

# OHRNET

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## PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

### A Slip of the Tongue

*They approached him (Moshe) and said, 'Pens for the flock shall we build here for our livestock, and cities for our small children.'* (32:16)

How often it is that we reveal our shortcomings to others, while we ourselves stay blissfully ignorant of our true selves! A slip of the tongue often speaks louder than a blasting loudspeaker.

The tribes of Reuven and Gad were blessed with large flocks. Recognizing that the terrain on the east bank of the Jordan was ideal for cattle grazing, they petitioned Moshe for this to be their share of the Land.

The Midrash says that their request to Moshe betrayed a materialistic orientation. In the order of their priorities 'pens for the flock' preceded 'cities for our small children.' Moshe, in his response, subtly corrected their priorities; "*Build for yourselves cities for your small children and pens for your flocks...*" (32:24)

It seems that Moshe's subtle rebuke had its effect, for they replied, "*Our small children, our wives, our livestock and all our animals will be there in the cities of Gilead.*" (32:26)

Nevertheless, this Midrash seems difficult to understand. How could it be that Reuven and Gad, two of the tribes, two of the progenitors of the holy nation of Yisrael, could have been more concerned with their possessions than their children, as it appears from this order?

We should never make the mistake of relating our failings to the perceived failings of our Forefathers. Their smallest sin in our hands would appear like a jewel of mitzvah. On their level, the children of Reuven and Gad were considered overly materialistic, but if they were walking around today, they would seem so spiritual as to be scarcely part of the planet.

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# TALMUD TIPS

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by Rabbi Moshe Newman

## Gittin 51-57

### My Home and the House of Yaakov

*Rabbi Yossi said, "I never called my wife 'my wife'... but rather 'my home'."*

This statement of Rabbi Yossi is part of a *beraita* on our *daf*. Rashi explains that his wife handled all the needs of the home and that she was the mainstay of their home. We similarly find that the women are called "*bayit*" or "home" at the time of the giving of the Torah: "Moshe ascended to Hashem, and the L-rd called to him from the mountain, saying, 'So will you say to the house ("*beit*") of Yaakov, and tell the sons of Yisrael...' (Ex. 19:3). Rashi, in explaining this verse, cites the *Mechilta*, which teaches that "Beit Yaakov" refers to "the women."

I have also heard another explanation for referring to the wife as the home. We find in *Mesechta Sotah* (17a) that Rabbi Akiva states, "If a married man and woman are meritorious, the Divine Presence is with them." Rashi writes, "Hashem took His Name (of *Yud* and *Heh*) and divided it, and caused it to dwell with *both* of them – the letter *Yud* in "*ish*" (man, i.e., husband), and the letter *Heh* in "*isha*" (woman, i.e., wife)." A man alone does not an ideal home make. Only if the man is with a wife, living in marital peace and harmony, is there a true Jewish home, blessed with the Divine Presence.

▪ *Gittin 52a*

### Dilemma of Division

*Rabbi Yochanan said, "The humility of Rabbi Zecharia ben Avkulus destroyed our Beit Hamikdash and burned our Heichal and exiled us from our Land."*

This statement concludes the well-known story of Kamtza and Bar Kamtza, which led to the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of the Jewish People by the Romans. When Bar Kamtza was ejected from a certain celebration, he sought revenge by telling the Roman Caesar that the Jews were rebelling against him. The Caesar sent an animal with him to be sacrificed in the Beit Hamikdash to test their loyalty, but Bar Kamtza intentionally made a blemish in the animal as he took it to Jerusalem. The Sages had a great dilemma. If they refused to offer the Caesar's sacrifice and word of their refusal got back to the Caesar, they and the Jewish People were likely to face serious consequences. Many Sages were therefore inclined to either offer the Caesar's sacrifice or kill Bar Kamtza, thereby removing the danger. However, Rabbi Zecharia ben Avkulus "in his humility" convinced the Sages to neither offer the sacrifice nor to kill Bar Kamtza, resulting in destruction and exile.

