

# OHRNET

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## PARSHA INSIGHTS

### GOING FROM THE GOLD

*"And Yitro, the priest of Midian..." (18:1)*

I always wanted a spectacular view from my living room window: the Jerusalem hills, or the tomb of Shmuel HaNavi or even, at a pinch, the French Alps. Somehow, I ended up with the clothes lines of Arzei HaBira.

Not that I'm complaining. I don't really see them anymore. Come to think of it, anytime I visited someone who *did* have a spectacular view, they told me that they don't really notice it much after a while.

Our nature is to take what we have for granted. Sometimes we need an outsider's view to get us to appreciate with what we have been blessed.

In this week's Torah portion, the central and culminating event of Jewish nationhood takes place. G-d gives the Torah to the Jewish People on Mount Sinai. One would think that of all the possible names for this week's Parsha, the least likely would be that of a non-Jewish priest who had tried every form of idol worship in the world. And yet there it is in black and white: "Yitro – priest of Midian."

Why was this central Parsha of the Torah named after Yitro?

When Yitro heard of the Exodus and the miracles that were performed for the Jewish People his happiness was so great that he felt physically elated, like someone who weeps or faints through being overwhelmed with the emotion of unexpected joy. Literally, his flesh started to prickle. He had gooseflesh. (18:9) No such extreme reaction characterizes the response of the Jewish People. They believed in G-d and Moshe, His servant, sure, but there is no mention of a similar visceral reaction like that of Yitro.

Sometimes it takes a foreign eye to see exactly what you have. The following is a true story:

I come from a totally secular Israeli home. By secular I mean atheist. We held no religious beliefs at all, and no Jewish traditions and practices were kept. Yom Kippur was ignored, and I didn't even celebrate my bar mitzvah.

When I was 16 I began to search for some kind of meaning to life, although at the time I didn't call it that since I didn't real-

ize what I was doing. I liked rebels and I started hanging out with all kinds of different people. I dressed and acted like a kind of hippie, and caused no end of embarrassment to my parents. I didn't believe in anything. I roamed around the country with all the strange characters who were my friends. I could fill a book with my adventures from then.

At the age of 21, I packed my bags and set off for India to look for truth. In my quest for meaning, there was no commune or ashram that I did not visit. I got to know many gurus personally. Only someone who has spent time in India can really understand the magnetic force of these communes.

My roaming and searching continued and eventually I went to visit the Dalai Lama himself. I was captivated by the Dalai Lama's personality, by his wisdom and intelligence. I would rise early each morning and attend his daily sermon at 4:30am. As far as I was concerned, he was a human being without any blemishes.

Back home in Israel, my parents were worried about me. My father sent me a letter saying he had heard that I had "freaked out," afraid that I'd really gone crazy. I sent a polite letter back assuring him that I wasn't crazy but that I was now at a major crossroads in my life. As I mailed the letter I realized that the very wording of my letter would convince my father that I had indeed gone crazy!

The same evening I approached one of the Dalai Lama's assistants and asked for a private audience with the Dalai Lama the next morning after his sermon. The following morning I entered his chambers. He was a gentleman who greeted everyone who came to see him. He bowed to me and offered me a seat. My words poured forth as I told him that I saw truth and meaning in his religion and that I decided to adopt it if he would accept me.

"Where are you from," he asked me.

"Israel."

He looked at me. "Are you Jewish?"

"Yes," I replied.

His reaction surprised me. His expression turned from friendly to puzzled, with even a tinge of anger. He told me that he did not understand my decision, and that he would not per-

*continued on page six*

Hearing of the miracles G-d performed for *Bnei Yisrael*, Moshe's father-in-law Yitro arrives with Moshe's wife and sons, reuniting the family in the wilderness. Yitro is so impressed by Moshe's detailing of the Exodus from Egypt that he converts to Judaism. Seeing that the only judicial authority for the entire Jewish nation is Moshe himself, Yitro suggests that subsidiary judges be appointed to adjudicate smaller matters, leaving Moshe free to attend to larger issues. Moshe accepts his advice. *Bnei Yisrael* arrive at Mt. Sinai where G-d offers them the Torah. After they accept, G-d charges Moshe to instruct the people not to approach the mountain, and to prepare for three days. On the third day, amidst thun-

der and lightning, G-d's voice emanates from the smoke-enshrouded mountain and He speaks to the Jewish People, giving them the Ten Commandments: 1. Believe in G-d, 2. Don't worship other "gods," 3. Don't use G-d's name in vain, 4. Observe Shabbat, 5. Honor your parents, 6. Don't murder, 7. Don't commit adultery, 8. Don't kidnap, 9. Don't testify falsely, 10. Don't covet.

