

OHRNET

SHABBAT PARSHAT ACHAREI MOT-KEDOSHIM · 8 IYAR 5766 · MAY 6, 2006 · VOL. 13 NO. 28

PARSHA INSIGHTS

BEING NORMAL

“You shall be holy...” (19:1)

It always struck me whenever I had the privilege to meet a great Torah Sage how normal he seemed. It was, in fact, as if he defined the yardstick of normalcy. After meeting this person, others seemed somewhat less than normal.

The Alshich explains that God instructed Moshe to call all the people together when giving them the commandment to be holy in order that it would be clear that holiness is not something achievable by only the few. Every Jew has the potential to be holy, and thus it follows that if every Jew has the potential so be holy, so holiness is not a voluntary affair but an obligation.

Holiness does not consist of the mortifying the flesh or of extreme abstinence. Holiness does not mean rolling in ice or lying on a bed of nails. Holiness means being more and more normal. Holy Jews live normal married lives. They eat normally. They

breathe normally. However, everything they do is with consideration and within measure.

Holiness means being normal even under the most abnormal situations. It means never compromising with our lower desires, but at the same time recognizing that we are part physical beings. Being holy means resisting

that extra spoonful of *cholent*, even if the *kashrut* is top-drawer. Above all, holiness means going beyond the technical fulfillment of the *mitzvot*. It means sanctifying the permitted. When something is forbidden outright, it's much easier to steer clear of it; there's no room for negotiation with our lower personas. However when something is permitted there is always the temptation to push the edge of the envelope, and even though technically one could stay within the letter of the law, the commandment to be holy tells us that there is more to mitzvah observance than the letter of the law.

Observing the spirit of the law is a mitzvah in itself. That's what it means to be normal.

• Based on the Ramban

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ACHAREI MOT

G-d instructs the *kohanim* to exercise extreme care when they enter the *Mishkan*. On Yom Kippur, the *kohen gadol* is to approach the holiest part of the *Mishkan* after special preparations and wearing special clothing. He brings offerings unique to Yom Kippur, including two identical goats that are designated by lottery. One is “for G-d” and is offered in the Temple, while the other is “for Azazel” in the desert. The Torah states the individual’s obligations on Yom Kippur: On the 10th day of the seventh month, one must afflict oneself. We abstain from eating and drinking, anointing, wearing leather footwear, washing, and marital relations. Consumption of blood is prohibited. The blood of slaughtered birds and undomesticated beasts must be covered. The people are warned against engaging in the wicked practices that were common in Egypt. Incest is defined and prohibited. Marital relations are forbidden during a woman’s monthly cycle. Homosexuality, bestiality and child sacrifice are prohibited.

KEDOSHIM

The nation is enjoined to be holy. Many prohibitions and positive commandments are taught. *Prohibitions:* Idolatry; eating offerings after their time-limit; theft and robbery; denial of theft; false oaths; retention of someone’s property; delaying payment to an employee; hating or cursing a fellow Jew (especially one’s parents); gossip; placing physical and spiritual stumbling blocks; perversion of justice; inaction when others are in danger; embarrassing; revenge; bearing a grudge; cross-breeding; wearing a garment of wool and linen; harvesting a tree during its first three years; gluttony and intoxication; witchcraft; shaving the beard and sideburns; tattooing. *Positive:* Awe for parents and respect for the elderly; leaving part of the harvest for the poor; loving others (especially a convert); eating in Jerusalem the fruits from a tree’s fourth year; awe for the Temple; respect for Torah scholars, the blind and the deaf. Family life must be holy. We are warned again not to imitate gentile behavior, lest we lose the Land of Israel. We must observe *kashrut*, thus maintaining our unique and separate status.

ISRAEL Forever

A BIRTHDAY WARNING IN TIME

“You shall heed all My laws... so that the Land into which I bring you to dwell shall not vomit you out.” How appropriate to the 58th birthday of the State of Israel are these words of G-d that appear towards the very end of the double Torah portion which will be read in synagogues throughout Israel and the world this Shabbat.

