

# OHRNET

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## PARSHA INSIGHTS

### HANDS UP!

*"In your ascending..." (8:2)*

In the battle against Amalek in Parshat Beshalach, Moshe raises his hands toward the Heavens, and the Jewish People prevail over their enemy; when he lowers them, they begin to lose. For many years, the classic Jewish pose of prayer was with the arms outstretched above the head. It was only changed when the non-Jewish world started copying this position.

What is the symbolism of the hands outstretched upward?

The Jewish people accepted the Torah with the words *"na'aseh v'nishma"* — "we will do and we will hear."

Only if we are prepared to lift our hands above our ears; only if we say, "We'll do it *before* we hear and understand it", will we be able to move outside our spiritual comfort zone and become closer to G-d.

The hands above the ears — the *"na'aseh"* above the *"nishma"* — is the classic pose of receiving from G-d.

*"In your ascending..."*

In front of the Menorah there were steps. We learn this from the word that begins this week's Torah portion, *"beha'alotcha"*, which literally means *"in your ascending"*,

*i.e., "in your going up to kindle the lights."*

The Menorah was three *amot* high. That's somewhere between 54 to 72 inches or 1.37 to 1.83 meters. Not enormous. Almost anyone can reach up to that height. Why then was it necessary for the Kohen Gadol to *ascend* to prepare and light the lamps of the Menorah?

On his forehead, the Kohen Gadol wore the *tzitz* — a golden plate secured by ribbons. On the plate was engraved the Tetragrammaton, the ineffable four-letter name of G-d. It's true that the Kohen Gadol could have reached up to perform the service of the Menorah, but that would mean that his hand would be higher than G-d's Name, and that would be disrespectful.

One of the jobs of the *kohanim* was to teach Torah to the Jewish People. Once the Jewish People has received the Torah, once the *tzitz* sits on the head of the Kohen Gadol, our job is to hear what the Torah tells us, and not stretch out our hands above our heads, above the *tzitz* looking for our own definition of spirituality.

• Sources: *Malei HaOmer in Mayana shel Torah and others*

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## NEDARIM 16 - 22

*Rabbi Levi said, "These are the children of a mother who is hated by her husband".*

Rabbi Levi in our *gemara* lists nine scenarios in which the offspring will be "rebellious and transgressing against G-d", as found in Yechezkel 20:38. One of these scenarios leading to rebellious children, Rabbi Levi teaches, is when the mother is hated by the father.

Although it would appear from two verses in Chumash (Gen. 29:31 and 33) that Leah was hated by her husband Yaakov, this was certainly not the case, and their children were certainly righteous and devoted to G-d. Leah was neither hated by Yaakov nor blamed for her father's treacherous dealings with Yaakov. Rather, she was greatly loved by her husband Yaakov, as is evident in 29:30 which states, "And he (Yaakov) *also* loved Rachel". He loved Rachel in addition to Leah. The other verses that seem to connote that she was "hated" merely indicate that Yaakov had an even greater love for Rachel. (Rabbi S. R. Hirsch)

• *Nedarim 20b*

*Rabbi Natan said, "Making a neder (vow) is like building a forbidden altar (bama), and fulfilling the neder is like offering a sacrifice there."*

This teaching appears in a *beraita* on our *daf* and is cited by the Rambam, the Tur and the Shulchan Aruch. The severe negative aspect taught here by Rabbi Natan is that making a *neder* separates a person from the community. When a person makes a personal altar he is separating himself from the ways of the unified Jewish People. Likewise, one who makes a *neder* to forbid to himself that which is permitted to the rest of the community is separating himself from the community. Fulfilling his *neder* makes matters worse. Just as sacrificing on his personal altar is the act of completing his separation from the community, likewise fulfilling his *neder* demonstrates his complete separation from the community. (Maharal)

