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PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

The Company We Keep

“You shall not commit adultery.” (20:13)

According to Canadian psychologist Dr. Jordan Peterson, one of the major factors that drove the development of online technology was the proclivity of young men, specifically engineers, many of whom ended up at Google, to search out inappropriate content. Those same algorithms that enable you to find out about almost anything in the world, were spawned by a bunch of male geeks who wanted to fill their basest desires.

One of the things that, for many, has become increasingly difficult to do, is to function without online access. I remember a dozen or so years ago, driving my Rebbe to pick up a credit card from his bank. He must have been over seventy at the time, and he had never had, or needed to have, a credit card. Then, all of a sudden, the airline companies insisted that every passenger had to have a credit card. Nowadays, getting on a plane without a smartphone is a real challenge to one’s ingenuity and patience. It has gotten to the point where an avreich (fulltime married Torah scholar) who wouldn’t be seen dead with a smartphone, virtually has to travel with someone who does.

“You shall not commit adultery.” By definition, this commandment refers only to cohabitation with a married woman, but there are many subsidiary levels to it, one of which is the incitement to lust through the eyes.

Whatever the future holds for online usage, and however more sophisticated and user-friendly are the filters that many employ, let us not forget how it all began and exactly in whose company we are.

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Hearing of the miracles that Hashem 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 Rabbeinu, Yitro suggests that subsidiary judges be appointed to adjudicate smaller matters, leaving Moshe free to attend to larger issues. Moshe accepts his advice.

The Jewish People arrive at Mount Sinai, where Hashem offers them the Torah. Once they accept, Hashem 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, Hashem's voice emanates from the smoke-enshrouded mountain, and He speaks to the Jewish People, giving them the Ten Commandments:

1. Believe in Hashem.
2. Do not worship other "gods".
3. Do not use Hashem's name in vain.
4. Observe Shabbat.
5. Honor your parents.
6. Do not murder.
7. Do not commit adultery.
8. Do not kidnap.
9. Do not testify falsely.
10. Do not 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 not to draw close to the mountain or touch any part of it.

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Q & A

Questions

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?

Answers

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.

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

Murder He Wrote

Headlining the second half of the Ten Commandments is a prohibition that reads: *lo tirtzach* (Ex. 20:13, Deut. 5:16) – “do not murder.” Yet, the term *retzichah* is not the sole Hebrew word for the act of “murdering/killing;” the terms *harigah* and *ketilah* also essentially mean the same thing. Rabbi Nathan Adler (1803–1890) cites the use of *harigah* and *retzichah* side by side in Ps. 94:6 as evidence that the two terms are indeed synonymous. Nonetheless, if we look very closely at the etymologies of the three expressions in question and see how they are used in the Bible, we will notice that they are not true synonyms. This essay thus explores the nuances between *retzichah*, *harigah*, and *ketilah* and shows how the terms differ from one another.

While both *retzichah* and *harigah* refer to the act of taking another’s life, Rashi’s grandson Rashbam lays down a general rule to help define *retzichah* as opposed to *harigah*: The term *retzichah* always refers to killing somebody for no legitimate reason. The very term *retzichah* includes a moral judgement about the killer by stressing that his act of killing was in no way legally justified, but was instead an illicit act of murder. For example, when the Bible refers to a murderer (whether he killed somebody in a deliberate, premeditated way and is liable for the death penalty, or he killed somebody by mistake and is subject to exile in a City of Refuge), the term used is *rotzeach* (Num. 35:16–18, Deut. 19:4–6). Similarly, when Ahab and Jezebel arranged for Naboth’s death in order to take over his vineyard, Elijah the Prophet famously rebuked the king by rhetorically asking, “Did you murder (*ha’ratzachta*) and also inherit [Naboth]?” (I Kings 21:19). These two instances use cognates of the *retzichah* because they denote the crime of murder, and not simply the act of killing.

On the other hand, the term *harigah* is a neutral, value-free term that simply denotes the act of killing somebody – whether legally justified or not. In other words, *harigah* can refer to murder and also refer to a justified killing. For example, when the Bible states that a woman who commits the sin of bestiality ought to be put to death, the verb used to denote that she should be killed is a cognate of *harigah* (Lev. 20:16). This is because this judicial execution is legally justified. But a cognate of *harigah* also appears when Cain “killed” Abel (Gen. 4:8), even though that was the first act of homicide, and was thus a crime of murder. Like Rashbam, Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim (1740–1814) also writes that *harigah* refers to any act of “killing” that causes someone’s death in an unnatural way – whether lawful or not – while *retzichah* specifically denotes an *illegal* act of killing.

The only exception to Rashbam’s distinction is the Biblical passage that uses the verb form of *retzichah* (Num. 35:27, 35:30) when saying that a “redeemer of blood” (i.e., relative of somebody who was mistakenly killed) may “kill” a mistaken murderer. Even though that “killing” is permitted according to the law, the term used is still *retzichah*, not the expected *harigah* (see Rabbi Hirsch to Ex. 20:13 for an explanation of this special case).

COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

The Amidah (Part 36) – The Final Paragraph: Personally Speaking

“Prayer is not a miracle. It is a tool, man’s paintbrush in the art of life. Prayer is man’s weapon to defend himself in the struggle of life. It is a reality. A fact of life.”
(Rabbi Avraham Chaim Feuer)

“My Hashem, guard my tongue from evil and my lips from speaking deceitfully. To those who curse me, let my soul be silent, and let my soul be like dust to everyone. Open my heart to Your Torah, then my soul will pursue Your commandments. As for all those who design evil against me, speedily nullify their counsel and disrupt their design. Act for Your Name’s sake, act for Your right hand’s sake, act for Your sanctity’s sake, act for Your Torah’s sake. That Your beloved may be given rest, let Your right hand save and respond to me. May the expressions of my mouth and the thoughts of my heart find favor before You, Hashem, my Rock and my Redeemer. He Who makes peace in His heights, may He make peace upon us and upon all Israel. And let us say: Amen.”

The final paragraph concludes with the stirring declaration that Hashem “makes peace – shalom – in His heights.” And, then we make one final request that, “He make peace upon us, and upon all Israel.” What is referred to here when we talk about “His heights”? The Eitz Yosef explains that, very often, the angels seem to be at odds with each other. On the one hand, there are angels who represent Hashem’s attributes of mercy and kindness. On the other hand, there are angels of judgment and strictness. Yet, Hashem creates a harmonious environment in the spiritual realms by having them all fulfill His Will. The fact that each angel does only what it is commanded to do and does not impose on the next angel is the definition of shalom.

The Chatam Sofer asks a question. Exactly what disagreements are in the Heavens that would require Hashem to make peace between the two sides? The Chatam Sofer explains that when Hashem created the world, it was necessary for diametrically opposed components to be given the ability to join together. The first of those pairs was fire and water. Despite the fact that in their natural state they are elements that cannot coexist, nevertheless, there would come a time when Hashem would command them to fuse together in order to punish the Egyptians. In the Midrash, our Sages teach (Shemot Rabbah 12) that the seventh plague, of hail, consisted of both fire and water. That potential for shalom between fire and the water is permanent because it was created in “His heights.” The second pair that required Divine intervention in order to coexist was the dust of the ground and the pure soul that Hashem puts within us. The Torah (Ber. 2:7) describes the creation of the first human, “And Hashem formed the man from dust of the earth, and He blew into his nostrils the soul of life, and man became a living being.” This second pair, composed of the spiritual and the physical, is involved in an incessant struggle in which each one tries to overpower the other.

And that is our final plea to Hashem. That the same shalom that was made in “His heights” between fire and water should be made in the physical realms for us as well. Not just for each person individually, but, as we declare, “upon all Israel.” The only way to reach such harmony is for the Jewish nation to stop quarreling and disagreeing with each other.

There is a classic joke (which like so many Jewish jokes may not be particularly funny but is sharp and thought-provoking) told about a young scholar who was invited to become the rabbi of a small, old community. On his very first Shabbat, the Ten Commandments were read as a part of the weekly Torah reading, and it sparked off an enormous argument in the Synagogue. Should one stand or not stand during the reading. The rabbi was at a loss as he watched his congregants screaming and shouting at each other, and,

at one point, nearly coming to blows. The very next day, an extremely concerned rabbi visited the oldest member of the community, Mr. Katz, 98, in his nursing home.

After introducing himself, the rabbi then broached the reason for his visit. “Mr. Katz,” he said, “I’m at a loss. I am turning to you to find what is the original and authentic custom in our Synagogue when it comes to reading the Ten Commandments.”

“Why would you want to know that?” asked Mr. Katz.

The rabbi answered, “Yesterday, as we started to read the Ten Commandments, some of the congregants stood, and others sat. Then, the ones standing started screaming at the ones who were sitting that they have to stand up. And the ones sitting down started shouting at the standers, telling them that they have to sit down. It was appalling! And the worst thing about it was that I, as their rabbi, had no idea what I was supposed to tell them.”

Mr. Katz looked at the rabbi and calmly told him, “You don’t have to say anything. That is our custom.”

Rabbi Shimon Schwab explains why we say, “May He make peace upon us” and not, “May He make peace between us.” He says that ultimately we do not seem to be capable of achieving peace by ourselves. Therefore, peace will have to be imposed upon us from Above.

Or, as Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin so poignantly expresses it, “Why do we take three steps back before mentioning the concept of peace? We step backwards to show that we are ready to retreat from our seemingly intractable position for the sake of peace.”

To be continued.....

PEREK SHIRA: The Song of Existence

by Rabbi Shmuel Kraines

The Song of the Camel

The Camel says:

“From on high, Hashem will roar, and from His holy dwelling, He will sound His voice. He will roar and shout about His abode.” (Yirmiyah 25:30)

The camel is incredibly resilient to the intense heat of the desert and can go for nine days without water. It does not need refined food and can eat even thorns. The camel can thus be seen as a symbol of survival in the desert.