For many Jews in Israel this past year has been one of experiencing in part the fulfillment of this dread warning. Without entering into the national debate over disengagement, past and future, it is hardly possible not to commiserate

with those Jews who lost their homes and livelihoods as a result of international pressures on the government to remove them. “Vomiting” can come in various forms. The present one of being forced to relinquish parts of our Land to an enemy committed to destroying us should serve as a reminder that the failure of so many of our misled brothers and sisters everywhere to “heed all My laws” may indeed be the cause of this tragedy.

May our people wherever they reside be inspired by the Divine warning and commit themselves to heeding G-d’s laws and thus securing Israel forever.

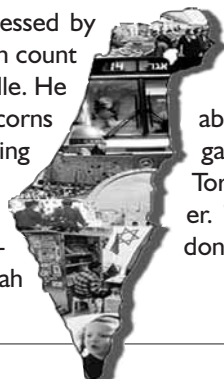
LOVE OF THE LAND - THE SAGES

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael

“TWO WHO SIT TOGETHER AND NO WORDS OF TORAH PASS BETWEEN THEM CONSTITUTE A SEAT OF CYNICS” — RABBI CHANINA BEN TRADYON (AVOT 3:2)

There is no greater cynicism than that expressed by one who is told that all the gold coins he can count in one hour will be his, and yet he remains idle. He certainly scoffs at the value of the coins and scorns them. In similar fashion one who is idle from studying Torah despite his awareness of the great reward available can only be called a cynic.

“No words of Torah pass between them” indicates that the two are involved in the study of Torah



independently – but they do not join together to learn as a *chavruta*. This can only be the result of each one scoffing in his heart at the knowledge and abilities of the other and thinking that he has nothing to gain from a *chavruta* with him. Therefore “no words of Torah pass between them” – they do not learn together. These are certainly considered cynics even if they don’t actually utter a sound of scorn.

• *Midrash Shmuel, as quoted by the Tosefot Yom Tov*

ACHAREI MOT

1. Why does the Torah emphasize that *Parshat Acharei Mot* was taught after the death of Aharon's sons?
2. How long did the first *Beit Hamikdash* stand?
3. What did the *kohen gadol* wear when he entered the Holy of Holies?
4. How many times did the *kohen gadol* change his clothing and immerse in the *mikveh* on Yom Kippur?
5. One of the goats that was chosen by lot went to *azazel*. What is *azazel*?
6. After the Yom Kippur service, what is done with the four linen garments worn by the *kohen gadol*?
7. What is the penalty of *karet*?
8. Which categories of animals must have their blood covered when they are slaughtered?
9. What is the difference between "*mishpat*" and "*chok*"?
10. May a man marry his wife's sister?

KEDOSHIM

1. Why was *Parshat Kedoshim* said in front of all the Jewish

People?

2. Why does the Torah mention the duty to honor one's father before it mentions the duty to honor one's mother?
3. Why is the command to fear one's parents followed by the command to keep Shabbat?
4. The Torah obligates one to leave the "*leket*" for the poor. What is "*leket*"?
5. In *Shemot* 20:13, the Torah commands, "Do not steal." What does the Torah add when it commands in *Vayikra* 19:11 "Do not steal"?
6. In verse 19:13, the Torah commands, "Do not wrong your neighbor." To what "wrong" is the Torah referring?
7. When rebuking someone, what sin must one be careful to avoid?
8. How does one fulfill the command "*v'hadarta p'nei zakein*"?
9. What punishment will never come to the entire Jewish People?
10. When the Torah states a death penalty but doesn't define it precisely, to which type of death penalty is it referring?

Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

ACHAREI MOT

1. 16:1 - To strengthen the warning not to enter the Holy of Holies except on Yom Kippur.
2. 16:3 - 410 years.
3. 16:4 - Only the four linen garments worn by an ordinary *kohen*.
4. 16:4 - Five times.
5. 16:8 - A jagged cliff.
6. 16:23 - They must be put into *geniza* and not be used again.
7. 17:9 - The person's life is shortened and his offspring die.
8. 17:13 - Non-domestic kosher animals and all species of kosher birds.
9. 18:4 - A "*mishpat*" conforms to the human sense of justice. A "*chok*" is a law whose reason is not given to us and can only be understood as Hashem's decree.
10. 18:18 - Not during his wife's lifetime.

