

O H R N E T

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PARSHA INSIGHTS

Author's note: It is nearly two years since my sister, Chaya Esther bas Rochma, was involved in a tragic accident that has left her in a coma until this day. My sister is breathing by herself but can only receive food intravenously. She seems to react only to the most basic stimuli of noise, light and pain.

I wanted to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has been praying for my sister's recovery. Not a word of prayer goes unheard. I trust and know that G-d hears our prayers.

As time wears on, it becomes more difficult to sustain our prayers, but for those of you who are praying for my sister, please continue to pray for a *refua sheleima* (complete recovery) for Chaya Ester bas Rochma, and of course, anyone who is reading this for the first time, I would so much appreciate your prayers, even on an occasional basis.

We all exist on Heavenly mercy, and I pray that G-d in His mercy will see fit to restore my sister to full health amongst all those of our people who are in need of healing.

THE QUALITY OF MERCY

"This is the Torah of a man who dies in a tent..." (19:14)

I well remember my father, may his memory be for a blessing, remarking when he was some ninety years old that the last twenty years of his life had passed literally like a flash. Time seems to go faster the longer we live. The distance between my seventh and eighth birthdays was measured in light years. Somewhere in my late twenties, a year was a year, and now as what remains of my hair turns white, Pesach is separated from Succot by about two months.

But however long is our life, it is a pitifully short affair. Most people try and sublimate this reality by running after the pleasures of this world, amusing themselves to death. But I never met anyone, nor anyone who said they met anyone who lived their life without being hurt. Some more, some less. This world gives few reasons for joy. As Kohelet said, "I said of laughter, 'It is mad' and joy, 'What does it accomplish?' " (2:2)

Animals at least are oblivious to all this. They live their lives with the feeling of life itself, unaware of the precipice over which all must plunge. The greatest punishment of being a human being is knowing the sorry state in which we exist.

How can we come to terms with the certain knowledge of our own demise?

One of the names for the Torah is *Rachmana* – the Merciful. *Rachmana* is connected to the Hebrew word for 'womb' – *rechem*. What is the connection between Torah and the womb?

Without Torah we are doomed to a pathetic transitory existence in this world. The Torah is called *Rachmana* because the future comes from the womb, and it is only the Torah that can give us the future, as we say in the blessing on the Torah, "*and eternal life, You have planted within us.*"

Originally, G-d wanted to create the world with *Din*, strict justice. *Din* is connected to *Dai*, which means "enough". In a world of pure *Din*, you get only what you deserve and no more. G-d saw that world could not survive in this way and thus He included in the creation the possibility of a future existence beyond the grave. He gave us *Rachmana*, the Torah.

He gave us the quality of mercy.

• Sources: Maharal, others

PARSHA OVERVIEW

The laws of the *para aduma* — the red heifer — are detailed. These laws are for the ritual purification of one who comes into contact with death. After nearly 40 years in the desert, Miriam dies and is buried at Kadesh. The people complain about the loss of their water supply that until now has been provided miraculously in the merit of Miriam's righteousness. Aharon and Moshe pray for the people's welfare. G-d commands them to gather the nation at Merivah and speak to a designated rock so that water will flow forth. Distressed by the people's lack of faith, Moshe hits the rock instead of speaking to it. He thus fails to produce the intended public demonstration of G-d's mastery over the world, which would have resulted had the rock

produced water merely at Moshe's word. Therefore, G-d tells Moshe and Aharon that they will not bring the people into the Land. *Bnei Yisrael* resume their travels, but because the King of Edom, a descendant of Esav, denies them passage through his country, they do not travel the most direct route to Eretz Yisrael. When they reach Mount Hor, Aharon dies and his son Elazar is invested with his priestly garments and responsibilities. Aharon was beloved by all, and the entire nation mourns him 30 days. Sichon the Amorite attacks *Bnei Yisrael* when they ask to pass through his land. As a result, *Bnei Yisrael* conquer the lands that Sichon had previously seized from the Amonites on the east bank of the Jordan River.

