

O H R N E T

SHABBAT PARSHAT NETZAVIM - VAYELECH · FOR THE WEEK ENDING 23 ELUL 5759 · SEPT. 4, 1999 · VOL. 6 NO. 47

PARSHA INSIGHTS

THE SAME BOAT

“You are standing, today, all of you...” (29:9)

Quietly, he entered his cabin and closed the door behind him. Down here in the bowels of the ship, you could hear the massive turbines droning and the ocean slipping under the keel inches beneath the steel floor.

Opening a small closet, he removed an anonymous-looking briefcase, laid it on the bed and moved the combination to its correct position. The latches of the case sprung open. He lifted the lid. There it was. The smallest and most powerful laser blowtorch that you could buy anywhere in the Far East. He removed it from its velveteen bed and held it lovingly in his arms. Then he pushed aside the bed and took up the rug to reveal the dull steel of the hull. He flicked the switch and the laser sprang to life. As the beam met the metal floor, the ship gave out a banshee wail.

Within a minute, there were loud knocks on the door. “What are you doing?” “Open the door!” “Open this

door!” “What’s going on in there?”

“I’m cutting a hole in the floor. Go away.”

“Are you crazy, you’ll kill us all!”

“Mind your own business. What’s it to do with you? I’m only cutting a hole in my own cabin!”

In the first part of this week’s double Torah portion, *Nitzavim*, Moshe assembles every member of the Jewish People on this, the last day of his life. From the youngest to the oldest, from the least to the most exalted, Moshe initiates them into a new covenant. Why did they need a new covenant? Hadn’t they already entered a covenant with G-d at Sinai?

What was different about this covenant was that it created a mutual responsibility between all Jews. Not just responsible in the sense that we have to look after each other, feed and clothe the sick and the poor, but in the sense that “I am responsible for everything you do” — like a big brother. This idea is hinted to by the very first words of the parsha “*You are standing, today, all of you...*” meaning, “You are all standing over each other.”

“Religious coercion! Big Brother is watching you!” All too often, we hear these words screaming from newspaper headlines. And what a tragic, mistaken idea it represents. When a Jew cries out “Shabbos!” to someone driving past his home on Shabbos, he’s crying in pain. He feels that responsibility that we all accepted for each other.

The Jewish People are but sparks of one soul. A mystical connection exists between us all. What each of us does affects all the rest of us. A Jew cannot say: “Look, if you guys want to keep Shabbat, that’s fine, but why should I be coerced into doing things that I don’t believe in? It’s my life. I’m my own person.”

With respect — it’s not your life. You were given it. And you’re not just your own person. Every action we do ripples across the physical and the spiritual world. There is no action without re-action. No man is an island entirely to himself, and no man has a cabin in which he can cut a hole in the floor. We are all in the same boat.

Sources:
• Rabbi Mordechai Perlmán

I DIDN'T KNOW THAT!

The first letters of the words “*Mi Ya’aleh Lanu Hashamaimah*” — *who will go up to the heavens for us?* — spell “*mila*” (circumcision). The last letters spell Hashem’s name. *Brit Mila* prepares a person for his heavenly climb towards G-dliness.

• *Ba’al Haturim (30:12)*

TRAVELER IN THE RAIN

As rain began to pour down upon him, the traveling sage, Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa, turned his eyes heavenward and appealed: "Everyone else is enjoying the comfort of his home; must Chanina suffer from the rain?"

The rain immediately stopped. When he finally entered his home he once again turned to heaven:

"Everyone (who needs rain for his fields) is suffering while Chanina (who has no field) is in the comfort of his home!"

And the rains came once again.

"What power does the *kohen gadol's* prayer have against Rabbi Chanina?" asked Rabbi Yosef.

