

OHRNET

THE OHR SOMAYACH TORAH MAGAZINE ON THE INTERNET

PARSHA INSIGHTS

LET'S DO BREAKFAST

"Moshe descended the mountain to the people" (19:14)

"What time do we land?"

"In about two hours, Mr. President."

"Okay — I'm going to need about an hour to have a shower, freshen up and change my clothes before I can meet the Prime Minister. Can you radio ahead and fix up a meeting at about twelve? Actually, make it twelve-thirty. I haven't slept a wink on this flight, so I'll need to close my eyes for twenty minutes or so. Oh, and I could do with a light breakfast when I wake up — just a roll and some coffee, a little cereal. Make that real coffee. Hey, is there any real need to have this meeting as soon as we arrive? Couldn't we postpone till the afternoon?"

Moshe, the quintessential Jewish leader, went "from the mountain to the people." He didn't take a break. He didn't take a pit-stop. Moshe ignored his personal affairs completely and went straight to work. From the mountain to the people.

• Based on Rashi

SEEING THE SOUND OF MUSIC

"And all the people saw the voices" (20:15)

One winter's day in a small village in Poland, there arrived a frail figure carrying a small black leather box.

It was still early in the morning, the pale winter sunlight barely coloring the ashen faces of the houses.

The man made his way to the town square. He rubbed his hands together and blew warm air from between them. A cloud of mist emerged from the other side of his clasped palms and snaked its way upward, catching the rays of the rising sun as it faded away.

He opened the box and assem-

"G-d opened their eyes, and they all saw this overwhelming joy, so that even if they could not experience the music itself clearly, they could experience its great happiness."

bled three black cylindrical sections of a clarinet.

He started to play, at first slowly and hauntingly. The sound was so beautiful and compelling that very soon, yawning faces started to appear at the windows.

Children were pressing their faces to the panes. He started to pick up the tempo. The sound was so delightful, so sweet, that very soon, people emerged into the street and spontaneously started to dance.

The music crescendoed in wave after wave. The unbelievable sweetness of the sound gilded the faces of the dancers with delight.

Into this scene stumbled a deaf man. He was quite convinced that

everyone had taken leave of their senses. Here, for no reason whatsoever, was half the town dancing in the square at six o'clock in the morning!

If he'd been a little bit more discerning, he would have realized that it was the voice of the clarinet and its beautiful music that was the reason for all this dancing.

When the Torah was given at Sinai, the people 'saw' the voices. They experienced *kinesthesia* - the reversal of sensory perception. Seeing Sound. Hearing Sight.

When the Torah was given at Sinai, Hashem radiated the light of His Presence on the whole Jewish People as one. They experienced this as angels dancing.

When they saw the angels dancing, they understood that it was because of the overwhelming sweetness and beauty of the Holy Torah. And, as it were, they craned their necks and strained their ears to hear its sublime melody.

Compared to angels they were somewhat spiritually 'deaf' because they had never experienced such sounds. Nevertheless, they wanted to try and at least get a 'glimpse' of the sound.

G-d opened their eyes, and they all saw this overwhelming joy, so that even if they could not experience the music itself clearly, they could experience its great happiness.

Thus, they pressed themselves to hear the voice of the Torah itself. Maybe they would be able to reach that level and understand the exquisite light which is Torah...

• Based on Degel Machane Ephraim

continued on page four

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Hearing of the miracles Hashem has performed for the *Bnei Yisrael*, Moshe's father-in-law, Yisro, arrives with Moshe's wife and sons, reuniting the family in the wilderness. Yisro is so impressed by Moshe's detailing of the Exodus from Egypt that he converts and joins the Jewish People.

Seeing that the only judicial authority for the entire Jewish nation is Moshe himself, Yisro suggests that subsidiary judges be appointed to adjudicate the smaller matters, leaving Moshe free to attend to larger issues. Moshe accepts his advice.

The Children of Israel arrive at *Mt. Sinai* where the Torah is offered to them. After they accept, Hashem charges Moshe to instruct the people not to approach the mountain, and to prepare themselves for

three days in order to receive the Torah.