Why does the *gemara* attribute this decision to his “humility”? Where do we see his humility in this decision? It would seem that the more correct description for the basis of his decision would be his “righteousness” or his “piety.” (In fact, Rashi translates “*anwatanuto*” in the *gemara* not as “humility” but, rather, as “patience,” which is not the “normal” translation, and begs explanation). Rabbi Zecharia ben Avkulus was an outstanding Torah scholar of his generation and had the authority to declare a temporary “overriding” of Torah law for the sake of the welfare of the Jewish People. Nevertheless, he was extremely humble and did not feel he was a great enough Sage to actually *carry out* either one of the suggested rulings that would have spared the national tragedy. For this “misplaced” humility, our *gemara* places blame on him for the ensuing disaster. (Maharitz Chiyut)

▪ *Gittin 55b-56a*

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## PARSHA OVERVIEW

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### Matot

Moshe teaches the rules and restrictions governing oaths and vows, especially the role of a husband or father in either upholding or annulling a vow. The Bnei Yisrael wage war against Midian. They kill the five Midianite kings, all the males and Bilaam. Moshe is upset that women were taken captive. They were catalysts for the immoral behavior of the Jewish People. He rebukes the officers. The spoils of war are counted and apportioned. The commanding officers report to Moshe that there was not even one casualty among the Bnei Yisrael. They bring an offering that is taken by Moshe and Elazar and placed in the Ohel Mo'ed (Tent of Meeting). The Tribes of Gad and Reuven, who own large quantities of livestock, petition Moshe to allow them to remain on the eastern side of the Jordan River and not enter the western Land of Israel. They explain that the land east of the Jordan is quite suitable grazing land for their livestock. Moshe's initial response is that this request will discourage the rest of the Bnei Yisrael, and that it is akin to the sin of the spies. They assure Moshe that they will first help conquer the Land of Israel, and only then will they go back to their homes on the eastern side of the Jordan River. Moshe grants their request on condition that they uphold their part of the deal.

### Masei

The Torah names all 42 encampments of the Bnei Yisrael on their 40-year journey from the Exodus to the crossing of the Jordan River into Eretz Yisrael. Hashem commands the Bnei Yisrael to drive out the Canaanites from the Land of Israel and to demolish every vestige of their idolatry. The Bnei Yisrael are warned that if they fail to completely rid the Land of the Canaanites, those who remain will be “pins in their eyes and thorns in their sides.” The boundaries of the Land of Israel are defined, and the tribes are commanded to set aside 48 cities for the Levites, who do not receive a regular portion in the division of the Land. Cities of refuge are to be established so that someone who unintentionally kills another person may flee there. The daughters of Tzlofchad marry members of their own tribe so that their inheritance will stay in their own tribe. Thus ends the Book of Bamidbar/Numbers, the fourth of the Books of the Torah.

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# Q & A - Matot

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## Questions

1. Who may annul a vow?
2. When may a father annul his widowed daughter's vows?
3. Why were the Jewish People not commanded to attack Moav, as they were to attack Midian?
4. Those selected to fight Midian went unwillingly. Why?
5. What holy vessels accompanied the Jewish People into battle?
6. Those who killed in the war against Midian were required to remain outside the "machane" (camp). Which machane?
7. Besides removing traces of forbidden food, what else is needed to make metal vessels obtained from a non-Jew fit for a Jewish owner?
8. "We will build sheep-pens here for our livestock and cities for our little ones." What was improper about this statement?
9. During the conquest of the Land, where did Bnei Gad and Bnei Reuven position themselves?
10. What promise did Bnei Gad and Bnei Reuven make beyond that which Moshe required?

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

## Answers

1. 30:2 - Preferably, an expert in the laws of nedarim. Otherwise, three ordinary people.
2. 30:10 - If she is under 12 1/2 years old and widowed before she was fully married.
3. 31:2 - Because Moav only acted out of fear against the Jewish People. Also, Ruth was destined to come from Moav.
4. 31:5 - They knew that Moshe's death would follow.
5. 31:6 - The aron and the tzitz.
6. 31:19 - The Machane Shechina.
7. 31:23 - Immersion in a mikve.
8. 32:16 - They showed more regard for their property than for their children.
9. 32:17 - At the head of the troops.
10. 32:24 - Moshe required them to remain west of the Jordan during the conquest of the Land. They promised to remain after the conquest until the Land was divided among the tribes.