After receiving the first two commandments, the Jewish People, overwhelmed by this experience of the Divine, request that Moshe relay G-d's word to them. G-d instructs Moshe to caution the Jewish People regarding their responsibility to be faithful to the One who spoke to them.

## ISRAEL Forever

### NATIONAL UNITY – THEN AND NOW

As millions of Israeli citizens go to the polls in a few days to choose the political party they wish to represent them in the 16th Knesset there will be unfortunately a significant number of voters casting their ballots strictly on the basis of which party promises to do the most harm to the Torah community in Israel. Even those for whom this is not their sole motivation will have a hard time trying to figure out which one of the close to 30 slates to select as the candidates most likely to achieve the "unity of the people" which appears as a motto in virtually every other party platform.

What a far cry from the first election held by the Jewish people 3315 years ago! In this week's Torah portion we recall the scene at Mount Sinai where millions of Jews – the entire nation – stood "as one man with one heart" and unhesitatingly declared their readiness to accept G-d's offer of the Torah sight unseen.

This was the greatest demonstration of national unity in all of human history and it should serve as a model for all of today's politicians who sanctimoniously preach unity.

A nation is united "as one man with one heart" only when every one of its members submits his will to the will of the Creator. Only then is the corrupting competition between individuals replaced by the uplifting recognition of every human as a creation of G-d and the bonding affection for every Jew as a fellow member of the Chosen People.

How sad that at a time when national unity is so vital for coping with the security and economic problems facing the Jews in Israel there are so many descendants of those who stood at Sinai who choose to ignore the commitment made by their ancestors and place small-minded political opportunism above the Heaven-oriented unity which alone can safeguard Israel forever.

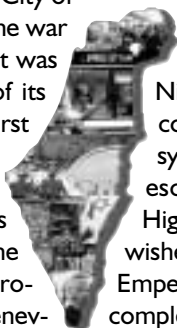
## LOVE OF THE LAND - THE PEOPLE

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

### NISSAN BECK AND THE EMPEROR – THE DOME THAT BOWED

One of them most outstanding synagogues in the Old City of Jerusalem which was destroyed by the Jordanians in the war of Independence was the Tiferet Yisrael Synagogue. It was popularly known as the Nissan Beck Shul because of its founder, whose father, Yisrael Beck, established the first Hebrew printing press in Jerusalem.

The most outstanding feature of this synagogue was the beautiful dome atop it. There is a famous story connected with this dome that goes back to the visit in 1870 of Franz Joseph, Emperor of Austro-Hungary, to Jerusalem. This ruler, respected for his bene-



volent policy towards his Jewish subjects, was given a royal welcome by those subjects who now lived in Jerusalem. They showed him the yet unfinished Nissan Beck Shul along with other the buildings they had constructed. Familiar with the domes which topped the synagogues back in his own country, he asked his escorts where the dome of this one was. "Your Highness," they cleverly explained, "even the synagogue wished to pay tribute to you by removing its hat." The Emperor took the hint and contributed a generous sum for completing the dome.

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## EATING DATES IN A SIEVE

The Torah (*Vayikra 19:27*) prohibited the removal of a man's sideburns, and the barber who violates this prohibition is punished with lashes if he did so after being warned of the consequences of his action by witnesses. What about the fellow getting the haircut who receives a similar warning?

When Rabbi Chisda heard one of his disciples quote a ruling that both of them are liable for lashes he expressed his amazement in a most unusual fashion. "Shall one who eats dates in a sieve receive lashes?" he asked. His challenge was based on the principle that lashes are administered only for an active violation of a Torah prohibition and this should not apply to the one receiving the haircut because he is guilty of a passive violation.

Rabbi Ashi refuted this challenge by explaining the case in question as one in which the fellow receiving the haircut assists the barber by positioning his head, so that he too is guilty of an active violation. But a mystery remains as to what Rabbi Chisda intended with his comparison of the passive fellow in the barber chair to someone eating dates in a sieve!

Ritva's explanation is that he was referring to a case in which someone ate from a sieve dates that had sinfully been picked from a tree by another Jew on a holiday. Just as he would not be liable for lashes because it was not he who did the picking in violation of Torah law, so too should the fellow getting the haircut be free of lashes since he was not involved in active violation.