On the third day, amidst thunder and lightning, Hashem's voice emanates from the smoke-enshrouded mountain, and He begins speaking to the Jewish People, giving to them the Ten Commandments:

- Believe in Hashem
- Don't have other gods
- Don't use Hashem's name in vain
- Observe the Shabbos
- Honor your parents
- Don't murder
- Don't commit adultery
- Don't kidnap
- Don't testify falsely
- Don't covet.

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

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SING My SOUL INSIGHTS INTO THE SHABBOS ZEMIRO

MIZMOR LE'DAVID

"SONG OF DAVID..."

*"Hashem is my shepherd,
I shall not lack anything."*

The shepherd is the provider for his flock. When one studies Torah while a human shepherd supports him he is forced to share his reward for this study with his provider. But when "Hashem is my shepherd" and provides this sup-

port directly "I shall not lack anything" in the amount of reward I will receive. This thought, expressed in this psalm at the beginning of the meal, is echoed in the grace said at the end of the meal, when we ask Hashem to spare us from relying on the gifts of flesh and blood and to provide our needs directly through His "full, open, sacred and generous hand."

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PARSHA Q&A ?

1. News of which two events motivated Yisro to come join the Jewish people?
2. Yisro had six other names. What are they?
3. Who informed Pharaoh of Moshe killing the Egyptian?
4. Why did Moshe tell Yisro all that Hashem had done for the Jewish People?
5. According to the *Midrash* quoted by Rashi, how did Yisro respond when he was told about the destruction of Egypt?
6. Who is considered as if he enjoys the splendor of the *Shechina*?
7. On what day did Moshe sit to judge the Jewish People?
8. Who is considered a co-partner in creation?
9. “Moshe sat to judge the people, and the people stood before Moshe...” What bothered Yisro about this arrangement?
10. In Rashi 18:19, what does “*Hey Mem Lamed Chaf*” spell? What does it mean?
11. Why did Yisro return to his own land?
12. On what day did the Jewish People arrive at Sinai?
13. How did the encampment at Sinai differ from the other encampments?
14. What was Hashem’s original plan for *Matan Torah*? What was the response of the Jewish People?
15. How many times greater is the ‘measure of reward’ than the ‘measure of punishment’?
16. How is it derived that “don’t steal” refers to kidnapping?
17. In response to hearing the Torah given at Sinai, how far backwards did the Jewish people retreat in fear?
18. Upon what must the copper altar rest?
19. Why does the use of iron tools profane the altar?
20. The altar must have a ramp and not steps, so the *Kohanim* can conduct themselves in a respectful manner. What lesson does this teach?

BONUS QUESTION?

“Hashem said to Moshe, ‘Behold I come to you in the thickness of cloud, in order that the people will hear when I speak to you...’” (19:9) What does it mean that Hashem appeared to Moshe in the ‘thickness of cloud?’ Why was that necessary ‘in order for the people to hear’ Hashem speaking to Moshe?

I DIDN'T KNOW THAT!

The public Torah reading is a symbolic reenactment of the giving of the Torah at Sinai: The *Gabbai*, who decides which person to call to the Torah, symbolizes Hashem, who chose the Jewish people to receive the Torah. The person called to the Torah represents the Jewish people. And the person reading the Torah is Moshe, the ‘broker’ between the Jewish people and Hashem.

• *Taamei Haminhagim 328 - Heard from Rabbi Sholem Fishbane*

HAFTORAH: YESHAYAHU 6:1-13, 7:1-6, 9:5,6

The revelation of the Shechina at Sinai which is the subject of this week’s Parsha is mirrored in the Haftorah by a revelation of the Shechina to the prophet Yishayahu.

No, No, AFTER YOU...

The nature of most people is to want to be first. To demonstrate their superiority over others. This is the driving force behind the desire to have money and power. I’m better than you! **You** go second!

And even when we allow others to go first, when we put them in front of ourselves, it’s usually

to demonstrate what elevated character traits we have — in other words — *elevated over you!*

In the *kedusha* (holiness) that we say at least twice a day, we borrow a prayer from the angels to magnify the glory of the Almighty.

We say “Holy, Holy, Holy, is the L-rd of Hosts. The whole world is filled with His Glory.”

