

O H R N E T

SHABBAT PARSHAT BEREISHET · 29 TISHREI 5761 · OCT. 28, 2000 · VOL. 8 NO. 1

PARSHA INSIGHTS

JUST DO IT

“And the woman perceived that the tree was good for eating and that it was a delight to the eye...” (3:6)

Obesity is a uniquely human affliction. Overeating animals are unheard of. An animal eats as much as it needs and stops. Another thing. G-d created the world in such a way that an animal finds appealing that which is necessary to sustain him: Lions like gazelles. They’re not too interested in tadpoles. Frogs love tadpoles but rarely attempt to eat dogs. The Creator has blessed every animal that whatever his heart desires — his stomach requires.

With one exception. Man.

Man is the only animal who can eat

things that aren’t good for him. There’s no such thing as lion “junk food.” Elephants don’t have cookie cravings in the wee small hours. Only man can eat — and over-eat — things that are damaging to his health.

“And the woman perceived that the tree was good for eating and that it was a delight to the eye...”

I remember a supermarket in LA whose apples were impossibly shiny from the wax coating they had received. Micro-fine water jets were suspended above them to give them a little squirt of water every ten minutes or so, making them look totally mouth-watering. I always think of those apples when I imagine the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Man cannot rely solely on taste and appearance in his choice of diet.

G-d told Man that the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil contained a deadly poison. Eve insisted on listening to the voice of the snake — the voice of her animal side — saying: “If it looks good and it tastes good — it must be good.”

G-d created Man different from the animals. When we react to sensory stimulus without engaging our brains, when we let our desires dictate our diet — we are behaving like animals. It’s fine for an animal to behave like an animal, but when Man says to himself “just do it!” he just applied for membership to his local zoo.

Sources:

• Rabbi S.R. Hirsch as heard from Rabbi Dovid Kaplan

PARSHA OVERVIEW

In the beginning, Hashem creates the entire universe, including time itself, out of nothingness. This process of creation continues for six days. On the seventh day, Hashem rests, bringing into existence the spiritual universe of Shabbat, which returns to us every seven days. Adam and Chava — the Human pair — are placed in the Garden of Eden. Chava is enticed by the serpent to eat from the forbidden fruit of the “Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil,” and in turn gives the fruit to Adam. By absorbing “sin,” Adam and Chava render themselves incapable of remaining in the spiritual paradise of Eden and are banished. Death and hard work (both physical and spiritual) now enter the world, together with pain bearing and raising children. Now begins

the struggle to correct the sin of Adam and Chava, which will be the main subject of world history. Cain and Hevel, the first two children of Adam and Chava, bring offerings to Hashem. Hevel gives the finest of his flock, and his offering is accepted, but Cain gives inferior produce and his offering is rejected. In the ensuing quarrel, Cain kills Hevel and is condemned to wander the earth. The Torah traces the genealogy of the other children of Adam and Chava, and the descendants of Cain until the birth of Noach. After the death of Sheith, Mankind descends into evil, and Hashem decides that He will blot out Man in a flood which will deluge the world. However, one man, Noach, finds favor with Hashem.

FIRST JEWS IN THE US

From: Leslie Tanner <ltanner@metabolex.com>

Dear Rabbi,

I was wondering who the first Jewish immigrant was to come to the United States to live? What year? Did they have family? Also who was the first Jewish person born in the U.S.? Thank you.

Dear Leslie Tanner,

I referred your question to one of today's foremost Jewish historians, Rabbi Berel Wein. He said, that as far as he is aware, this information is not known. What he could tell me though, was that the first Jews to settle in what is now the US were Sephardic Jews who came from the West Indies in the 1650's. The first family to settle in Philadelphia (whether they were the first in the US, Rabbi Wein did not know) was the Seixas family.

GOOD G-D

From: Name@Withheld in Brooklyn, NY

Dear Rabbi,

What biblical or philosophical proof is there that everything G-d does is for the good (gamzu l'tovah)?

Dear Name@Withheld,

Biblically, see the first chapter of Genesis, that all that G-d created was "very good." Thus, the entire world is good, even when we don't realize it. And Psalms 144 states: "G-d is good to all..." There are others.



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Philosophically, the apparent existence of evil is in order to allow us free choice, to overcome evil and thus attain the ultimate good, which is the good of earning our reward, instead of having it handed to us for free.

Regarding our inability to understand suffering, imagine a little child at the dentist: All he knows is that the dentist is hurting him. Can the child understand that the dentist is actually a good man and is trying to save him from future pain? One day that child will thank the dentist.

This is a very short, condensed answer, and there is much more to be said on this subject.

THE BIGGER THEY ARE...