He was referring to the prayer said on Yom Kippur by the *kohen gadol* upon leaving the Holy of Holies. This prayer included not only an appeal for adequate rainfall but also a request that Hashem not accept the prayers of travelers who ask Hashem to halt the rain. (*Yoma 53b*)

This conflict between the needs of the general public and the comfort of the individual on the road is resolved in favor of the public in the *kohen gadol's* prayer. This seems to run counter to the resolution of the same conflict found earlier in our *mesechta (10a)*. There we learned that in *Eretz Yisrael* the request for rain is not included in prayers until two weeks after Succot; this

enables the last of those who traveled to Jerusalem to fulfill the mitzvah of *aliya laregel* to reach their distant homes safely before the rains begin.

The simple answer is that we distinguish between the case of an ordinary traveler whose comfort must be sacrificed for the general good and that of a Jew who has traveled all the way to Jerusalem to serve Hashem in the *Beit Hamikdash* on Succot. We are prepared to sacrifice the public's welfare so that he shall not be discouraged from such service.

Regarding Rabbi

Chanina, perhaps his prayer was accepted by Heaven against that of the *kohen gadol* because his prayer was also accepted for the rain to resume when he gets home.

• *Ta'anit 24b*

TWILIGHT ZONE

Many wondrous events are related in our *gemara* about the saintly sage Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa. One of them took place during the "twilight period." Rashi defines "twilight period" as a Talmudic term for the period preceding the beginning of Shabbat. This particular story begins when Rabbi Chanina's daughter sighed with sadness. Her father asked her why she was so upset.

"When I prepared the Shabbat lights," she explained, "I mistakenly put vinegar into the lamps instead of oil. Shabbat has already begun, and the tiny bit of oil that had been in those lamps will certainly last for only a few moments, while the vinegar cannot serve as fuel."

"Don't be concerned," responded the sage. "He Who commanded oil to burn shall command vinegar to burn as well."

Not only did the vinegar miraculously burn, but the light it fueled lasted throughout the entire Shabbat and was even used for the *havdalah* service.

Although Rashi here states that he has no explanation for the use of "twilight period" in reference to Shabbat eve, he does offer an explanation elsewhere. *Mesechta Ketubot (103a)* describes Rabbi Yehuda Hanassi's visits to his home at "twilight" following his death. Rashi explains that "twilight" refers to the period preceding Shabbat. Why? Because that is the time of the week when Jews are most concerned about when "twilight" — "*bein hashmashot*" (a period whose halachic character as day or night is dubious) — begins, since by then all weekday labor must already have ceased.

The Maharsha offers another perspective here. Since a Jew is required to add some of the weekday to the Shabbat (*tosefet Shabbat*) the term "twilight" is applied to this period to indicate this conversion of a part of Friday into Shabbat. For the same reason, he notes, we refer to this period as "*Erev Shabbat*" because the part of the late afternoon defined in Hebrew as "*erev*" is converted into Shabbat because of our need to usher in the holy day earlier.

• *Ta'anit 25a*

OHRNET

THE OHR SOMAYACH TORAH MAGAZINE ON THE INTERNET

Published by

OHR SOMAYACH
TANENBAUM COLLEGE

POB 18103, Jerusalem 91180, Israel • 02-581-0315

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Produced and Designed by the Office of Communications
Rabbi Eliezer Shapiro, Director

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PARSHA Q&A?

NITZAVIM

1. What is the connection between the verse “*atem nitzavim*” and the curses in the previous *parsha*?
2. Who were the wood-choppers and water-carriers?
3. Why can Hashem never “swap” the Jewish people for another nation?
4. One who ignores the Torah’s warnings “adds drunkenness to thirst.” What does this mean?
5. What two cities were destroyed along with Sedom and Amorah?
6. “The hidden things are for Hashem, our G-d, and the revealed things are for us...” What does this mean?
7. According to Rashi, how will the day of the ingathering of the exiles be “great and difficult?”
8. Where is the Torah not to be found? Where is it to be found?
9. When and where did the Jewish People become culpable for each other’s sins?
10. How do the earth and sky remind us to keep the mitzvot?