Rabbi Yacov Ettinger, in his "Aruch La'ner" commentary finds this explanation too remote and offers an alternative one which gives meaning to the sieve mentioned in Rabbi Chisda's challenge. The *mishna* in *Mesechta Keilim (15:3)* mentions a sieve which was used by women hairdressers to catch the hair they cut from their clients. It may therefore be assumed that it was common practice to place the man receiving a haircut in such a sieve-like net to prevent the hair from dirtying the area. What did the fellow do as he sat idle while his hair was being cut? He ate dates! But why should he receive lashes, asked Rabbi Chisda, if the only thing he did actively was to eat these dates while seated in the sieve?

The big problem with both of these ingenious approaches is that they are hardly applicable to Rabbi Chisda's use of the same phrase in *Mesechta Sanhedrin (89b)*. We must conclude that once he coined the phrase here Rabbi Chisda decided to use it elsewhere even if only remotely applicable.

• Maccot 20b

## THREE TIMES THIRTEEN

In order to communicate a lesson to the sinner condemned to 39 lashes for violating a prohibition of the Torah, passages from Torah and Tehillim are read to him by one of the judges administering the penalty. Four passages are mentioned in the *Mishna* – *Devarim 28:58*, *Devarim 28:59*, *Devarim 29:8* and *Tehillim 78:38*.

The common denominator of these passages is the theme of Divine justice applied to those who fail to honor the covenant between Hashem and His people. The last three aforementioned passages also have something else in common – they each contain exactly thirteen words.

This number is not coincidental. The 39 lashes, after all, are divided into three equal sections. One set of 13 is applied to the chest and two sets of thirteen each to the back at the shoulders. Each word of these three passages thus corresponds to one of the blows.

The first passage, however, contains 21 words and does not seem to fit in with this pattern. Maharsha therefore suggests that this passage was read as an introduction to the lashes but not while they were administered, in accordance with the word count of the succeeding passages.

There is a mention in *Shulchan Aruch Orech Chaim 607:6* of a custom for Jews to administer to one another very token lashes on Erev Yom Kippur in order to stimulate thoughts of repentance. Since these are not lashes in a real sense because no court today has the authority to issue such a sentence, and the one receiving the lashes received no formal warning, the only passage said by the lasher – three times – is the last one which stresses Divine mercy even in the administration of justice.

• Maccot 20b

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## PARSHA Q&A ?

1. Yitro had 7 names. Why was one of his names *Yeter*?
2. News of which two events motivated Yitro to come join the Jewish People?
3. What name of Yitro indicates his love for Torah?
4. Why was Tzipora with her father, Yitro, and not with Moshe when *Bnei Yisrael* left Egypt?
5. Why does verse 18:5 say that Yitro came to the desert — don't we already know that the *Bnei Yisrael* were in the desert?
6. Why did Moshe tell Yitro all that G-d had done for the Jewish People?
7. According to the *Midrash* quoted by Rashi, how did Yitro respond when he was told about the destruction of Egypt?
8. Who is considered as if he enjoys the splendor of the *Shechina*?
9. On what day did Moshe sit to judge the Jewish People?
10. Who is considered a co-partner in Creation?
11. "Moshe sat to judge the people, and the people stood before Moshe...." What bothered Yitro about this arrangement?
12. Why did Yitro return to his own land?
13. How did the encampment at Sinai differ from the other encampments?
14. To whom does the Torah refer when it uses the term "*Beit Yaakov*"?
15. How is G-d's protection of the Jewish People similar to an eagle's protection of its young?
16. What was G-d's original plan for *Matan Torah*? What was the response of the Jewish People?
17. How many times greater is the "measure of reward" than the "measure of punishment"?
18. How is it derived that "Don't steal" refers to kidnapping?
19. In response to hearing the Torah given at Sinai, how far backwards did the Jewish people retreat in fear?
20. Why does the use of iron tools profane the altar?

