishwasher to a full-fledged yeshiva student. When he visited his family in Ashdod on weekends he would spend the entire Shabbat steeped in Torah study. Three weeks before his tragic passing he reportedly completed learning the entire Shulchan Aruch and its main commentaries.

May G-d avenge his blood and those of his fellow martyrs.

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