VAYELECH

1. Moshe said, “I am 120 years old today. I am no longer able to go out and come in...” How do we know this does not refer to physical inability?
2. Which of Moshe’s statements to Yehoshua was later contradicted by Hashem’s command?
3. Why does the Torah refer to Succot of the eighth year as though it occurred during the *shemita* year?
4. Why does the Torah command that babies be brought to the Torah reading?
5. What does it mean that Hashem “hides His face?”
6. What function does the song *Ha’azinu* serve?
7. Which verse promises that the Torah will never be totally forgotten?
8. What is the difference of opinion regarding the placing of the Torah scroll which Moshe gave the *levi'im*?
9. On the day of Moshe’s death, why didn’t Moshe gather the people by blowing trumpets as he normally would have?
10. Moshe said, “For I know that after my death you will act corruptly,” but, in fact, this didn’t occur until after Yehoshua’s death. What does this teach us?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week’s Questions!

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

NITZAVIM

1. 29:12 - The Jewish People asked, “Who can survive such curses?” Moshe responded, “You’ve done a lot to anger Hashem, and yet — “*atem nitzavim*” — you’re still standing before Him.”
2. 29:10 - Canaanites who joined the Jewish People under false pretenses.
3. 29:12 - Because Hashem swore to their ancestors that He would never do so.
4. 29:18 - He causes Hashem to reckon his unintentional sins alongside his intentional ones, punishing him for all.
5. 29:22 - Admah and Tsevoyim.
6. 29:28 - There is collective culpability only for “open” sins, but not for “hidden” ones.
7. 30: 3 - It will be as if Hashem needs to take each individual by the hand and lead him out of exile.

8. 30:12-15 - The Torah is not found in heaven nor across the ocean. Rather, it is “very close to you, in your mouth and in your heart.”
9. 30:28 - When they crossed the Jordan and accepted the oath on Mt. Eval and Mt. Grizim.
10. 30:19 - The earth and heavenly bodies, although receiving neither reward nor punishment, always obey Hashem’s will. How much more should we, who stand to receive reward or punishment, obey Hashem.

VAYELECH

1. 31:2 - Because verse 34:7 says “His (Moshe’s) eye never dimmed, and his (youthful) moisture never departed.”
2. 31:7 - Moshe told Yehoshua to share his leadership with the Elders. Hashem later commanded Yehoshua to rule alone.

3. 31:10 - Because the laws of the seventh year still apply to the harvest.
4. 31:12 - To give reward to those who bring them.
5. 31:17 - He ignores their distress.
6. 31:21 - It warns what will befall the Jewish People if they abandon Torah.
7. 31:21 - “For (the Torah) will not be forgotten from the mouth of their offspring.”
8. 31:26 - Whether it was placed outside but adjacent to the Ark, or inside next to the Tablets.
9. 31:28 - Blowing the trumpets expressed Moshe’s dominion, and “there is no dominion on the day of death.” (*Kohelet* 8)
10. 31:29 - That a person’s student is as dear to him as himself — As long as Yehoshua was alive, it was as though Moshe himself were alive.

KASHA! (KASHA MEANS “QUESTION”)

A covenant was made between Hashem and “those standing here with us today — in front of Hashem, our G-d — and those NOT here with us today (i.e., future generations).” How can future generations be obligated by a covenant which they never entered into?

Answer:

The souls of all future generations — although not physically “*here with us today*” — exist nevertheless “*in front of Hashem, our G-d.*” These yet unborn souls entered the covenant, along with the rest of the Jewish People.

• *Kli Yakar*

Do you have a KASHA? Write to kasha@ohr.org.il with your questions on any Parsha!

CORPORATE HEADS

Anonymous wrote:

Dear Rabbi,
I'm 22 and work in a totally non-Jewish business setting in Manhattan where I've worked for a year. I wear a yarmulke to work every day. I feel that wearing a yarmulke here will prevent me from moving up in the company, as much of my job involves seeing potential clients and I am starting to think that perhaps an outright religious article like a yarmulke might make them uncomfortable. Also, my co-workers treat me differently and do not accept me so much. The "damage" has been done in this office, so I am thinking of leaving to another office and not wearing a yarmulke there. What are your thoughts on this, halachically and philosophically? This has been bothering me for a while.

