

OHRNET

SHABBAT PARSHAT PINCHAS · 24 TAMMUZ 5772 - JULY 14, 2012 · VOL. 19 NO. 38

PARSHA INSIGHTS

MAKE MINE A SCREWDRIVER, PLEASE!

“Harass the Midianites and smite them” (25:17).

Imagine yourself sitting on an airplane. The person next to you smiles at you and then pulls out a screwdriver, places the sharp end into his ear and leisurely starts to turn the screwdriver into his brain.

You’d try and stop him, wouldn’t you? You’d knock the screwdriver out of his hand and kick it away from him.

Wouldn’t you?

How about if you found yourself sitting on a plane next to someone who is Jewish? They serve the food and you see him starting to eat a pork cutlet. Would you suggest that there was enough food for both of you, and that he join you and eat your kosher food? How about if he refuses? Would you knock his plastic tray to the ground and kick the food away from him?

Ideas don’t frighten us.

We are only frightened by what we see.

The greatest proof is that we don’t fear G-d.

We may know and believe that there is a G-d, but how many of us walk around feeling that He is in front of us at every moment, watching us and listening to our every thought?

If we saw G-d, we would never sin. We don’t see Him, and that’s why we are able to pretend He’s not really there. In Hebrew, the word for *fear* and the world for *sight* are almost identical - “*yirah*”. We are only frightened by what we see.

When we see someone murdering, it evokes in us a horror and a revulsion that is beyond words. But when we see someone encouraging a Jew to break Shabbat or eat non-kosher food, we don’t have anything like the same reaction. And yet, logically, our reaction to the latter should be far greater than the former.

If someone tries to murder you, he’s trying to take away your life in a world where everyone eventually dies. Someone who encourages you to transgress the Torah, however, is trying to take away your life in a world that you could live in forever.

As far as our eyes can see, this world is but a brief walk between two darkneses. However, we *know* that this world is no more than an antechamber before the great palace of light. We don’t see the light, but we know it’s there.

The Midianites incited the Jewish People to sin. It is for this reason that G-d commanded us to take such harsh measures against them. It was not enough for us to attack them; rather we must maintain a constant enmity against them, a constant mindset to remind ourselves that they tried to implant in us a lust for immorality.

They tried to remove us not just from this world but also from the next as well.

OHRNET magazine is published by OHR SOMAYACH Tanenbaum College

POB 18103, Jerusalem 91180, Israel • Tel: +972-2-581-0315 • Email: info@ohr.edu • www.ohr.edu

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PARSHA OVERVIEW

G-d tells Moshe to inform Pinchas that Pinchas will receive G-d's "covenant of peace" as reward for his bold action - executing Zimri and the Midianite princess Kozbi. G-d commands Moshe to maintain a state of enmity with the Midianites who lured the Jewish People into sin. Moshe and Elazar are told to count the Jewish People. The Torah lists the names of the families in each tribe. The total number of males eligible to serve in the army is 601,730. G-d instructs Moshe how to allot the Land of Israel to *Bnei Yisrael*. The number of the Levites' families is recorded. Tzlofchad's daughters file a claim with Moshe: In the absence of a brother, they request

their late father's portion in the Land. Moshe asks G-d for the ruling, and G-d tells Moshe that their claim is just. The Torah teaches the laws and priorities which determine the order of inheritance. G-d tells Moshe that he will ascend a mountain and view the Land that the Jewish People will soon enter, although Moshe himself will not enter. Moshe asks G-d to designate the subsequent leader, and G-d selects Yehoshua bin Nun. Moshe ordains Yehoshua as his successor in the presence of the entire nation. The Parsha concludes with special teachings of the service in the Beit Hamikdash.

ISRAEL Forever

UNDESIRABLE STRANGERS

As we announce this Shabbat that Rosh Chodesh Av will be on the following Friday, we cannot help but reflect on what happened during this month thousands of years ago.

Biblical commentaries such as Ramban point out that our ancestors brought tragedy upon themselves by forming a political alliance with the Romans. These foreigners arrived in masses and eventually took control.

Israel today faces a grave threat to its existence in the form of infiltrators from Sudan and Eritrea who present

not only a criminal problem but a demographic one as well. Unless the government sticks to its pledge to rid the country of these undesirable aliens and prevent new ones from joining them, we will one day discover that the Moslem minority has become a majority.

Israel has enough problems dealing with the non-Jews in its midst and it is hoped that the lesson of destruction and exile which the Month of Av communicates will inspire firm action to protect Israel forever.

LOVE OF THE LAND

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

ROAD TO REWARD – THE WORLD-TO-COME

Three merits are mentioned by Rabbi Yochanan (*Mesechta Pesachim 113a*) as entitling one to the afterlife of *Olam Haba* (World-to-Come). One of them is living



in Eretz Yisrael. Implied in this, however, is a warning regarding the gravity of sins committed in such a holy place, which can place serious obstacles on that road to reward.

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PARSHA Q&A?

1. Why was Pinchas not originally a *kohen*?
2. Why was Moav spared the fate of Midian?
3. What does the *yud* and *heh* added to the family names testify?
4. Korach and his congregation became a “sign.” What do they signify?
5. Why did Korach’s children survive?
6. Name six families in this Parsha whose names are changed.
7. Who was Yaakov’s only living granddaughter at the time of the census?
8. How many years did it take to conquer the Land? How long to divide the Land?
9. Two brothers leave Egypt and die in the *midbar*. One brother has three sons. The other brother has only one son. When these four cousins enter the Land, how many portions will the one son get?
10. What do Yocheved, Ard and Na’aman all have in common?
11. Why did the decree to die in the desert not apply to the women?
12. What trait did Tzlofchad’s daughters exhibit that their ancestor Yosef also exhibited?
13. Why does the Torah change the order of Tzlofchad’s daughters’ names?
14. Tzlofchad died for what transgression?
15. Why did Moshe use the phrase “G-d of the spirits of all flesh”?
16. Moshe “put some of his glory” upon Yehoshua. What does this mean?
17. Where were the daily offerings slaughtered?
18. Goats are brought as *musaf* sin-offerings. For what sin do they atone?
19. Why is Shavuot called *Yom Habikkurim*?
20. What do the 70 bulls offered on Succot symbolize?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week’s Questions!