Man is not an angel. When the angels say *kedusha*, they begin by calling to each other, as if to say “*You go first, because you are greater than me.*” To which comes the reply “*No, you are greater than me!*” Finally, they all praise Hashem together.

The angels repeat the word ‘holy’ three times. Anything which is done three times is considered to have permanence and perpetuity. Thus the angels never cease saying ‘holy,’ for Hashem is infinitely Holy.

• *Based on The Midrash Says*

WEEKLY DAF

BECHOROS 18-24

HOW EXACT IS EXACT?

Is it possible to be perfectly exact in timing and measuring? This issue arises in our Gemara in regard to two cases which represent two categories of exactness.

The first is an exactness of timing where human effort is not involved. A sheep gives birth to twin males in its maiden birth and their heads come forth from the womb simultaneously. Do we assume the possibility that both were born at exactly the same moment and award both lambs to the *kohen*, or do we say that there is no such thing as perfectly equal timing, and therefore only one goes to the *kohen*?

Rabbi Yossi Haglili rules that we can assume that both were born at the exact same moment and, therefore, both lambs go to the *kohen*. The majority view of Sages is that it is impossible for them both to have been born at exactly the same time, and therefore the *kohen* receives only one of the lambs.

The second category — the possibility of perfectly exact measurement by man — is represented by the case of finding the corpse of a murdered man midway between two cities. The Torah has commanded us (*Devarim* 21:1-9) that if the murdered is unknown, the elders of the city nearest to the corpse must bring a calf to a

designated spot and behead it as an act of atonement for their possible negligence in caring for the victim. If the measurement conducted by members of the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem results in a conclusion that two cities are exactly equidistant from the corpse, the question arises as to what action is to be taken.

Rabbi Eliezer rules that each of the cities brings a calf for atonement, because it is possible for them to both be exactly the same distance from the corpse, as human measurement has concluded. The majority view of the Sages, however, follows the same pattern as in the first category, where human effort is not involved. They rule that it is impossible for the measurement to be exact and for the cities being exactly equidistant from the corpse. Both cities, therefore, must bring one calf in partnership, and the representatives of each city declare that if their city was farther away, and therefore exempt from any obligation, their portion of the jointly owned calf should revert to the other city which is obligated.

• *Bechoros 18a*

WHO'S OUT FIRST?

“A *klall* (a general term) followed by a *prat* (a particular one).”

“A *klall* which requires a *prat* (for clarification) and a *prat* which requires a *klall* (for clarification).”

• *Bechoros 19a*

These are the fourth and seventh of Rabbi Yishmael's list of 13 rules for interpretation of the Torah which we recite daily in our morning prayers as a minimal fulfillment of our obligation to study Torah daily.

Illustrations of all three methods mentioned in these two rules are provided by our Gemara in explaining how we deduce from the Torah that only a first born male animal is considered a “*bechor*” which must be given to the *kohen* and offered as a sacrifice.

Klall followed by prat — The general term “*bechor*” could be understood as any first-born, male or female. The particular term “*zachar*” limits it to males only.

Klall which requires a prat — The general term “*bechor zachar*” would be understood as a first-born male born by cesarean section, since he is both a male and the firstborn. It is only the particular term “*peter rechem*” which clarifies that a *bechor* is only a male who is the first to come forth from its mother's womb.

Prat which requires a klall — The particular term “*peter rechem*” could be understood as including a male born after an earlier offspring delivered by cesarean section because it is the first male to come forth from its mother's womb. It is the general term “*bechor*” which clarifies that a *bechor* must have both qualities — the first to be born and the first to come forth from the womb.

continued from page one

PARSHA INSIGHTS

BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE

“And Yisrael camped there opposite the mountain” (19:2)

At the time of the Tower of Babel when the world rebelled against Hashem and tried to build a city and tower that would reach to the Heavens, Hashem made it impossible for them to understand each other's language. The project thus failed.

Why did Hashem choose to foil their designs by confusing their languages? Why couldn't He have decreed that the project just plain fail?

It certainly wouldn't have been the last building project to have failed because of a poor architect or defective labor!