The Sages teach that the camel represents the Babylonian exile, based on the observation that the verse in Tehillim 137:8 describes the word “gemul” (retribution), as the same word-root for “gamal” (camel). We may explain the meaning of this symbolism as follows: The Jewish People’s exile to the spiritual desert of Babylonia is similar to a camel entering a vast desert. In the same way that a camel survives by storing water in its hump, the Jewish People remained connected to the Torah through the one thousand expert Torah scholars who joined them in that exile.

The Zohar states that when the Jewish People reached Babylonia, Hashem roared in anguish over His devastated Beit HaMikdash and His exiled children, as it is written, “Hashem roars from on high, and from His holy dwelling He emits His voice. He roars and shouts about His abode.” It is therefore fitting that the camel, which represents the Babylonian exile, sings this verse. Even though the Babylonian exile has long since come to an end, the camel’s song is relevant to our current state of exile as well. Indeed, the Sages teach that Hashem roars in this way three times every night.

Even if we cannot hear Hashem’s thrice-nightly roars of anguish, we should not forget His love for us, and how mightily He yearns for our return. The longer our nation’s state of exile extends, the harder it is to relate to Hashem and to return to Him. However, the rules of our relationship remain

the same. Hashem treats small mitzvahs in our generation like great feats of faith in bygone days, and He treats sins with a measure of leniency in consideration of the times in which we live. In the same way as Hashem designed the camel to be able to cross a desert, He designed us to cross the exile. And every day, He is waiting for us to do so.

Sources: Zohar, Parashas Vayakhel 196a; Vayikra Rabbah 13:51; Gittin 81a; Daas Shalom; Tzaltzal Knafayim; Kol Rinah, citing Berachos 3a; Arizal. See also Knaf Renanim.

*In loving memory of Harav Zeev Shlomo ben Zecharia Leib

TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Nazir 2-8

Mitzvah Beauty Treatment

We learn in a beraita: The verse “This is my G-d and I will glorify Him” (Shmot 15:2) teaches that “I will beautify myself before Him in mitzvah fulfillment.” For example, “I will make a beautiful succah, a beautiful lulav, a beautiful tzitzit and a beautiful Sefer Torah.” (See Shulchan Aruch Aruch Chaim 656:1 for the practical, financial implications in beautiful mitzvah fulfillment, often referred to as “hidur mitzah” – “beautifying a mitzvah”.)

Nazir 2b

Why Thirty Days?

The Mishna states: “A term of being a nazir that is unspecified in length is set as being 30 days.”

Why is it this specific time span? Rav Matna on our daf cites a verse that states, “Kodesh yihiyeh” – “he will be holy,” and the numerical value of “yihiyeh” (“will be”) is 30. The Sage Bar Pada teaches a different basis: the number of times that the word “nazir” appears in the Torah is thirty. However, we have a rule that measurements are part of the Oral Law that Hashem told directly to Moshe, and, therefore, these sources are not “real sources.” Rather, they serve as “hints” in the Torah to this measure of time. (Rambam in his commentary on the Mishna)

Nazir 5a

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LETTER AND SPIRIT

Insights based on the writings of Rav S.R. Hirsch by Rabbi Yosef Hershman

Inherited Impact

In the second of the ten commandments, Hashem warns the people of Israel to be faithful in their observance, for *I am Hashem, your G-d, a G-d Who commands His exclusive rights; I remember the sin of parents for their children, for the third and fourth generation, for those who hate Me; And I practice loving-kindness unto thousands, to those who love Me and to those to keep My commandments.*

Two fundamental truths are taught here regarding Divine reward and retribution. First, Hashem holds us accountable for our actions, and it is in our power to build our lives or ruin them. All is according to our adherence to His Law. There is no escape from judgment.

But the extension of judgment to subsequent generation demands our reflection. This second fundamental teaches that the weal or woe of children depends on the parents – all according to the measure of their virtue or vice.

Children's lives and fates are bound to that of the parents. Just as parents impart physical traits – desirable and undesirable, strengths and infirmities – so too do they impart spiritual ones, be it via nature or nurture.

This creates yet another incentive to aid our spiritual development. For the sake of our children we should preserve our own health; for the sake of our children we should act morally and charitable; for the sake of our children we should be spiritually vigilant and valiant.

But what of that pure soul of the child? What has that soul done to begin its journey as a fruit on the frail tree of its parents? The flawed propensities, weaknesses and defects of the parents have affected that child not only by inheritance or osmosis, but may also have compromised the child's upbringing by depriving him of a sound emotional environment. These present the child with a formidable task, and to overcome them, the pure soul of the child must test and prove its godlike power. The parents' sins may line the cradle of their infant, but that little citizen has the power to climb a hard steep path of trials until he prevails in the moral test.

And the journey of that fruit of a more righteous vine is just as noble. The goodness of his parents, their moral and spiritual purity and strength, form a rich and firm soil which becomes broader and firmer with the succeeding generation. This is the kindness that Hashem bestows upon the offspring of those who are loyal to his Law.

Both outcomes for the next generation – the carrying over of sins, and the bestowal of kindness – are the attribute of the One Hashem. He alone reckons our deeds, and He alone controls our fate. And the individual yearning, pure soul can achieve its perfection on the very road he has been placed.