KEDOSHIM

1. 19:2 - Because it contains the fundamental teachings of the Torah.
2. 19:3 - Since it is more natural to honor one's mother, the Torah stresses the obligation to honor one's father.
3. 19:3 - To teach that one must not violate Torah law even at the command of one's parents.
4. 19:9 - "*Leket*" is one or two stalks of grain that are accidentally dropped while harvesting.
5. 19:11 - The Torah in *Vayikra* prohibits monetary theft. In *Shemot* it prohibits kidnapping.
6. 19:13 - Withholding wages from a worker.
7. 19:17 - Causing embarrassment.
8. 19:32 - By not sitting in their seat nor contradicting them.
9. 20:3 - "*Karet*" — the entire Jewish People will never be "cut off."
10. 20:10 - "*Chenek*" (strangulation).

A digest of the topics covered in the seven weekly pages of the Talmud studied in the course of the worldwide Daf Yomi cycle along with an insight from them

- On what beverage *kiddush* and *havdalah* can be made and how much of it has to be drunk
- What is the cutoff time for eating on Erev Pesach and why?
- The late dining king
- Food and drink appetizers and the fasting Sage
- Reclining at the Seder – when and who
- The amount and quality of wine for the four cups
- Keeping the children awake for the Seder
- How to fulfill mitzvah of *simcha* (joy) on holiday – then and now
- Measurement of *reviit* for cup of wine and water needed for *mikveh*
- The supernatural danger of *zugot* (pairs), demons and witchcraft
- Subsisting on Shabbat but accepting support on Pesach
- Rabbi Akiva's counsel to his son and his dialogue with a disciple in prison
- Sagely advice on marriage, business, where to live and how to avoid harm
- Those who win special favor in the eyes of G-d and those despised by G-d and man
- Love and hate amongst men and animals

WHO FASTS ON EREV PESACH?

A familiar scene in synagogues on the morning of Erev Pesach (the day preceding Pesach) is the gathering of men to participate in the *siyum* (completion) of a tractate of the Talmud, which is followed by the partaking of some food and drink.

The background for this is the custom for first-born males to fast on that day. This fast, whose source is *Mesechta Sofrim* 21:3, is in commemoration of the Jewish first-born being spared when G-d slew all the Egyptian first-born on the eve of the Exodus. Since this is only a custom, participation in a *seudat mitzvah* such as that which celebrates a *siyum* exempts the first-born from actually fasting.

Tosefot in our *gemara* refers to the custom of fasting in the process of analyzing what is reported about Rabbi Sheishet's fasting the entire day of Erev Pesach. It was first suggested that his purpose in fasting was connected with a caution that might have been necessary in the time of the *Beit Hamikdash*. There is one opinion that although the Pesach sacrifice should not be slaughtered in the morning, if

one does so it is considered a fulfillment of the mitzvah. One who wished to be extremely stringent would therefore refrain from eating from the beginning of the day in order to avoid forgetting his obligation to offer this sacrifice.

This approach is rejected in favor of the much simpler explanation that Rabbi Sheishet had such an extremely limited appetite that if he ate in the morning he would have no appetite at night for the matzah.

It has been suggested that this is the basis for the position of Rambam cited in our article on 99b that all people, even those with regular appetites, should refrain from overindulging in any form of food during the last quarter hour of Erev Pesach.

It may well be, points out Tosefot, that Rabbi Sheishet also did not actually fast but rather restrained himself from eating too much all day the way we restrain ourselves at the end of the day. There is, however, a possibility that he actually took upon himself a formal fast in order to be certain that he would not forget himself and spoil his appetite for the matzah at night.

• *Pesachim* 108a

WHAT THE Sages SAY

“There are three people for whom G-d has a special love – one who does not lose his temper, one who does not get drunk and one who does not seek to get even with those who upset him.”

• *Anonymous Sages*
Pesachim 113b

CONVERSING CONVERSION

The following are excerpts from correspondence between "Ask" and a young woman interested in converting to Judaism.

From: Sarah in NB

Dear Rabbi,

My father's side is either not religious or take on Buddhist/Tao practices. My mother's side comes from a long line of Southern Baptist ministers. My siblings and I were "forced" to believe in a Southern Baptist context and I was told everyday that if I didn't believe what they taught, repent my sins and give my soul to Jesus I would be damned to hell and my life would be miserable.