ISRAEL Forever

IN SEARCH OF A PARTNER

If Israeli leaders are frustrated in their search among the Palestinians for a "partner for peace" they may derive some comfort from what we will hear in the synagogue this Shabbat when the weekly portion is read.

On their journey to their promised land it was necessary for our ancestors to pass through some neighboring countries. When Moshe sent a delegation to the king of Edom he addressed him as a brother because they had common ancestry. He asked for permission to pass through his land, promising that no harm would be caused, and that there

would even be an economic advantage for the Edomites. The response was a refusal and a rallying of the armed forces to prevent any entry.

An even stronger reaction to a similar request was offered by Sichon, king of the Emorites, who even went to war and was soundly defeated.

Partners for peace were always difficult to find and this can only lead to the inevitable conclusion that only Heaven can provide security for Israel forever.

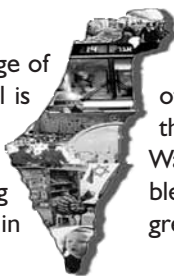
LOVE OF THE LAND - THE PLACES

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

NABI SAMUEL – TOMB OF THE PROPHET

On a hill overlooking Jerusalem is the village of Nabi Samuel where the Prophet Shmuel is buried.

Because of its strategic location this site played an important role in several wars. During World War One the British defeated the Turks in



this area, opening the road to Jerusalem. In Israel's War of Independence the Arabs bombed Jewish Jerusalem from their fortress at the site. They did it again in the Six Day War but Israeli soldiers quickly captured it, making it possible for Jews to once again come to pray at the tomb of the great prophet and judge.

לע"נ
מת בי"לא בת ר' דוד ע"ה
ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

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PARSHA Q&A ?

1. “Take a perfect *para aduma* (red heifer).” What does the word “perfect” — *temima* — mean in this context?
2. How many non-red hairs disqualify a cow as a *para aduma*?
3. A man dies in a tent. What happens to the sealed metal and earthenware utensils in the tent?
4. What happens to the one who: a) sprinkles the water mixed with the ashes of the *para aduma*; b) touches the water; c) carries the water?
5. Why was the *mitzvah* of the *para aduma* entrusted to Elazar rather than to Aharon?
6. Why does the Torah stress that *all* of the congregation came to *Midbar Tzin*?
7. Why is Miriam’s death taught after the law of *para aduma*?
8. During their journey in the *midbar*, in whose merit did the Jewish People receive water?
9. Why did Moshe need to strike the rock a second time?
10. When Moshe told the King of Edom that the Jewish People would not drink from the well-water, to which well did he refer? What do we learn from this?
11. The cloud that led the Jewish People leveled all mountains in their path except three. Which three and why?
12. Why did the *entire* congregation mourn Aharon’s death?
13. What disappeared when Aharon died?
14. Which “inhabitant of the South” (21:1) attacked the Jews?
15. For what two reasons did G-d punish the people with snakes specifically?
16. Why did the Jewish People camp in Arnon, rather than pass through Moav to enter *Eretz Canaan*?
17. What miracle took place at the valley of Arnon?
18. What was the “strength” of Amon that prevented the Jewish People from entering into their Land?
19. Why was Moshe afraid of Og?
20. Who killed Og?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week’s Questions!

