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PARSHA INSIGHTS

BY RABBI YAAKOV ASHER SINCLAIR

THE SERVANT OF TWO MASTERS

“And now, if you will surely listen to My voice...” (19:5)

Why is it only now after all the plagues and the Exodus that G-d asks the Jewish People to listen to His voice?

The Talmud Yerushalmi explains that a Canaanite slave is exempt from the mitzvah of saying “*Shma*” because he cannot honestly accept the yoke of Heaven (the purpose of this mitzvah) since he already has another yoke — that of his master.

A true servant cannot serve two masters. To the extent that he serves one, his dedicated service to the other is lacking.

Only now, after breaking the enslavement of Egypt, bringing the Children of Israel out of Egypt and raising

them far above the Egyptians on eagles’ wings, G-d is the undisputed Master of the Jewish People; and thus only now does G-d seek from the Jewish People their acceptance of the Kingdom of Heaven.

This should give us pause.

How much of our own lives are spent serving “other masters”? The masters of honor, of wealth and prestige, of frivolous entertainment and needless worry?

To fly with the eagles a Jew can have no other master than G-d.

• Sources: based on the *Shem MiShmuel* in *Mayana shel Torah*

PARSHA OVERVIEW

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 Mount 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 thunder 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.

BAVA BATRA 25 - 31

Rabbi Yitzchak said, “One who wants to have wisdom should turn to the south; and if he wants wealth he should turn to the north.”

In addition to this statement on our *daf*, our *gemara* also teaches a “*siman*”, or “memory device”, in order not to mix up which direction is advised for wisdom and which direction for wealth. The *Shulchan* (Table; i.e. source of material sustenance and wealth) was in the northern side of the *Mishkan* and *Batei Mikdash*, whereas the *Menorah* (symbolizing the light of wisdom of the Torah) was in the south.

It is interesting to note that despite Rabbi Yitzchak’s statement which offers a choice between praying in a manner either fortuitous for wisdom or for wealth — but not for both simultaneously — Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi teaches otherwise. He states that one should always face the south, and in this way will be better positioned not only for wisdom but also for wealth. Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi claims that when one has the wisdom of the Torah he also has great wealth, as the verse teaches: “Long life is on its (the Torah’s) right, while wealth and honor are on its left.” (Proverbs 3:16)

As beautiful as this teaching may sound, this opinion is not codified in *Shulchan Aruch*, and is also not our *minhag* (custom).

Rashi explains that the directional words of advice in our *gemara* refer to “turning one’s head” (not body) south or north when praying. And “praying” refers to the “standing prayer” that we often call “the *amida*” or “the *Shmoneh Esrei*”. Turning only one’s head south or north is consistent with the *gemara* elsewhere (*Masechet Berachot* 30a), which teaches that the main direction for prayer is toward the Land of Israel, Jerusalem and site where the Temples stood, as taught by King Solomon when he dedicated the First Temple (*Kings I* ch. 8). Therefore, according to Rashi, one would position his body towards the east (towards the Land of Israel), and angle his head to the south or north, depending upon his objective.

The Rema, however, seems to prefer to explain our *gemara* as speaking about the position of one’s *entire body* for wisdom or wealth, and not only the head. In *Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim* 94:2 the Rema states: “And one who wants to fulfill the words of our Sages to turn to the south for wisdom and to the north for wealth should do so; however, he should turn his face towards the east.”

The *Mishneh Berurah* (*ibid* 94:2:12) writes that this implies that one should stand with his *body* towards the south or north, and angle only his *head* toward the east (in the *Askenazic* countries in Eastern Europe that require prayer towards the east in order to be praying in the direction of the Land of Israel). The *Mishneh Berurah*, however, points out that Rashi explains our *gemara* differently: that one’s body should face the Land of Israel and that only the head should be angled to the side — south for wisdom or north for wealth. He concludes that it is correct to pray according to Rashi’s explanation, and that this is in fact our widespread *minhag* — to position our bodies towards the Land of Israel (in the east when we are west of Israel), and angle our heads sideways, to the south or north, if so desired, in prayer for increased wisdom and wealth.

• *Bava Batra* 25b

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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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Love of the Land, written by Rav Mendel Weinbach, zt"l • *Parsha Insights* written by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair
General Editor and Talmud Tips: Rabbi Moshe Newman • Design: Rabbi Eliezer Shapiro

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Yitro

THE PUBLIC GIVING OF THE TORAH AT MOUNT SINAI

This Parsha describes the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai, the culmination of the narrative of the Exodus from Egypt. Abarbanel poses two simple but important questions: Why didn't G-d give the Torah much sooner in history, to Adam or Noach, or at least to one of the Patriarchs? Secondly, why did G-d choose to give the Torah at that particular location? Why not give it when the people were in Egypt, or in the Land of Israel, perhaps on the very spot where the Temple would be built?