I rejected these terms as soon as I was old enough to understand what they meant. It was not just a sense of rebellion but my internal sense telling me what they were teaching me wasn't right. I didn't believe that I should fear G-d just because He feels in order for me to be worthy of heaven I need to be punished first to show Him my faith — I was created in His image and therefore worthy to be in heaven and that my experience there will be determined by my actions here.

I was 8 when I was first exposed to Jewish culture. I changed schools and a young boy in my class was Jewish. He told me about the holidays he celebrated/observed, the rituals and traditions he followed and invited me to attend an activity set up by the synagogue. It was one of the most enlightening experiences I've ever had. A community with such a strong bond was amazing to see, especially in a small southern town that openly persecuted people who thought outside Christian views. I had to hide the fact that I attended the activity, and even that I had a Jewish friend at all, from my family. I was a month from my 13th birthday when I finally told my mother I wanted to convert to Judaism. She was horrified, to say the least, at my decision and I was told that I had to move out and I was no longer welcome around my family.

I am now 18 and still study and learn everyday, I would like to make an official conversion and hope to move to Israel as soon as possible. My boyfriend is a Jew and lives in Israel with his family and he openly supports my decision to convert and is willing to help me where he can. So, my hope is that with this information you can point me in the right direction to where I need to go to help make this happen.

Dear Sarah,

I commend you on your spiritual pursuit in general, and in your interest in Judaism in particular. If you want to convert in America, you must find a reliable rabbi there to guide you. If you want to move to Israel, you might consider going through the conversion here. That would involve enrolling in an acceptable women's seminary and applying for conversion with the Israeli Rabbinate. Please be aware that whatever you choose to do, there are different groups within Judaism today, and only Orthodox conversions are accepted by everyone. This requires a commitment to the Jewish belief in G-d and to keep the commandments of the Torah and of the Rabbis according to the traditional and ancient understanding of Jewish Law.

Sarah: Thank you for responding back to me so quickly, it is appreciated. My hope would be to convert in Israel. If I am not Orthodox will I be allowed to marry in Israel as long as I have an Orthodox ceremony? Will my 'future' children be considered Jewish?

Rabbi: As far as I know, non-Orthodox conversions done in Israel are not recognized by the Israeli government. Ones done outside of Israel are. However, this is only as far as gaining Israeli citizenship as a "Jewish" citizen is concerned. As far as marriage in Israel, it is done through the Rabbinate and only Orthodox conversions are accepted. A woman converted non-Orthodox and married outside of Israel might be viewed by the Israeli government as married, but the Rabbinate would not consider the couple married or the children Jewish. Eventually when the children would want to marry in Israel, they would not be able to.

You have had a long search into Judaism, and I'm sure you know a lot about the subject. May I nevertheless take the liberty to share with you that in the years I have been helping Jews and non-Jews come closer to Judaism, many people originally interested in non-Orthodox conversion, including many who actually converted through those movements, came to realize that they are lacking, and eventually came to desire Orthodoxy. It is possible that you might feel the same after coming to Israel and learning in an authentic seminary with other thinking and sensitive young women like yourself. If I can be of further assistance, please let me know.

[Sarah described her distaste with what she referred to as a so-called rabbi who offered to convert her on-line for between \$1800-\$3600. In addition to many obvious objections, she writes:] "So I explained to him that I thought of Judaism as a caring, giving family and to obligate future members to do this isn't setting a very good example, and that as a rabbi, he should know that above everyone else." [She then explained why she had not initially considered Orthodoxy:] I was told that I was not allowed to convert to Orthodoxy because I was born to a gentile woman who wasn't married. Is this true?

Rabbi: You certainly do have an interesting past to say the least. But it in no way disqualifies you from becoming a Jew according to Jewish Law. Your unique past makes you all the more special, and can be harnessed in a positive way to enable you to contribute to the world as a person and a Jew in wonderful ways. [We explained the option of following the Noahide Laws, to which she replied that she was well aware of, but wants to observe the commandments as a Jew.]