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# Q & A - Masei

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## Questions

1. Why does the Torah list the places where the Jewish People camped?
2. Why did the King of Arad feel at liberty to attack the Jewish People?
3. What length was the camp in the midbar?
4. Why does the Torah need to specify the boundaries that are to be inherited by the Jewish People?
5. What was the nesi'im's role in dividing the Land?
6. When did the three cities east of the Jordan begin to function as refuge cities?
7. There were six refuge cities, three on each side of the Jordan. Yet, on the east side of the Jordan there were only two and a half tribes. Why did they need three cities?
8. To be judged as an intentional murderer, what type of weapon must the murderer use?
9. Why is the kohen gadol blamed for accidental deaths?
10. When an ancestral field moves by inheritance from one tribe to another, what happens to it in Yovel?

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

## Answers

1. 33:1 - To show G-d's love of the Jewish People. Although it was decreed that they wander in the desert, they did not travel continuously. During 38 years, they moved only 20 times.
2. 33:40 - When Aharon died, the clouds of glory protecting the Jewish People departed.
3. 33:49 - Twelve mil (one mil is 2,000 amot).
4. 34:2 - Because certain mitzvot apply only in the Land.
5. 34:17 - Each nasi represented his tribe. He also allocated the inheritance to each family in his tribe.
6. 35:13 - After Yehoshua separated three cities west of the Jordan.
7. 35:14 - Because murders were more common there.
8. 35:16 - One capable of inflicting lethal injury.
9. 35:25 - He should have prayed that such things not occur.
10. 36:4 - It remains with the new tribe.

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# WHAT'S IN A WORD?

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By Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

## The Shiloach Waters

One of the most intriguing passages of the Creation narrative in Genesis states that a river exits from Eden and splits into four tributaries, with the second of those being the Gichon River – said to circumscribe the entire Land of Kush (Gen. 2:13). Over the generations, that Gichon River has been variously identified by scholars as either the Ganges, the Nile, the Amu Darya, or the Orontes river. Another river named Gichon is mentioned thrice in the Bible in connection with King Solomon’s coronation (I Kgs. 1:33, 1:38, 1:45). Furthermore, the Gichon River appears twice more in the Bible, when Hezekiah blocked and redirected the waters of the Gichon River (II Chron. 32:30), and when Hezekiah's son Manasseh fortified the outer walls of Jerusalem, just beyond the Gichon River (II Chron. 33:14). This second river is clearly located in Jerusalem, and in some sources, its name is actually given as Shiloach (Shiloah). In this essay, we take a close look at the names of this river and explore their possible etymologies and meanings.

When the Mishna records the story of Hezekiah blocking the Gichon, it uses the word Gichon just like the Bible does (*Pesachim* 4:9). Yet, the Mishnah elsewhere (*Sukkah* 4:10) refers to the Shiloach as stream/spring near the Holy Temple in Jerusalem (see Rashi to *Sukkah* 48a). In fact, the term “Waters of the Shiloah” (*Mei Shiloach*) already appears in Isaiah (8:6), and that is the only time it is mentioned in the Bible. Although, we should mention that a similar name – the Shelach pool – is mentioned elsewhere in the Bible (Neh. 3:15). Either way, Rashi (to I Kgs. 1:33, Isa. 8:6) explicitly writes that the Gichon and was also called Shiloach, as does Radak (to I Kgs. 1:33).

The Talmud (*Kerisus* 5b) rules that Jewish kings must be coronated at a well-spring, as this symbolizes the everlasting continuity of their kingship which should continue to flow like the current of a well-spring. To support this ruling, the Talmud cites the aforementioned verses concerning King Solomon’s coronation which occurred at the Gichon. In explaining this passage, Rashi (to *Kerisus* 5b) comments that the Gichon was a small well-spring near Jerusalem that was not the same thing as the Great Gichon River which was said to flow from Eden. In the context of Hezekiah stopping the Gichon’s waters, Rashi (to *Brachot* 10b) once again stresses that the Gichon in question was near Jerusalem and was not identical to the Gichon mentioned in Genesis. This time, Rashi adduces support for his assertion by citing Targum (to I Kgs. 1:33) who renders the Hebrew name Gichon in Aramaic as Shilucha.