In regard to the first question Abarbanel offers three perspectives. First of all, the Torah had to be given to a large congregation of people that constituted an entire nation. Even though Adam and Noach observed the universally applicable Noachide laws, and the Patriarchs observed the commandments of the Torah prophetically even before the *mitzvot* were given, they did so only as individuals with a personal intellectual and prophetic connection to the will of G-d. Additionally, according to kabbalistic thought, the 600,000 men between the ages of 20 and 60 who were present at Sinai constituted all of the different character types in the totality of Mankind. In effect, although the Torah was only directly given to one distinct nation, it was in a sense transmitted to all of Mankind.

Secondly, the monumental task of receiving and transmitting the vast scope of the Torah and ensuring that it would be accepted by the nation could only be achieved through Moshe. Although the Jewish nation produced hundreds of prophets, Moshe stood alone, unique in the history of Mankind. That uniqueness can be characterized as follows: 1) Maturity at an early age and physical strength undiminished by age. 2) Total control over his physical desires. 3) The wisdom to almost completely understand the nature of G-d's total Creation. 4) A spiritual make-up that allowed him to receive prophecy at any moment, unlike any other prophet. 5) Since he had led the nation out of Egypt, fought battles and performed miracles on their behalf, it was fitting that only he would be the one to transmit the Torah. 6) He combined all of the positive characteristics of the Jewish People into one individual: royalty, priesthood, scholarship, material and spiritual accomplishment. 7) Most importantly, the nature of his prophecy was unlike any other. He received his prophecies when fully conscious. They were never shrouded in metaphors, images, visions or dreams. His prophecies came in the most direct manner. This is

what is meant by the fact that he spoke with G-d "Face to face."

Thirdly, in order to emphasize the fundamental difference between Torah Judaism and all other religious beliefs and philosophies, the giving of the Torah had to be a clearly miraculous Divine intervention. It was the culmination of the Exodus, from the plagues to the splitting of the sea and the destruction of the Egyptian army, to the miraculous manna from Heaven, to the victory over Amalek, and finally to the thunder, lightning, smoke and fire that surrounded the Sinai mountain.

In regard to the second question, the Torah was given specifically at Mount Sinai for the following reasons: 1) Since it required Divine intervention, the Torah had to be given in a desert setting, where the nation could be sustained only miraculously. It also had to be given soon after the Exodus so that those miracles would be fresh in their minds. 2) Mount Sinai possessed a unique measure of spiritual sanctity. It was there that Moshe first encountered G-d at the burning bush. 3) They could not receive the Torah in Israel since they would be overwhelmed by the physical necessities of conquering and developing the Land. At the same time, they could not receive it in Egypt as they were still affected by the spiritual contamination of the immoral and idolatrous Egyptian society. They required a cleansing experience of three months of travel which brought them to Mount Sinai. 4) Finally, the Torah had to be given in a desolate wilderness that was not claimed by any other nation. This symbolizes the availability of the Torah to all people. If the Torah had been given in Israel, the nations of the world could claim that since the Torah was given only in the territory of the Jewish People they had no connection to it, were not bound by the dictates intended to apply to all of Mankind, and were not welcome to accept it in totality voluntarily. Additionally, disputes could arise within the Jewish People, with each tribe claiming that the Torah was given in its portion of the Land.

Therefore, the Torah had to be given publicly and dramatically, in a place owned by no one — and thus owned by everyone — to a prophet and a nation uniquely prepared to receive the message which would enlighten all of Mankind.

THREE STEPS

From: Kenneth

Dear Rabbi,
I have seen people pray at the Western Wall, and I've noticed they seem to step back or step forward during prayer, and I'm wondering if you could explain to me that aspect of the Jewish prayer. With all due respect, thank you.

Dear Kenneth,

Most of the formal Jewish prayer does not have a specific formula for the person's posture or footwork. In general, during most of the prayer services one may sit, stand or sway, as long as one behaves respectfully and with the appropriate decorum befitting one's praying to G-d.

One of the few exceptions is regarding the standing, silent prayer, called the *amida* (which literally means "standing") or *shemoneh esreh* (meaning "18", the original number of parts of this prayer), which is the pinnacle of communion with G-d, and has a fixed formula for posture. One of these requirements involves what steps we take when approaching G-d in prayer, and what steps we are to take in order to disengage. These are the steps you've seen people make back and forth during prayer.

According to Rabbi Moshe Isserlis (Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 95:1), the essential requirement is to take three steps forward before commencing this special prayer. Elsewhere (Darchei Moshe I, in the name of Rokeach), he writes that this is based on a precedent of the Patriarchs and Prophets in prayer: "And Abraham *approached* (G-d in prayer) and said..." (Gen. 18:23); "Then Judah *approached* (Joseph, with a prayer to G-d for his success)" (Gen. 44:18); "Elijah the prophet *approached* (G-d) and said..." (I Kings 18:36). Based on this three-fold precedent for approaching G-d in prayer, we take three steps.