• *Nedarim 22a*

## PARSHA OVERVIEW

**A**haron is taught the method for kindling the Menorah. Moshe sanctifies the *levi'im* to work in the Mishkan. They replace the first-born, who were disqualified after sinning at the golden calf. The *levi'im* are commanded that after five years of training they are to serve in the Mishkan from ages 30 to 50; afterwards they are to engage in less strenuous work. One year after the Exodus from Egypt, G-d commands Moshe concerning the *korban* Pesach. Those ineligible for this offering request a remedy, and the mitzvah of Pesach Sheini, allowing a "second chance" to offer the *korban* Pesach one month later, is detailed. Miraculous clouds that hover near the Mishkan signal when to travel and when to camp. Two silver trumpets summon the princes or the entire nation for announcements. The trumpets also signal travel plans, war or festivals. The order in which the tribes march is specified. Moshe invites his father-in-law, Yitro, to join the Jewish People, but Yitro returns to Midian. At the instigation of the *eruv rav* — the mixed Egyptian multitude who joined the Jewish People in

the Exodus — some people complain about the manna. Moshe protests that he is unable to govern the nation alone. G-d tells him to select 70 elders, the first Sanhedrin, to assist him, and informs him that the people will be given meat until they will be sickened by it. Two candidates for the group of elders prophesy beyond their mandate, foretelling that Yehoshua instead of Moshe will bring the people to Canaan. Some protest, including Yehoshua, but Moshe is pleased that others have become prophets. G-d sends an incessant supply of quail for those who complained that they lacked meat. A plague punishes those who complained. Miriam tries to make a constructive remark to Aharon which also implies that Moshe is only like other prophets. G-d explains that Moshe's prophecy is superior to that of any other prophet, and punishes Miriam with *tzara'at* as if she had gossiped about her brother. (Because Miriam is so righteous, she is held to an incredibly high standard.) Moshe prays for her, and the nation waits until she is cured before traveling.

## PARSHA Q&A ?

1. Toward which direction did the wicks of the Menorah burn, and why?
2. From what material and in what manner was the Menorah made?
3. Moshe was commanded to cleanse the *Levi'im* by sprinkling on them "*mei chatat*." What is "*mei chatat*"?
4. Which three "*t'nufot*" (wavings) are in the parsha?
5. Why did G-d claim the first-born of the Jewish People as His possession?
6. Why are the words "Bnei Yisrael" repeated five times in verse 8:19?
7. When a *Levi* reaches age 50, which functions may he still perform?
8. Why was the mitzvah of Pesach Sheini not commanded directly to Moshe?
9. What similarity is there between the Menorah and the trumpets?
10. What three purposes did trumpet signals serve?
11. How many tribes marched between the Gershon-Merari detachment and that of Kehat? How was the time differential used?
12. The tribe of Dan, who traveled last, was called "the gatherer of all the camps." What did they gather?
13. When the Jewish People entered the Land, who took temporary possession of Jericho?
14. Which aron is referred to in verse 10:33?
15. Which two topics are out of chronological order in the parsha?
16. Which tastes did the manna not offer, and why not?
17. Moshe was commanded to choose 70 elders to help him lead the Jewish People. What happened to the elders who led the Jewish People in Egypt?
18. Who did Moshe choose as elders?
19. What was the prophecy of Eldad and Medad?
20. Why did Miriam merit to have the people wait for her?

## PARSHA Q&A!

### Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

1. 8:2 - They leaned toward the middle wick so people wouldn't say that the Menorah was lit for its light.
2. 8:4 - It was made from one solid piece of hammered gold.
3. 8:7 - Water containing ashes of the *para aduma*.
4. 8:11 - The wavings of Kehat, Gershon and Merari.
5. 8:17 - Because in Egypt He spared them during *makat bechorot*.
6. 8:19 - To show G-d's love for them.
7. 8:25 - Closing the courtyard gates of the Mishkan and Beit Hamikdash; singing during the avoda; loading the wagons to transport the Mishkan.
8. 9:7 - The people who asked about it were rewarded by being the catalyst for the teaching of this mitzvah.
9. 8:4, 10:2 - They were each made from a single, solid block.
10. 10:2-7 - Announcement of the gathering of Bnei Yisrael, the gathering of the *nesi'im*, and the beginning of a move of the encampment.
11. 10:17-21 - Three: Reuven, Shimon and Gad. In the meantime Gershon and Merari set up the Mishkan.
12. 10:25 - They gathered and returned things lost by the other tribes.
13. 10:32 - The children of Yitro.
14. 10:33 - The aron which held the broken pieces of the first tablets, that was taken to the battlefield.
15. 9:1, 10:35,36 - The Pesach sacrifice, and the traveling of the aron.
16. 11:5 - Cucumber, melon, leek, onion and garlic - these are harmful to nursing women.
17. 11:16 - They were consumed in the fire at Taverah (11:3).
18. 11:16 - People who were supervisors in Egypt and had pity on Bnei Yisrael at risk to themselves.
19. 11:28 - "Moshe will die and Yehoshua will lead the Jewish People into the Land."
20. 12:15 - Because she waited for Moshe when he was cast into the river.