The giving of the Torah at Sinai was predicated on the absolute unity of the Jewish People.

Just as Hashem is One, and His Torah is indivisible from Him, so too the receiving of the Torah has to be in perfect unity.

Only at Sinai were the Jewish People united like one man with one heart.

The generation who built the

tower of Babel, for all their failings, had one positive quality. Their unity. Hashem *could* have merely foiled their plans, but that necessarily would have meant that He would have **broken the power of Unity in the Creation.**

But Hashem didn't want to break the power of Unity, because he knew many generations later there would be a Jewish People who would need to receive the Torah, and the only way that they would be able to receive that Torah would be through perfect unity.

• Based on Rashi

SNIPPING WHIPPERSNAPPERS

Elazar <keabram@ibm.net>

wrote:

Shalom,
I am looking for source material about the Jewish tradition of the 'upfsherin' or cutting a boy's hair at three years old. Where does the term 'upfsherin' originate from, and is there a halacha in reference to same? Thank you

Dear Elazar,

'Upfsherin' is a Yiddish word that means 'cutting off.' Cutting a boy's hair at age three is a wide-spread Jewish custom. Three is also when a boy usually starts wearing a *yarmulke* and *tzitzit*, if he doesn't already wear them.

By age three, a child usually understands enough to begin learning about the commandments. The first haircut is a way to train the child in the commandment of 'payot' — the prohibition against too closely cropping the hair on the sides of the head.

On a deeper level, this custom is rooted in the commandment of 'orlah': The Torah says if you plant a tree, all fruits which grow during the first three years are 'orlah' — off-limits.

The Torah is the Tree of Life. Just as a tree is off-limits in its first three years, so too, the Torah is 'off-limits' to a child until age three, due to the child's limited understanding. At three, when the child's understanding has developed, then his parents can start teaching him the Torah and he can start doing some of its commandments. He finally gets to taste the sweet fruits from the 'Tree of Life.'

Some people honor the first haircut with a festive celebration. They express thanks to Hashem for allowing them to teach Torah to their child. Many are accustomed to take their child to a great Torah scholar who cuts the first snip. Not everyone has this custom, however. I found this out when my son was about to turn three, and I approached a renowned Jerusalem rabbi, asking if he would like to take the first snip. "Ani lo sapor" he said — "I'm not a barber."

Some people weigh the cut hair and give that weight in gold or silver to charity, especially a charity which promotes Torah study.

After everyone gets a snip, the child is usually taken to a barber to finish the job.

A man and little boy walk into a barber shop together. "Billy," says the man, "I'll get my hair cut first, and then it will be your turn." The man sits down in the barber's chair and gets his hair cut.

Then the man stands up, picks up the little boy and sets him down in the barber's chair. "Make it nice and short," says the man to the barber. Then to the little boy he says, "Billy, you sit real still while the barber cuts your hair. I'm going next door to the pharmacy for a few minutes."

When the barber finishes cutting the boy's hair, he says, "Little boy, shouldn't your father be back by now?"

"That's not my father," says the little boy. "He's just some nice man who said, 'Come with me little boy, and we'll both get a free haircut'."

Sources:

- *Responsa Arugot Habosem*
- *Meam Loez on Devarim 11:19*
- *Sefer Hachinuch LeYisrael page 239*
- *Sha'arei Teshuvah, Orach Chaim 17:2*

STAYING MAINLY IN SPAIN

Gershom P. Barros

<gbarros@ids.net> wrote:

Is it true that Jews today may no longer take up residency in Spain due to the inquisition that took place in 1492? If so, what is the status of Germany? Are Jews allowed to take up residency in Germany after the most recent attempt at genocide?

Dear Gershom P. Barros,

It's well known that following the expulsion of Jews from Spain, the rabbinic authorities of that generation prohibited establishing residence in Spain. Opinions vary as to whether this ban applied to all Jews, or only to those actually expelled from Spain.

Some authorities maintain that the ban against entering Spain was actually a Torah prohibition: Ferdinand and Isabella decreed that any Jew found in Spain must

chose Christianity or death. Hence, entering Spain meant pretending to be Christian, which is forbidden for a Jew to do. In effect, therefore, the Torah itself — not a rabbinic ban — forbade the return to Spain.