Dear Anonymous,

To get ahead, or to cover your head: That is your question.

The Shulchan Aruch writes that a head covering is an obligation during prayer and something that one "should do" at other times. Some later authorities suggest that a head covering has gained the status of Torah Law due to the prohibition against "going in the ways of non-Jews," because the non-Jews bare their heads as a sign of honor.

In certain cases, there is room for leniency if wearing a yarmulke causes a financial loss. But let me tell you a story: The Rabbi of Berditchev once saw a man running. "Where are you running?" he asked. "To my livelihood." "How do you know your livelihood

doesn't lie in the other direction and you're running away from it?" said the Rabbi.

Who knows? Maybe for every client you "lose" because of your yarmulke, you may gain two clients who respect you specifically for the integrity and courage you display by wearing a yarmulke.

A yarmulke is a very powerful reminder of your Jewish identity. It seems to me a major mistake to cast it off, even if only at work. To wear a yarmulke is to proclaim "I'm a proud Jew," and it makes you worthy of extra-special Divine protection and blessing, especially today when so many Jews are assimilating into oblivion.

Sources:

- Talmud Kiddushin 31a; Shabbat 118b
- Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 8 & 92, and Taz
- Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, Igrot Moshe, Orach Chaim, vols. 1 & 4; and Choshen Mishpat, vol. 1

YIDDLE RIDDLE

LAST WEEK we wrote:

I am a *levi*. There is one thing I have never witnessed in my entire adult life, and I never will either. *Yisraelim* sometimes see it, so do *kohanim*, but me and my fellow *levi'im*? Never! What is it?

Answer:

I am told that if there is no *levi* present during the Torah reading, the *kohen* honored by being called first to the Torah stays up and receives the second honor as well. At least that's what I've been told — I've never seen it, though, and I never will!

Riddle courtesy of *Eliyahu Shiffman, Beit Shemesh, Israel*
<sarash1@netvision.net.il>

PUBLIC DOMAIN

Comments, quibbles and reactions concerning previous "Ohrnet" features

RE: IN THE FLESH AGAIN (OHRNET SHOFTIM):

I think it is only fair to mention that a belief in reincarnation is not mandatory. After all, Sa'adia Gaon did not believe in reincarnation. It is one of those optional beliefs that we can embrace if we are so inclined.

• Michael Katz <M613K@aol.com>

I was surprised by your reference to reincarnation in Judaism. I thought Hindus were the reincarnists?

• Stan <Ix2000@ix.netcom.com>

OHRNET RESPONDS:

Dear Stan,

We do not discard a belief simply because it is believed by Hindus, pagans, or others who subscribe to a false idea system. As an extreme example, we do not discard our belief that two plus two equals four because they also believe so.

Furthermore, note that Abraham, the founder of Judaism, had six sons from his wife Ketura to whom he "gave gifts ...and sent eastward to the land of the East" (*Genesis 25:3-6*). The Talmud explains that these "gifts" were gifts of kabbalistic knowledge; therefore, we shouldn't be totally surprised to find parallels between our respective idea systems.

RE: REVENGE OF THE KILLER CHICKENS (OHRNET RE'EH):

You wrote that "preying on other living things is an indication that a bird is non-kosher." I believe that many kosher birds eat insects and worms.

• Julie Stampnitzky, Rehovot, Israel
<julie@dapsas1.weizmann.ac.il>

OHRNET RESPONDS:

The term "preying on living things" needs to be defined. Halacha states that a bird is not kosher if it is "*dorais*." "*Dorais*" basically means to trample, but the authorities differ as to its exact halachic definition. Rashi says it refers to a bird that eats its prey while stepping on it to keep it from moving. Rabbeinu Tam says that it refers to a bird that hunts animals and eats them live, and bugs, flies and worms are not included as "animals" in this regard; Ramban states that "*dorais*" refers to those birds which stick their claws into their prey and trample them. By any of these definitions, chickens are kosher, even though they eat worms and bugs.

Sources:

- Rambam *Hilchot Ma'achalot Asurot 1:16*
- Magid *Mishneh Ibid.*