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

1. 19:2 - Perfectly red.
2. 19:2 - Two.
3. 19:14, 15 - The metal utensils are impure for seven days, even if they are sealed. The sealed earthenware vessels are unaffected.
4. 19:21 - a) Remains *tahor*; b) He, but not his clothing, contracts *tumah*; c) He and his clothing contract *tumah*.
5. 19:22 - Because Aharon was involved in the sin of the golden calf.
6. 20:1 - To teach that they were *all* fit to enter the Land; everyone involved in the sin of the spies already died.
7. 20:1 - To teach that just as sacrifices bring atonement, so too does the death of the righteous.
8. 20:2 - Miriam’s.
9. 20:11 - After he hit it the first time, only a few drops came out since he was commanded to *speak* to the rock.
10. 20:17 - To the well that traveled with the nation in the *midbar*. This teaches that one who has adequate provisions should nevertheless purchase goods from his host in order to benefit the host.
11. 20:22 - *Har Sinai* for receiving the Torah, *Har Nevo* for Moshe’s burial, and *Hor Hahar* for Aharon’s burial.
12. 20:29 - Aharon made peace between contending parties and between spouses. Thus, everybody mourned him.
13. 20:29 - The clouds of glory disappeared, since they sheltered the Jews in Aharon’s merit.
14. 21:1 - Amalek.
15. 21:6 - The original snake, who was punished for speaking evil, is fitting to punish those who spoke evil about G-d and about Moshe. And the snake, for whom everything tastes like dust, is fitting to punish those who complained about the manna which changed to any desired taste.
16. 21:13 - Moav refused them passage.
17. 21:15 - The Amorites hid in caves in the mountain on the Moabite side of the valley in order to ambush the Jews. When the Jews approached, the mountain on the *Eretz Canaan* side of the valley moved close to the other mountain and the Amorites were crushed.
18. 21:24 - G-d’s command, “Do not harass them” (*Devarim* 2:19).
19. 21:34 - Og had once been of service to Avraham. Moshe was afraid that this merit would assist Og in battle.
20. 21:35 - Moshe.

- The two degrees of exemption from military service
- The meaning of “faint of heart” exemption
- Three different categories of Jewish wars
- The high court judges needed for ritual of beheading the calf in case of an unsolved murder
- When such a ritual is not performed
- Measuring which city is closest to the victim’s corpse
- The qualifications of the calf and the slaughtering site
- The declaration of the elders of the nearest city
- The importance of providing a safe escort
- The Prophet Elisha and the bears
- Failed attempts to persuade sinners to repent
- Discovery of the murderer and conflict of testimony
- The impact of proliferation of murderers and adulterers on the rituals connected with these matters
- The revolutionary decrees of Yochanan Kohen Hagadol
- The impact of the absence of the Sanhedrin, the prophets and the *Beit Hamikdash*
- The Heavenly voice that replaced prophecy
- The impact of the passing of certain Sages
- A portrait of the sad situation preceding the arrival of Mashiach

TWO VIEWS OF KAVOD HA TORAH

“With the passing of Rabban Gamliel the Elder there came an end to *kavod haTorah*.” This lament mentioned in the final *mishna* of *Masechet Sotah* raises a problem when we refer to a similar lament which appears only two lines earlier. There we are told that with Rabbi Akiva’s passing there came an end to *kavod haTorah*. These two great Talmudic Sages lived centuries apart. How then could the honor accorded to the study of Torah come to an end in two different eras?

The answer lies in the explanation provided by Rashi of what sort of *kavod haTorah* each of these Sages represented. In the era of Rabban Gamliel people stood while studying Torah to express the respect and honor thus accorded to Torah. It was only with this Sage’s passing that physical

weakness of the generation compelled student of Torah to sit while studying.

The *kavod haTorah* expressed by Rabbi Akiva generations later was his ability to interpret a meaning in every word, letter and even the crowns of letters, which appeared on the surface to be superfluous. This brought great honor to the Torah by demonstrating that there was nothing extraneous in it.

Although the extreme forms of *kavod haTorah* represented by these Sages came to an end with their passing, we have the opportunity even today of expressing our respect for Torah in some manner. Standing up when a Sefer Torah or a Torah scholar passes by is an expression of *kavod haTorah* reminiscent of the days of Rabban Gamliel. Studying the Torah in depth to fathom all of its subtle nuances is an echo of the *kavod haTorah* represented by Rabbi Akiva.

• *Sotah 49a*

What the SAGES Say

“On what can we rely (in pre-Messianic days) but our Father in Heaven.”

• *Mishna Sotah 49b*

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TITLE OF HONOR

From: Akiva in Atlanta

Dear Rabbi,

This question may come across as rude but I certain don't mean it to be. Here is the situation: I have great respect for rabbis, but it also happens that people who are called "rabbis" don't fit my description of a rabbi, neither in learnedness nor in behavior. Such people I just can't respect, and I feel justified in treating them like any other average person. Surely they shouldn't get special respect if they don't deserve it, should they?