## PARSHA Q&A!

### Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

1. 18:1 - Because he caused a Parsha to be added to the Torah. *Yeter* means addition.
2. 18:1 - The splitting of the sea and the war against Amalek.
3. 18:1 - Chovav.
4. 18:3 - When Aharon met Moshe with his family on their way down to Egypt, Aharon said to Moshe: "We're pained over the Jews already in Egypt, and you're bringing more Jews to Egypt?" Moshe, hearing this, sent his wife and children back to Midian.
5. 18:5 - To show Yitro's greatness. He was living in a luxurious place, yet he went to the desert in order to study the Torah.
6. 18:8 - To draw Yitro closer to the Torah way of life.
7. 18:9 - He grieved.
8. 18:12 - One who dines with Torah scholars.
9. 18:13 - The day after Yom Kippur.
10. 18:13 - A judge who renders a correct decision.
11. 18:14 - Yitro felt that the people weren't being treated with the proper respect.
12. 18:27 - To convert the members of his family to Judaism.
13. 19:2 - The Jewish People were united.
14. 19:3 - The Jewish women.
15. 19:4 - An eagle carries its young on top of its wings to protect them from human arrows. So too, G-d's cloud of glory separated between the Egyptians and the Jewish camp in order to absorb Egyptian missiles and arrows fired at the Jewish People.
16. 19:9 - G-d offered to appear to Moshe and to give the Torah through him. The Jewish People responded that they wished to hear the Torah directly from G-d.
17. 20:6 - 500 times.
18. 20:13 - Since it is written immediately after "Don't murder" and "Don't commit adultery," it is derived that "Don't steal" refers to a crime carrying the same penalty as the first two, namely, the death penalty.
19. 20:15 - They backed away from the mountain twelve *mil* (one *mil* is 2000 cubits).
20. 20:22 - The altar was created to extend life; iron is sometimes used to make weapons which shorten life.

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## ANGER AND THE TORAH

**From: A. B.**

Dear Rabbi,  
I would like to know where in the Torah it discusses the topic of anger. Is it a Torah mitzvah – I mean transgression.  
Thank you very much.

Dear A. B.,

Anger is considered one of the most destructive traits. Yaakov (Jacob) strongly admonishes his children Shimon and Levi "Accursed is their rage for it is intense, and their wrath for it is harsh..." Shlomo Hamelech (King Solomon) warns "Anger resides in the bosom of fools." The Midrash criticizes Moshe for becoming angry: "Rabbi Eliezer states: in three instances (Moshe) came to be angry and thus came to err: Upon being angry at Elazar and Itamar the sons of Aharon; after being angry with the commanding soldiers who returned from battle with Midian; and upon being angry at

the Children of Israel when they demanded water."

It is puzzling that "anger" is so destructive and is nevertheless not the subject of a direct commandment. There is no mitzvah "Thou shalt not be angry." Rabbi Chaim Vital in his classic work "Sha'arei Kedusha" addresses this question, and answers it with a very profound concept. Before we ever get to the point of performing *mitzvot* there is a need to develop our basic character. The traits that comprise our character determine the way in which we fulfill the *mitzvot*. We must first spend our energy in perfecting these aspects of ourselves. Once these are properly developed we can perform the *mitzvot* with relative ease and happiness.

Conclusion: Overcoming anger is a *foundation* for the proper fulfillment of the entire Torah, and is therefore not counted as a separate mitzvah.

Sources:

- Bereishet 49:7.
- Kohelet, 7:9.
- Sifri - Matot.
- Rabbi Chaim Vital - Sha'arei Kedusha, part 1, gate 2.

## WHAT'S THE RIGHT THING TO DO?

### REAL-LIFE QUESTIONS OF SOCIAL AND BUSINESS ETHICS

## ADVICE WITHOUT VICE

**Question:**

An acquaintance of mine is considering purchasing a certain property and, as he has done on other occasions, consulted me for my opinion on the advisability of the deal. It so happens that I am also interested in the same property and if I encourage him to buy I will lose out. What is the right thing to do?

**Answer:**

The answer to your question can be found in the words of the great ethicist, Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzato, who offers these guidelines in his classic "Mesillat Yesharim" (The Path of the Just, Chapter 11).

"This is the responsibility of the honest man. When someone asks his advice, he must tell him to do what he himself would do in a similar situation, without any consideration other than the benefit of the asker. This advice must be offered without the most remote ulterior motive. If it so

happens that he anticipates a loss to himself through such advice he should try, if possible, to reveal this to the asker. If this is not feasible he should excuse himself from giving any advice. Under no circumstances may he propose anything whose result will not be for the benefit of the asker."