# Abarbanel

## ON THE PARSHA

### Beha'alotcha

Chapter eleven in this Torah portion begins with a very enigmatic verse: "And the people were like complainers; evil in the ears of G-d, and G-d heard and his wrath flared and a fire of G-d burned against them, and it consumed at the edge of the camp". Curiously, they are not referred to simply as "complainers". Rather, they are described as "like complainers". Furthermore, we are not told what they were complaining about.

Abarbanel explains that despite the fact that Jewish People had spent an entire year at Sinai where they had received the Torah with its teachings and Divine admonitions, they never really abandoned the heretical beliefs that they had absorbed in Egypt. Similarly, they had imitated the crass Egyptian character, especially in regard to eating and drinking. Here, at Sinai, in a place where the Divine Torah should have straightened out their crooked beliefs and character, the Egyptian influence still could not be completely erased. Despite the fact that they were accompanied by the Ark of the Covenant and led by the Clouds of Glory, the two episodes that begin this chapter illustrate the failure of belief and character which remained with them.

The Hebrew word that is usually translated as "complainers" actually means, in the context of our text, "those who sought a pretext to complain". Abarbanel then transfigures the rest of the verse so that it reads as follows: "They sought pretexts to prove that G-d's ears were bad"; that is to say, that G-d did not pay attention to the everyday words and actions of the people. This is similar to the verse in Psalms 94:7: "And they said that G-d will not see, G-d will not understand." Their

belief was that G-d was not aware of and did not relate to the details of everyday, lowly physical existence. They expressed this belief now because Moshe had just said in the previous verse (10:36): "Arise, G-d, and let Your foes be scattered, let those who hate You flee from before You. And when it (the Ark) rested, he (Moshe) would say, 'Reside tranquilly, O, G-d, among the myriad thousands of Israel'."

The people were essentially mocking Moshe's words. They didn't believe that G-d really resided amongst them, that He was attuned to them. Yet they are still described as *like* those looking for a pretext because they were not totally denying the concept of Divine Providence. They understood that it applied to well-known and publicized miraculous interventions in nature. Rather, they were looking for a pretext to deny G-d's providence in regard to the details of everyday life.

Since their transgression does involve an overtly public action, the Torah does not go into further detail. Rather, to counter their claim that G-d does not hear, the Torah says explicitly that G-d heard. To counter their claim that G-d was not personally involved on an individual basis, G-d made sure that they would recognize Him through the punishment of fire, which was directed miraculously and specifically against only those who were guilty. The fire burned only on the "edge" of the camp, indicating that it was a miraculous fire, not a natural one which would have normally spread further. The people cried out to Moshe, who then prayed to G-d. To further demonstrate the uniquely personal and providential nature of the fire, it was then immediately absorbed into the ground.

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Rav Bulman *zt"l*  
on the  
Torah Portion of the Week

## WHAT'S IN A BEARD?

**From: John**

*Dear Rabbi,  
Why do Jews, or at least religious Jews, have beards and not shave? Someone told me it was in order to "get blessing". Is this the reason?*

Dear John,

It is true that Jewish mystical sources discuss the beard in the context of blessing — either being a *source* of blessing or an *expression* of blessing. I am not aware of there being a rational explanation for this idea. On the contrary, it is in the realm of the esoteric.

But in any case, this is not the main reason religious Jews do not shave but rather grow beards. The main reason for prohibited shaving is simply that the Torah forbids it: "You shall not destroy the edge of your beard" (Lev. 19:27).

The Talmud (Maccot 20a) interprets "destruction" as shaving with a razor. This prohibition also includes shaving with any implement which completely removes all the facial hair, but does not include trimming or "shaving" with a scissors or other tool that does not provide the smooth shave

provided by a razor.