According to this view, there is no prohibition nowadays against living in Spain, since today you can live there and practice Judaism. (The Inquisition was not *officially* revoked until last century.)

In conclusion, most authorities do permit living in Spain today. As far as I know, no similar ban was ever issued against living in Germany.

Sources:

Contemporary Halachic Problems, Vol. 1 (Rabbi J. David Bleich), published by Ktav, pp. 206-209

YIDDLE RIDDLE

Last week we asked:

"I've always been healthy and I'm a first born male, my parents are observant Jews and I'm exempt from circumcision. Who am I?"

• Thanks to Eli Weisz from Zurich

Answer: A first-born of triplets, born Friday after sunset, whose brothers — born after dark — died due to circumcision. If, G-d forbid, two brothers die from circumcision, any other brother born to that family is exempt from circumcision.

In the above case, the younger brothers are circumcised first, before the older brother for the following reason:

A circumcision can be performed on Shabbat only if Shabbat is the eighth day from the birth. Since the younger brothers were indeed born on Shabbat, they are circumcised eight days later, on Shabbat.

But the eldest was born during the doubtful 'twilight' period, when we're not sure if Shabbat started or not. So he can't be circumcised the following Shabbat, for fear that it's not the eighth day.

Circumcising him would then be a desecration of Shabbat. He can't be circumcised on Friday, either, because it might be too early. Therefore, his circumcision would be on Sunday, nine days later.

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PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

- 18:1 - The splitting of the sea and the war against Amalek.
- 18:1 - Reuel, Yeser, Chovev, Chaver, Keni, Putiel.
- 18:4 - Dasan and Aviram.
- 18:8 - To induce Yisro to attach himself to the Torah.
- 18:9 - He grieved.
- 18:12 - One who dines with Torah scholars.
- 18:13 - The day after *Yom Kippur*.
- 18:13 - A judge who renders a correct decision.
- 18:14 - Yisro felt that the people weren't being treated with the proper respect.
- 18:19 - It spells 'Hi-malech,' meaning "Take advice."
- 18:27 - To convert the members of his family to Judaism.
- 19:1 - *Rosh Chodesh Sivan*.
- 19:2 - The Jewish People were united.
- 19:9 - Hashem offered to appear to Moshe and to give the Torah through him. The Jewish People responded that they wished to learn the Torah directly from Hashem.
- 20:6 - Five hundred times.
- 20:13 - Because it's 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.
- 20:15 - They backed away from the mountain twelve *mil* (one *mil* is 2000 cubits).
- 20:21 - The ground.
- 20:22 - Because the altar was created to extend life and iron tools are sometimes used as weapons to shorten life.
- 20:23 - The altar is merely stone which is insensitive to disgrace. Since it serves a useful purpose, it must be treated in a respectful manner. People, who are created in the image of Hashem and who are sensitive to disgrace, all the more so must be treated in a respectful manner.

BONUS ANSWER!

Moshe's level of prophecy was far above that of all other prophets. Because Moshe was totally removed from the physical, Hashem could speak to him 'face to face.' The rest of the Jewish People, however, were not on such a high level. They were unable to receive such a clear level of prophecy. In order for them to 'listen in' while Hashem appeared to Moshe, the prophecy had to be 'filtered' through a 'thick cloud.'

•Malbim

RECOMMENDED READING LIST

RAMBAN

- 18:6,10 Yisro's communication and conversion
18:11 Why Egyptians were Punished
18:15 The Role of Moshe Rabbeinu
18:22 Availability of Justice
20:2 Belief Based on Experience
20:6 The Beloved of Hashem
20:8 Remembering Shabbos

- 20:17 The "Test" of *Matan Torah*
19:3, 8:9, 20:15, 24:1
The Chronology of *Matan Torah*

SEFER HACHINUCH

- 25 Faith
30 Respect for Divine Name
31 Kiddush on Wine

- 32 Shabbos Rest
33 Gratitude to Parents
35 Promiscuity

MALBIM

- 20:2 The Essence of Belief in Hashem

IBN EZRA

- 20:14 Discipline of Desire

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