Dear Akiva,

I understand the logic of your opinion, and it makes sense to a certain degree. A person who hasn't learned law or medicine, for example, should not be respected like a lawyer or a doctor. So too, someone who doesn't qualify as a rabbi should not be afforded the respect due to those who do.

Still, there are some significant differences.

For one, there are standard criteria for what makes one a doctor or lawyer. However, this is not the case regarding the title "rabbi". While there are formal requirements for gaining the professional distinction of rabbi, the term is accepted as applying more loosely as well, to include anyone in a teaching position who has some proficiency in Jewish texts and ideas. The result is that even people who are not on the highest standard of erudition or ethical behavior are still referred to as rabbi.

Does this mean that they should be treated as any average person?

First of all, every person should be treated with utmost respect. If in addition to this the person is elderly, or at least older than you, there is an additional element of respect due

to the person because of his age. And even if he's young, insofar as he probably has more-than-average Torah knowledge (even if not of the highest standard), he should be honored as due to Torah scholars, who anyway are like are budding rabbis.

But there's more to it than that. If this person is accepted by others, possibly by an organization, as a "rabbi", there is a certain degree of honor due to the person because of the title, even if you feel he does not qualify as a rabbi. First, your feelings about, and assessment of, the person might be wrong. Alternatively, there might be some personality clash that prevents you from seeing his true value. And even if you are right, the organization views this person as having what it takes to be called a rabbi, and the opinion of his rabbis are honored by honoring him. So there is value to the title of "rabbi" alone that is worth more respect than for just any other person.

Of course, if the person's ideas and behavior are outright reprehensible, no special honor is due as a rabbi. Still, one should right the wrong in an honorable way. But when something like this happens, this extreme is usually not the case. Rather, the person is just not particularly learned or exemplary. In such a case, if you choose to remain in the presence of the "rabbi", you should be tolerant and patient. More often than not, you'll still learn new things or see old things in a new light.

Conversely, you may choose to leave the presence of the "rabbi", which is perfectly fine. When these feelings occur, it's often an indication that you have reached some spiritual plateau and it's time to work hard to elevate yourself to the next level. Still, after having grown past that plateau, one often comes to appreciate more fully those who helped him get to where he is. And this is another reason to respect the "rabbi": in most cases, even if he's not particularly instructive or impressive to you, he's helping other people grow – and that's special.

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ABOVE SUSPICION

Question: I sometimes enter my local supermarket with the intention of purchasing an item or two, but when I see the long lines at the checkout counter I decide to forget about it. Leaving the store with no shopping bag or receipt might, however, arouse suspicion of shoplifting. What is the right thing to do?

Answer: A supermarket in Israel and the security company it employed were recently fined a combined total of 30,000 *shekalim* for unjustly accusing a woman of shoplifting and causing her great embarrassment.

The lady had intended to buy a package of tissues as a

backup for the tissues she had in her purse and asked the security guard to point out where in the store they could be found. She didn't care for the tissues being sold and walked out empty-handed. The guard suspected her of shoplifting and demanded to search her purse in which he found her tissues. This suspicion turned out to be unfounded, but the store management refused to apologize and paid a heavy price for its stubbornness.

The moral of the story as far as you are concerned is to inform the guard on your way out that you did not find what you were looking for and thus remain above suspicion.

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY _____

THE (IN)HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

The late George Turkelbaum worked together with 23 other employees in an open-plan office of a New York City publishing house. One Saturday morning the 51-year old proofreader was found at his desk by an office cleaner who asked him why he was working during the weekend. When there was no response the cleaner alerted the authorities, and they determined that Turkelbaum had suffered a heart attack and died on Monday.

It is difficult to understand this story that appeared in the

New York Times. How could someone be dead for five days in a crowded office without the odor of his decaying body disturbing anyone? But even more puzzling is how could 23 fellow workers be entirely oblivious of a colleague slumped over his desk and fail to ask if he was feeling well?

The Times concludes its report with this cynical moral of the story: "Don't work too hard. Nobody notices anyway."

Perhaps the real moral of the story is that there is an inhuman side in people and that they should be more concerned about the welfare of their fellow humans.

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