While Ibn Ezra (to Ex. 2:11) follows Rabbi Saadia Gaon (882–942) in identifying the Gichon of Genesis with the same Gichon near Jerusalem, Maimonides' son Rabbi Avraham Maimuni disagrees with Ibn Ezra and sides with Rashi that they are two discrete bodies of water. He explains that in some way that we are no longer privy to, the spring just outside of Jerusalem resembled the Great Gichon River mentioned in Genesis, so it was given the same name as it. [Rabbi Meir Abulafia (1170–1244), also known as *Ramah*, is cited by *HaKosev* (to *Ein Yaakov Horayot* 12a), as saying the same thing as Ibn Ezra.]

In their respective *Sefer HaShorashim*, Ibn Janach and Radak see the primary meaning of the root GIMMEL-VAV-CHET to be “exiting,” as tributaries of this root refer to the act of “birthing” (Job 38:8, Mic. 4:10, and

Ps. 22:10), when a baby *exits* her mother's womb, as well as "flowing from," when a river or spring's current leaves its source to flow downstream. Based on this, Radak explains that the Gichon river referenced in Genesis as one of the Four Rivers got its name from the fact that it "goes forth" from its fount and continues to flow around the entire Kush area. In his commentary to Genesis, Radak (to Gen. 2:13) adds that the Gichon River splits into many tributaries that "exit" from the main parent river.

\*To read the rest of this fascinating article, visit us online at: [http://ohr.edu/this\\_week/whats\\_in\\_a\\_word/](http://ohr.edu/this_week/whats_in_a_word/)

\*A more complete treatment of this subject can be found exclusively at:  
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## COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

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by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

### Havdalah Introduction (part 3) – Farewell, My Beloved

*"Hashem, my G-d will illuminate my darkness"*  
(King David, Tehillim 18:29)

As we continue saying Havdalah, we declare "Hashem, Master of legions, is with us. A fortress is the G-d of Yaakov, Selah." (*Tehillim 46:12*) The commentaries explain that when the final salvation happens, the other nations of the world will recognize Hashem's sovereignty over the world, but their recognition will lack the clarity that belongs to the Jewish nation. The clarity of our recognition will stem from the fact that, throughout all generations, we have strived to uncover Hashem's majesty in this world. It is the collective toil of our predecessors together with ourselves that will reveal the clearest, most lucid cognizance of Hashem in this world. One of the most obvious ways by which we show our desire to bask in Hashem's presence is by keeping Shabbat. Therefore, we mention it in Havdalah, as a reminder of just how astonishing the reward for honoring Shabbat will be when we finally reach that sublime time.

Due to the power of our connection to Shabbat, Rabbi Pinchas Mordechai Teitz (1908-1995), the Rabbi of Elizabeth New Jersey, would never bring in Shabbat early. Even in the summer months, when nearly everyone else did so because the summer days are very long and it would make everything extremely late, he began Shabbat with the setting sun. When he was asked why, he answered that there were many Jews in Elizabeth who did not keep Shabbat at all, and once Shabbat was accepted by the community, they were transgressing the Shabbat laws, albeit inadvertently, even though it was not yet dark. He felt an obligation to bring in Shabbat at the correct time so that he could minimize their transgressions.

We then recite the words from Tehillim 84:13, "Hashem, Master of legions, praised is the one who trusts in You." Rabbi David Kimche explains that this verse is directed towards those who never give up hope that

Hashem will redeem us. These powerful words are dedicated to those who continue to yearn for the rebuilding of the Temple and the ultimate redemption. Only the eternal bond with our souls has kept us joined to Hashem during our seemingly interminable exile. And it is only our connection to the spiritual dimensions that will bring us to the final redemption, to the most anticipated moment in history, the moment that our Sages call the “*Yom Shekulo Shabbat* – a time of eternal Shabbat.”