The author, whose strong stand on this matter is based on the Torah prohibition "And do not place a stumbling block before a blind man" (Vayikra 19:14), points out that the Talmudic Sages have applied this rule to areas of life outside of business. If someone asks for information regarding a prospect for marriage, caution must be exercised to avoid misleading him with wrong information because you have an interest in seeing the other party get married.

It is because it is tempting to rationalize one's bad advice by claiming it to be good that it was necessary for the entire Jewish people to hear, upon entering Eretz Yisrael, the Heavenly warning of "Accursed be he who misleads a blind man on his path." (Devarim 27:18)

### PROTECTING THE SANE DOGS FROM THE MAD ONE

The “mad dog” of Baghdad poses a threat not only to the humans in Israel and elsewhere with his weapons of mass destruction but animal life as well. When people in Israel began lining up at distribution centers for gas masks to protect themselves against the threat of Saddam Hussein launching missiles with chemical or biological warheads, Rafi Keshon began wondering what would happen to all the cats and dogs in the country in the event of such an emergency.

The solution of this veterinarian was the invention of pet-friendly gas masks in a variety of sizes to fit cats and dogs of all varieties. These masks, which cost from 56 to 84 shekels depending on size, are not intended for long-term use but rather for evacuating a pet to safety through an area contaminated by biological or chemical agents. Pet owners will also be able to buy doses of atropin, antibiotics for anthrax – and even tranquilizers to calm down the pets if they get too excited.

## PARSHA INSIGHTS

*continued from page one*

mit me to carry it out.

I was stunned. What did he mean?

“All religions are an imitation of Judaism,” he stated. “I am sure that when you lived in Israel, your eyes were closed. Please take the first plane back to Israel and open your eyes. Why settle for an imitation when you can have the real thing?”

His words spun around in my head the whole day. I thought to myself: I am a Jew and an Israeli, but I know nothing about my own religion. Did I have to search and wander the whole world only to be told that I was blind and that the answers I was seeking were to be found on my own doorstep?

I did what the Dalai Lama told me to do. I immediately flew back to Israel and entered a yeshiva. And, as he told me to do, I opened my eyes. I began to see the Dalai Lama had indeed been correct. I discovered Judaism and its vitality, and that it encompassed everything in life. I embraced its laws and found many reasons to live — at least 613 reasons! And I found joy.

Two years later someone suggested a *shidduch* (arranged meeting). Anat was a young woman of my age who was also a *ba'alat teshuvah*, a returnee to traditional Judaism. She too had been to Goa and other places in India to search for answers, and she too had found them back in Israel, in the religion of Israel. We clicked immediately. We had gone through the same search for meaning, and the same return to our roots. Eventually, Anat and I got engaged.

When I went to offer a gift to the matchmaker, she refused to accept anything, saying that she didn't deserve it.

“But it's customary to give the matchmaker a gift — and I want to do it.”

“You are quite right, but in this case I am not the matchmaker,” she replied simply.

“What do you mean?”

“I'll tell you. Anat came to me and showed me a piece of paper with a name in it. She asked me to introduce her to the

person whose name was written there. She knew nothing at all about that person, but said that she had been given his name by someone she trusts completely... It was your name.”

After the engagement party, Anat and I went for a walk.

“Tell me,” I said, “how did this *shidduch* come about? I want to know who gave you my name, so that I can pay him.”

Anat said “I haven't told you yet that at the end of my wandering, I went to the Dalai Lama. I was very impressed by him and all he embodied and I decided to join his religion. When I told him he said, ‘Anat, since you are Jewish you should not settle for silver if you can have gold.’ He told me to return to my roots and then in a whisper, he asked one of his assistants to bring him a piece of paper. The Dalai Lama then copied the name that was there onto another piece of paper, and handed it to me. ‘This is your soul mate,’ he told me.

With a smile, Anat said to me, “So you will have to travel to India to pay the *shadchan*.”

Anat and I have been married for three years now and we have been blessed with two wonderful children. I am immersed in Torah study, and Anat is a wonderful wife and mother. And our parents, you may be wondering, how did they accept all this? Our parents are educated, well-to-do people whose way of life is very different from ours, but they are impressed by our lifestyle and the close relationship between us. And they know the role the Dalai Lama had in all of this.”

Sometime it take a “priest of Midian” to remind us that we have the gold.

Sources:

- *Ohr HaChaim*; adapted from “People Speak About Themselves” by Rabbi Chaim Walder, Feldheim Publishers [www.feldheim.com](http://www.feldheim.com)