Another explanation for these three steps is found in Kaf HaChaim (Shulchan Aruch *ibid*, note 7, from the Shelah) and based on the precedent of Moses: "The people remained far off, but Moses drew near to the dark cloud of opaqueness, where G-d was" (Ex. 20:17). According to kabbalistic teaching three "barriers" must be traversed in order to appear before G-d: "darkness" (*choshech*), "the cloud" (*anan*) and "opaqueness" (*arafel*). The three steps before prayer represent crossing this threshold of three.

One is to begin these three steps forward with one's right foot, which is the more dexterous one for most people, in order to demonstrate eagerness to pray. The Talmud (Berachot 10b) adds that during the prayer one must place

his two feet together as one foot. This is akin to the ministering angels about whose service of G-d the prophet describes, "Their feet were one foot" (Ezek. 1:7). This symbolizes singularly focusing and directing all of our energies to G-d during prayer.

According to many opinions, not only must one take these three steps forward toward prayer, but he must *first* take three steps back (see Mishneh Berurah *ibid*, note 3). The Ben Ish Chai (Beshallah 3) states that there is great kabbalistic meaning in first stepping back, and one must thus carefully choose and assume his place of prayer, take three steps back from it, and then return to that place in great awe and reverence. Kaf HaChaim (*ibid*) relates this to the teaching of the Talmud (Shabbat 88b), whereby at Sinai each utterance of G-d caused the Jews to fall back as their souls departed, but G-d revived them with the "Dew of Resurrection", and the angels restored them to their place at the foot of Sinai. Additionally, this is compared to the way in which the angels are described as serving G-d by "retracting back" and "running forward" (Ezek. 1:14), which the Talmud (Chagiga 13b, see Rashi) explains is an expression of the fear, awe and reverence the angels have before approaching G-d.

Just as one takes three steps before commencing prayer, one must take three steps back upon finishing it (Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 123:1). This is in order to take leave of G-d, much as a servant or subject departs from before his master or king (Mishneh Berurah 1). But, beforehand, one must remain in his place, and may not even look back to see if the person behind him has finished, until the leader of the prayer (the *chazzan*) has finished his own prayer (Rema, end of 2). This is to avoid distracting other people who are praying behind, who are presumed to not have finished their personal prayer until the leader does so (Mishneh Berurah 12). Only after the leader has finished his own prayer may the person look back. If someone is still praying behind him, he may not distract him by stepping back; rather he must remain in his place. Once it is permitted to step back, unlike before the prayer, after the prayer he steps back first with his left, less dexterous foot, to indicate his reluctance to disengage from prayer (Shulchan Aruch *ibid* 3; M. B. 13). Then, in order not to look as if he is anxious to depart from G-d, he must remain stationary in his place until he takes the three steps forward again to join the *chazzan's* recitation of *kedusha* (M. B. 7, 9). After the evening prayer, where there is no such recitation, he must remain standing in that place until the *chazzan* recites *kaddish*, or at least for the amount of time it takes to walk four *amot* (approx. 2 meters; or three seconds).

SHOWERING AND SHAVING BEFORE PRAYERS

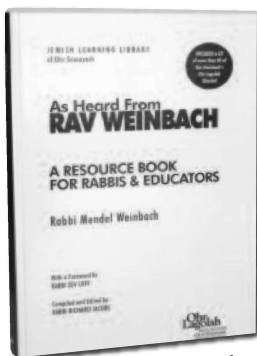
The Rabbis only prohibited one from getting a haircut or going to a bath house a half hour before the time of Mincha arrives, since this was common practice. It is therefore permitted to get a haircut and to enter a bath house before dawn, which is when the time of Shacharit actually begins (Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 89:7), but after dawn one should not do so before praying. (Mishneh Berurah in the name of Eliya Rabba)

The Piskei Teshuvot explains that the above prohibition only applies to bathing that is similar to a bath house, which would take a while, and poses a concern that one might take too long or become too tired to pray. A shower (or bath — Halacha Berurah), which is common in these times, is permitted, and considered like washing one’s hands, face and feet in honor of G-d, as mentioned in the Talmud (Shabbat 50b). It is certainly permitted to go to a mikveh before prayers; however one should be careful not to take so much time as to pass “zman tefillah” (the fourth hour of the day) as a result. Going swimming for pleasure is not permitted

unless instructed by a doctor to do so, and due to circumstances that should require one to go at that time.