Sarah: The person who told me that I wasn't allowed to convert to Orthodoxy was a Jewish woman actually. She lives here and she told me because I was born of sin to a non-Jewish mother that I wouldn't be allowed to become a "full-Jew", that I could practice if I chose, but I wasn't allowed to be considered one. I had no other resources, so even though I considered it pretty harsh, I had to take her word. If this is not true then I am certainly open to exploring this option more, as I have heard of several non-Orthodox converts who later became Orthodox because they felt their chosen movement was less than what they originally thought. Is there by chance a website where I can view these seminaries?

[We referred her to several seminaries.] I'm very happy you

continued on page six

SHARING THE HONORS

Question: In planning the forthcoming wedding of my daughter I am in somewhat of a dilemma regarding dividing the honors at the *chupah* amongst all the relatives and the distinguished rabbis connected to my family and those of the *chatan*. What is the right thing to do?

Answer: The most important thing to do is to avoid any dispute between you and the *chatan's* family. Although our Sages warn us that there is no marriage contract without some measure of discord, there is no need to go looking for a fight that is so unnecessary.

While it is customary for the rosh yeshiva or rabbi of the

chatan to be honored with officiating as the *mesader kiddushin*, there are many honors left which can be fairly divided. There is the reading of the *ketubah* and the blessings that follow, and serving as a witness to the *kiddushin* and the *ketubah* is also considered an honor. And don't forget the blessings at the end of the wedding feast that can serve as an honorable consolation prize for anyone who was left out or came late.

It may indeed be impossible in some cases to cater to everyone who deserves an honor. In such a case it would be nice to approach the ones you left out and apologize for doing so because of unavoidable pressure.

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

ANOTHER SURVIVOR FINDS A HOME

We have featured in the past a story of Talmudic volumes of Polish Jews which survived the Holocaust and found a home in Yeshivat Ohr Somayach. This is a story of a Sefer Torah that made its journey from Poland to Baltimore to Israel.

Written in the early part of the last century, this Sefer Torah was brought after World War II to the Randallstown Synagogue in Baltimore, Maryland where it remained for several decades until that congregation closed down. Since it was too costly to repair, it seemed that it was headed for *geniza* interment.

An article in the Jerusalem Post about the efforts of the Jerusalem-based Chaim Veshalom Hatzolah organization to

provide every Border Police base with its own Torah inspired students of the Baltimore-area Beth T'filoh Dahan Community School to raise the more than \$6,000 needed to repair the scroll.

When the job was completed, 77 seniors of the high school brought the Torah to Israel via Poland and marched to the Kotel with it before presenting it to the Border Police.

"The kids marched under the *chupah* with the Torah," said the school's director of education, Zipora Schorr, in describing the ceremony at the school before it was sent to Israel, "and they sang 'From Zion Came the Torah' and now we're sending it back to Zion."

ASK! YOUR JEWISH INFORMATION RESOURCE - WWW.OHR.EDU

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sent me those links to learn more about those seminaries. Thank you! I have looked a lot more into Orthodoxy and have seen for myself that it is the right path for me - even though it's much more difficult than the other movements. That by itself should be more reason to do it. Also, after looking more into the other movements, I don't believe that they have a 'right' to dismiss the Torah or the Talmud and say they are simply out-dated and we have no use for them anymore. I don't believe that we have a right to choose which commandments and holidays we follow and celebrate just because they suit us better; that's not the reason they were given to us. So I want to thank you for opening my eyes to this.

Rabbi: You have mentioned your boyfriend here in Israel a few times and it sounds that you are both interested in getting married. I understand that your interest in Judaism started long before you met him. Still, I was wondering, if for whatever reason your relationship with him wouldn't continue, what would

you do regarding your interest in Judaism and Israel?

Sarah: If it did unfortunately happen that we would part ways, I would still continue converting. He is a part of my incentive to continue because I understand the bad side of intermarriage. A lot of anti-Semitism stems from intermarriage and many people turn away from the faith because of it, and I don't want to be someone to contribute to that. Even if it won't be him that I marry, it will be another Jew, and G-d willing my children will have two Jewish parents and not just one.

[Later Sarah reported] I was quite persistent with the Orthodox synagogue in Omaha (3 hours from my home) and explained to them my situation and hopefully showed them a little bit of my sincerity in my quest and I received a reply yesterday to set up an appointment.

Thank you so much Rabbi for your support and encouragement, Shalom!