Havdalah then continues with another verse from Tehillim (20:10), “Hashem, save! May the King answer us on the day that we call out to Him.” The Midrash says that it is only when we call out to Hashem in prayer that He answers us and saves us from the predicaments that each generation finds itself in. Our relationship with Hashem is not just an intellectual one. It requires the constant involvement of our physical beings as well.

*To be continued...*

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## PEREK SHIRA

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by Rabbi Shmuel Kraines

### THE SONG OF THE HUNTING DOG

The Hunting Dog says: “Righteous ones, laud Hashem; for the upright, His praise is fitting!”  
(Tehillim 33:1)

The hunting dog runs swiftly to hunt wild animals on behalf of its master. Remarkably, although carnivorous, it restrains itself from eating the animals that it traps in order to keep them for its master. It therefore sings of the righteous who serve Hashem while withholding themselves from deriving personal benefit connected to their service.

The hunting dog specifies two types of righteous people in its song. The first is “the righteous” (*tzaddikim*), those who consistently struggle to do what is right. The second is “the upright” (*yesharim*), those who have already straightened their character and serve Hashem naturally. Through its wholehearted devotion to its master, it declares that although Hashem appreciates all forms of praise, the praise of the upright is the most fitting because it is wholehearted.

Since Hashem most desires the heart, we should not be satisfied with our mere observance of Hashem’s Torah. Rather, we should always strive to refine ourselves to the extent that our service to Him is a natural expression of love that is wholehearted and pure. This is a life-long goal, whose eternal worth outweighs its difficulty.

*\*Sources: Knaf Renanim; Eight Chapters of Rambam*

*\*In loving memory of Harav Zeev Shlomo ben Zecharia Leib*



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# LETTER AND SPIRIT

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

## Life and Land

The Jews are at the end of their forty-year sojourn in the desert, and the Torah reviews all of the encampments. Then, Moshe informs the people that they are about to cross over the Jordan into the Land of Israel, where they will conquer and apportion the Land. Moshe is then told to convey the mitzvah of setting up six cities of refuge – three on either side of the Jordan.

These cities were established for individuals who committed manslaughter to seek refuge. A manslayer was not granted asylum if he acted intentionally or was criminally negligent. Neither did one need to be exiled if the death was a result of an unforeseeable accident. The cities of refuge absorbed those who killed unintentionally, but with some degree of carelessness – such as in circumstances where a cautious person acting responsibly would have recognized the possibility of a deadly result and would have been more careful.

The Torah warns that one may not accept ransom money in lieu of the death penalty for an intentional murderer or in lieu of flight to the city of refuge for an unintentional manslayer. In explaining this prohibition, the Torah writes, *Do not turn the Land in which you are into a hypocrite, for the blood turns the Land into a hypocrite, and there can be no atonement for the Land for the blood that is spilled in it, except by the blood of the one who spilled it.*

What does it mean that the Land would be turned into a hypocrite?

This is the soil that is destined to bear abundant fruit beneath Hashem's blessed dew and sunshine. But the soil, the dew and the sunshine deceive, for no blessed seed germinates from within to give life and joy to mankind. Hashem warns, *if you tolerate deliberate murder and careless manslaughter in your midst, you turn the Land in which you are rooted into a hypocrite!* The Land will disappoint your expectations and withhold the blessing that was meant to come from it. Human blood is the most precious sap nurtured by the Land, and innocent blood that is spilled turns the Land into a "hypocrite."

A human society that does not regard the blood of its members as sacred, and does not demand a reckoning for the spilling of innocent blood, breaks the terms under which it may possess its Land. Instead, in order to claim the Land and its bounty, society must demand that reckoning. The survival of a deliberate murderer is an affront to the higher dignity of man and is a breach of the contract under which Hashem gave the earth to man and the Land to Israel. By committing murder, he forfeits his right to live.

These commandments were given just as the people are told that they will inherit the Land because they emphasize the sanctity of human life and represent the basic condition for Israel's right to possess the Land and enjoy its fruits.

- Sources: Commentary, Bamidbar 35:11, 33