The Piskei Teshuvot, citing Halacha Berurah, permits one who is accustomed to shaving in the morning to do so before prayers, even after dawn and sunrise. He explains that today there is no concern of the utensil breaking (which would require fixing it), and it also does not take up a lot of time. He adds that one doing so should first recite the blessings on the Torah and say *Kriat Shma*. In the footnotes he cites two opinions which forbid shaving before praying: Halichot Shlomo in the name of Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, and Rav Ben Tzion Aba Shaul in his *Sheilot VeTeshuvot*, and he therefore concludes that one should be strict unless it is really necessary.

The Mishneh Berurah writes that there are those who prohibit doing other types of things that are generally done in the early morning, and therefore it is advisable to say morning blessings before doing so.



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WHAT'S IN A WORD? *Synonyms in the Hebrew Language*

BY RABBI REUVEN CHAIM KLEIN

MYSELF AND I

The Ten Commandments famously open with the words, “I am the L-rd your G-d who took you out of Egypt...” (Ex. 20:2). In this context, the Hebrew word for “I” is *anochi*. But try using the word *anochi* to mean yourself in Modern Hebrew, and you will encounter chuckles and guffaws. The word *anochi* is considered somewhat archaic; the way one refers to himself in Modern Hebrew is *ani*, not *anochi*. In fact, even in the Bible the word *ani* appears more than twice as many times as does the word *anochi*. So are these two words truly synonymous? Is there any difference between them?

The Maharal of Prague (1520-1609) writes that the difference between *ani* and *anochi* is that *ani* is the simple way of expressing first-person, while *anochi* refers to a reflexive first-person, i.e. when one stresses oneself. In other words, *ani* simply means “I”, while *anochi* means “I (myself)”.

Similarly, Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim of Breslau (1740-1814) and the Malbim (1809-1879) explain that both the words *ani* and *anochi* are used to highlight a novelty, but the difference between them is in where the novelty lies. When using the word *anochi* the novelty is in the subject (“I — and not someone else — did such-and-such”), but when using the word *ani* the novel idea focuses on the predicate. Accordingly, *ani omed* (“I am standing”) means, “I am standing (as opposed to sitting)”, while *anochi omed* means “I (as opposed to someone else) am standing.” According to these authorities, when G-d began saying the Ten Commandments by proclaiming, “I am the L-rd your G-d...” He meant to stress that He — and no other — is our G-d who took us out of Egypt.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808-1888) offers a slightly different twist on this discussion. He explains that *ani* connotes the first-person speaker as distinct from his intended audience, while *anochi* connotes the first-person’s intimacy

with his audience in his role as their benefactor. By this rubric, G-d used the word *anochi* when introducing the Decalogue in order to establish His closeness to the Jewish People, especially in His role as their G-d, and in taking them out of Egypt. This explanation somewhat echoes the Midrashic tradition that the Hebrew word *anochi* in the Ten Commandments is related to the Egyptian word *anoch*, which means “love” and “endearment”.

Rabbeinu Bachaya (1255-1340) writes that the word *anochi* has deeper, Kabbalistic implications than the word *ani* does, but he does not explain this any further. This might imply that the word *anochi* alludes to one’s soul, while the word *ani* represents his body. However, there is evidence to the contrary: Ibn Ezra explains that the word *anochi* is related to the Hebrew word *anoch* (plumb line). Based on this, Rabbi Yehuda Leib Edel (1760-1828) writes that *anochi* recalls the bob at the bottom of a plumb line that serves to anchor the straightedge. This is analogous to the role of the body vis-à-vis the soul, as the body serves to anchor the soul in This World by containing it within physical boundaries. Accordingly, Rabbi Edel argues that although the words *anochi* and *ani* both mean “I”, they refer to two different elements of one’s personal existence. When a speaker uses the word *ani* he speaks on behalf of his own soul. But, when he uses the word *anochi* he refers to his body — his anchor to This World.

As an interesting side point, Rabbi Yaakov Tzvi Mecklenburg (1785-1865) proves from various sources that although the word *ani* is usually a common noun that refers to the first-person, when G-d uses that word He sometimes uses it as a special name of Himself.

Author’s note:

Le’Zechut Refuah Shleimah for Bracha bat Chaya Rachel

LOVE OF THE LAND

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

KFAR MASH’HAD — TOMB OF THE PROPHET YONAH

The Prophet Yonah is familiar to us mostly because the entire Book of Yonah is read at the Mincha service on Yom Kippur. Where he is buried is a matter of dispute, with sites as varied as Zippori, Kfar Kanah, Hebron, Halhul, Kfar Azza, Tiberias, Ashdod and Mosul in Iraq mentioned as possibilities.



Rabbi Chayim ben Atar, author of the Ohr Hachayim commentary on the Chumash, is reported to have said that when he lived in Peki’in he visited the tomb of Yonah in Kfar Mash’had. This village lies between the Beit Rimon junction and the city of Nazareth, and an Arab mosque marks the assumed location of the prophet’s tomb.