This is the reason some observant Jews have short or trimmed beards, since they are not using a razor. Similarly, some observant Jews achieve a clean-shaven look by using certain rabbinically-sanctioned rotary shavers that cut not in a razor fashion but rather in a scissor action.

The most commonly accepted reason for the Torah's prohibition of this type of shaving is that it resembles the actions of ancient idolaters and was therefore prohibited for all times. Another reason offered for the prohibition of shaving is that it constitutes an action whereby a man effects the appearance of a woman or to beautify himself, thereby transgressing the injunction against cross-dressing.

For most of history and in most locales, Jews did not shave or trim. In modern times, having a long beard came to be associated with backwardness, such that many who were swayed by the times started trimming their beards accordingly. However, the more-stringently observant maintain the traditional custom of having a long beard, and some refrain from cutting or trimming the beard at all — either to emphasize the Torah law or in consideration of Kabbalistic teachings.

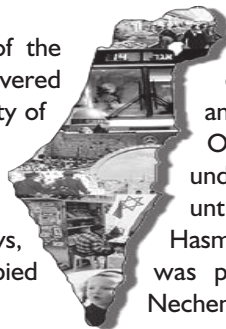
## LOVE OF THE LAND

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

### NECHEMIA'S WALL

**R**emnants of a wall dating back to the time of the Prophet Nechemia have apparently been discovered in an archeological dig in Jerusalem's ancient City of David.

In the Book of Nechemia (6:16) it is recorded that this wall around the city to which Jews had returned from Babylonian captivity was completed in only 52 days, despite the threats of hostile neighbors who had occupied the area around Jerusalem.



This part of the 2,500 year-old wall is located outside of Sha'ar Ha'ashpatot (Dung Gate) and the Old City walls, and faces the Mount of Olives. Based on rich pottery found during a dig under a previously uncovered tower, which has until now been assumed to date back to the Hasmonean period, it is now assumed that the tower was part of the wall built centuries before by Nechemia.

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## SHEMONEH ESREI: THE THIRTEENTH BLESSING - PART 3

**“May Your compassion be aroused, L-rd, our G-d, and give a good reward to all who truly believe in Your Name.”**

**W**hy is it necessary to ask for a “good reward”? Are not all rewards from G-d good? G-d rewards both the wicked and the righteous. But how can that be? Why do the wicked deserve to be rewarded?

Since a person is usually not all good or all bad, a righteous person may be punished in this world for his negative deeds, and a wicked person rewarded in this world for his positive ones.

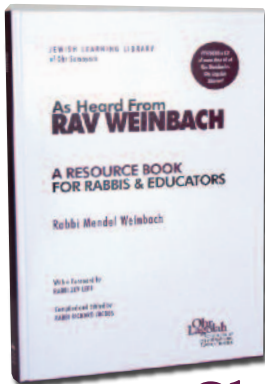
According to the above we can grapple, to some degree, with a perplexing subject in Jewish thought. Why do the wicked prosper while the righteous suffer? This is also stated in the Mishna in “Ethics of the Fathers”: Rabbi Yannai says, “It is not in our power to understand either the tranquility of the wicked or the suffering of the righteous.”

G-d wants to give the best reward possible to the righteous. However, there must be an accounting for their sins. To atone for the minor sins they may have committed, G-d sends them a measure of suffering in this world to rectify their souls. Thus, when they arrive in the World-to-Come they will be granted the ultimate good. This is the meaning

of “good reward”: Since G-d wants to give the righteous a good reward for all eternity, He causes them minor suffering in this world.

For the wicked it is the opposite. Since they do not deserve eternal reward in the next world, G-d pays them for the little good they may have done in this world. The reward is insignificant, to say the least, in comparison to what they would receive in the next world for those good deeds. He also may hold back punishment from the wicked in order to punish them more harshly later. All of this is because the truly wicked increase in their negative behavior against G-d and deserve receiving the harshest punishment. The righteous, however, deserve to be judged with kindness, since it is their desire to do the will of their Creator.

According to all of the above we can see that it is G-d’s compassion for His loyal children that sometimes brings on worldly suffering. This is however motivated out of love, just as a father chastises a son whom he loves. And just as the same father does not chastise a stranger, since he does not love Him, G-d also does not chastise the wicked, since they do not deserve the close relationship that this form of Divine discipline entails.



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