From: Glenn Slocum in McKinleyville, CA
<gglennslocum@pacbell.net>

Dear Rabbi,

What are the "Nephilim" mentioned in the Torah?

Dear Glenn Slocum,

The Nephilim are mentioned twice in the Torah (Genesis 6, Numbers 13). "Nephilim" means "the fallen ones." They were people of giant stature. It is not clear how large they were, but were large enough to scare other people. The Targum Yerushalmi, which is a Midrash, explains that they were Angels who descended to the Earth. According to this they were called fallen ones because they fell from their heavenly stature. The Ramban explains otherwise, that they were the other children of Adam. Because Adam, the First Man, was the handiwork of G-d, his children were of greater physical stature than their descendants. Because these people were so close to the Creator, they knew that they had no grandfather, they should have been spiritually elevated. Because they didn't live up to their potential they were considered "fallen ones."

PUBLIC DOMAIN

Comments, quibbles and reactions concerning previous "Ohrnet" features

Re: Life in the Fast Vein (Ohrnet Ha'azinu):

I disagree strongly with your advice about intravenous on Yom Kippur. If the insertion of a needle will save a life, it will fulfill a great *mitzvah* which supersedes Yom Kippur, which is to save a life.

• Name@Withheld

OHRNET RESPONDS:

Our article was about *voluntary* use of intravenous on a fast day as opposed to simply drinking water. We were not discussing a case where intravenous is *required* to save a life. In such a case, of course you are correct.

Yossi Goes to Japan:

I am seeking permission to reproduce **Yossi & Co.** for distribution to my students at the Jewish Community of Japan. There are some 25 students who will be getting **Yossi & Co.** Looking forward to your answer. Best wishes for a Happy New Year.

• Ilana Marmon, Jewish Community of Japan, Tokyo <jewish@gol.com>

OHRNET RESPONDS: Thanks for writing! We love to have our stuff reprinted, and consider it a compliment. We do ask please that you credit us as follows: Ohr Somayach Interactive [www.ohr.edu / info@ohr.org.il](http://www.ohr.edu/info@ohr.org.il)

TIME MARCHES ON

If a man takes a vow to become a *nazir* “from here until the end of the world” he is only obligated to follow the rules of *nezirut* for a thirty-day period. This period is the time frame for *any* vow of *nezirut* made without a specific designation of duration. The *gemara* explains this rule of the *mishna* as follows: We interpret his statement as an expression of anguish, that the thirty-day abstention period is as difficult for him as if it would be the 500 years which our Sages tell us it takes a man to traverse the universe by foot.

In a later *mishna* (8a) we learn that a man who makes a vow to observe *nezirut* “like the hairs of his head” is obligated to repetitively observe thirty-day periods of *nezirut*, cutting his hair and bringing sacrifices at the conclusion of each period, and starting all over again. We look upon his declaration as a commitment to observe as many *nezirut* periods as there are hairs on his head. But when he makes a vow for a hundred or a thousand years of *nezirut*, he must observe one long period of *nezirut* for the rest of his lifetime.

What emerges from the above is a clear distinction between a vow made with hairs as the standard and one made with days. In the former case we view each hair as a separate unit so that he is seen as accepting an innumerable number of *nezirut* periods, while in the latter cases we view the days as one long unit. (Why we take a lenient approach to “from here until the end of the world” and a strict approach to a commitment of 100 or 1000 years is explained in the *gemara* on the basis of his use of the term “until the end of the world” rather than specifying 500 years.)

As an explanation of this distinction, the Sage Rabba states that hairs are separated from each other while time is a continuum. But days too are considered separate units, challenges the *gemara*, as we see in the Torah’s description of the first day of creation: “It was evening and it was morning — one day” (*Bereishet* 1:8). Rabba’s response was that the intention of that passage was to establish that the night precedes the day in the structure of a 24-hour period, a consideration with ramifications for the observance of Shabbat and Festivals. It does not communicate any concept of days being actually separated from one another.

An interesting explanation of this concept of time continuum is offered by Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Chayot. Whenever it is day in one part of the world it is night somewhere else, so there is no real separation even between night and day as there is in the case of hair.

• Nazir 7a

THE MYSTERY WIFE

How is it possible for a Jew with no hereditary disqualification to be forbidden to marry a Jewish woman? If he appointed an agent to take a wife for him through *kiddushin* but did not specify any particular woman. Should that agent die before reporting to him on the details of the mission — which we assume he carried out — his sender is forbidden to marry any Jewish woman because she may be the sister, mother or daughter of the woman whom the agent made his wife.

The question arises: If we thus assume that an agent carries out his mission and that he made some woman his sender’s wife, it should follow that no Jew can marry any woman, for she may be that mysterious woman who is already betrothed to the sender. Tosefot raises this problem and cites the solution proposed by Rabbeinu Tam, that every woman is believed to declare that the agent did not make *kiddushin* with her. (In *Mesechta Gittin* 64a, Tosefot says that it is unlikely that a woman who had been made the sender’s wife by the agent would accept *kiddushin* from another man. It is safe to assume that this is the basis for Rabbeinu Tam’s approach for granting credibility to a woman regarding her marital status.)

But Rabbeinu Tam’s solution will not cover the girl whose father died when she was a minor. He may well have accepted *kiddushin* from the agent and made her the sender’s wife without her knowledge. The subsequent death of the father before divulging to her that she is a married woman would make her forbidden to all men.

Tosefot’s conclusion is that as far as Torah law is concerned, neither the sender nor anyone else should be affected in regard to the range of their marital opportunities by the mystery created through the agent’s action. This is so because we can apply the classic rule of majority indication and conclude that any particular woman is a member of the majority of women in the world who are neither this mysterious object of the agent’s *kiddushin* nor any of her close relatives. It is only the sender himself, who acted irresponsibly in delegating an agent in a manner that could create such a mystery, whom the Sages penalized by prohibiting him to marry anyone. They did not extend this penalty to others who can rely on majority indication.

Even regarding the sender himself, if at the time he appointed the agent all of the close relatives of the woman he now wishes to marry were themselves married, we can assume that the agent did not act to make any of them his sender’s wife, and he may therefore marry this woman.

• Nazir 12a

PARSHA Q&A?

1. Why does the Torah start with the account of Creation?
2. What happened to the light that was created on the first day?
3. Why isn't the word "good" associated with the second day?
4. How were the trees supposed to taste?
5. On which day were the sun and moon created?
6. Hashem blessed the birds to be fruitful and to multiply. Why did He not do so with the beasts?
7. In whose likeness was man fashioned?
8. What kind of food did Adam eat?
9. Why is "the sixth day" written with the definite article?
10. At the end of the sixth day what was the world still lacking?
11. Why was man made from dust gathered from the entire earth?
12. How is man superior to the animals?
13. Why was it not good that man be alone?
14. Where do we learn that one must not add to a commandment from Hashem?
15. What does it mean that Adam and Chava "knew that they were naked?"
16. Why did Hevel choose to be a shepherd?
17. What was the marital practice of the generation who lived before the flood?
18. What did Tuval-Cain invent?
19. Why did Chanoch die at a young age?
20. What was the sign that Shem was born with great propensity for righteousness?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

1. 1:1 - So that when the nations accuse us of stealing *Eretz Canaan* from the Canaanites, we can respond that Hashem, as Creator, has the right to give the land to whomever He sees fit, and He gave *Eretz Canaan* to us.
2. 1:4 - Hashem saw that the wicked would be unworthy of it so He hid it for the righteous.
3. 1:7 - Because the work with the water wasn't completed until the third day. Anything that is incomplete is not "good."
4. 1:11 - The wood was to have the taste of the fruit.
5. 1:14 - They were created on the first day and suspended in the firmament on the fourth day.
6. 1:22 - He did not want the serpent, who was to be cursed, to receive a blessing.
7. 1:26 - In the likeness of the angels.
8. 1:30 - Vegetation.
9. 1:31 - "The" in Hebrew is the letter *hey*, which has a numerical value of five. Hashem created the world on the condition that it will endure only if the Jewish People accept the Five Books of the Torah.
10. 2:2 - Rest.
11. 2:7 - So that wherever he might die, the earth would receive his body.
12. 2:7 - He was given understanding and speech.
13. 2:18 - If he were alone, he would appear to be a god; The creation of woman emphasized man's dependence.
14. 3:3 - From Chava. Hashem commanded not to eat from the tree but she added not to touch it. Because she added to the command she eventually came to transgress it.
15. 3:7 - They had been given one commandment and they had stripped themselves of it.
16. 4:2 - Since the ground had been cursed he refrained from cultivating it.
17. 4:19 - They married two wives, one with whom to have children. The other one was given a potion which prevented her from bearing children.
18. 4:22 - Murder weapons.
19. 5:22 - Though he was righteous, he was easily influenced; therefore Hashem took him before his time to protect him from sinning.
20. 5:32 - He was born already circumcised.

KASHA! (KASHA MEANS "QUESTION")

Name@Withheld from Brooklyn, NY wrote:

This question was asked to me by a friend's father. And here it goes: In Genesis, Chapter 1, after every day's creation, it says "And G-d saw that it was good," with the exception of the second day. Why is this?

Dear Name@Withheld,

Since the work of the second day (the water) was not completed until the next day, Hashem did not call it "good." According to the Midrash, the second day is not called "good" because the waters were then separated, which is a symbol of strife and discord.

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