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

1. 25:13 - *Kehuna* (priesthood) was given to Aharon and his sons (not grandsons), and to any of their descendants born *after* they were anointed. Pinchas, Aharon’s grandson, was born *prior* to the anointing.
2. 25:18 - For the sake of Ruth, a future descendant of Moav.
3. 26:5 - That the families were truly children of their tribe.
4. 26:10 - That *kehuna* was given forever to Aharon and his sons, and that no one should ever dispute this.
5. 26:11 - Because they repented.
6. 26:13,16,24,38,39,42 - Zerach, Ozni, Yashuv, Achiram, Shfufam, Shucham.
7. 26:46 - Serach bat Asher
8. 26:53 - Seven years. Seven years.
9. 26:55 - Two portions. That is, the four cousins merit four portions among them. These four portions are then split among them as if their fathers were inheriting them; *i.e.*, two portions to one father and two portions to the other father.
10. 26:24,56 - They came down to Mitzrayim in their mothers’ wombs.
11. 26:64 - In the incident of the *meraglim*, only the men wished to return to Egypt. The women wanted to enter *Eretz Yisrael*.
12. 27:1 - Love for *Eretz Yisrael*.
13. 27:1 - To teach that they were equal in greatness.
14. 27:3 - Rabbi Akiva says that Tzlofchad gathered sticks on Shabbat. Rabbi Shimon says that Tzlofchad was one who tried to enter *Eretz Yisrael* after the sin of the *meraglim*.
15. 27:16 - He was asking G-d, who knows the multitude of dispositions among the Jewish People, to appoint a leader who can deal with each person on that person’s level.
16. 27:20 - That Yehoshua’s face beamed like the moon.
17. 28:3 - At a spot opposite the sun. The morning offering was slaughtered on the west side of the slaughtering area and the afternoon offering on the east side.
18. 28:15 - For unnoticed ritual impurity of the Sanctuary or its vessels.
19. 28:26 - The Shavuot double-bread offering was the first wheat-offering made from the new crop.
20. 29:18 - The seventy nations.

- Which food matter does not require a previous contact with a liquid to be susceptible to *tumah*
- The identifying signs of a kosher fish
- Blessings before and after
- Physical signs of adulthood in boy or girl
- Till when can a minor girl dissolve a marriage through *meyun*
- Size of hairs re sign of adulthood, disqualification of the red heifer and sign of leprosy impurity
- If blood spot on a woman's garment causes suspicion that she is a *zavah*
- Which contaminating items have their effect both dry or wet and which only when they are wet
- Dead rodent found in a street and its effect on pure things in the area before discovery
- How the *kutim* dealt with miscarriages

A BLESSING AFTER THE MITZVAH?

In its effort to provide an example for the rule stated in the *mishna*, "There are things which require a blessing beforehand but not afterward", the *gemara* suggests that it cannot refer to food or drink but perhaps to *mitzvot*. We say a blessing, points out Rashi, before doing the *mitzvot* of wearing tzitzit and waving the four species on Sukkot, but say no blessing afterward.

The reservation expressed by the *gemara* is that in Eretz Israel it is customary to say a blessing after taking off the

tefillin, so it cannot be considered an ironclad rule.

Tosefot points out that only in regard to removing the tefillin was such a blessing said and not upon removing tzitzit. The only time there was a reason for saying the blessing upon removing the tefillin was just before sunset. Since it is forbidden to put on tefillin after sunset there was a *mitzvah* to remove them and this justified the blessing those in Eretz Yisrael said at such a time.

The ruling of the authorities, concludes Tosefot, is that one does not say a blessing upon removal of the tefillin.

• *Nidah 51b*

WHAT THE Sages SAY

Why does the Torah mention both scales and fins as signs of a kosher fish if we know that every fish that has scales has fins? In order to expand and glorify the Torah!"

• *Rabbi Abahu and the Yeshiva of Rabbi Yishmael - Nidah 51b*

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STAFF OF LIFE

From: Melanie

*Dear Rabbi,
It's been my impression that Judaism ascribes blessing to things having to do with bread, like washing the hands for it, treating it with respect, making a special long blessing after eating it, and so on. Why is this?*

Dear Melanie,

Your impression is right, there are many teachings that express the importance of bread, and the special blessing associated with expressing appreciation of it by dealing with it respectfully.

But this should not be a total surprise. Even in English, we find wealth and money referred to by terms like "bread" and "dough".

This is because, although in our day and age we may not fully appreciate it, bread is the "staff of life". Just as a staff simultaneously supports the infirm and is wielded by the strong, so too bread imparts life and strength to those who have it. However, because of its simplicity, it can be taken for granted.

Interestingly, the Talmud suggests that the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil was, in fact, wheat (bread). This is based on the idea that a person starts to be able to consume bread around the age when one starts to speak, and specifically say "Aba" which means father.

The ability to "quantify" G-d and thereby rebel against Him is thus associated with the ability to eat bread. If abusing this ability resulted in curse, appreciating it and thereby humbling oneself before G-d, results in blessing.

The Sages taught that one who meticulously fulfills the mitzvah of reciting the blessing after meals, the "Birkat HaMazon", will never starve. It was to this teaching that a Holocaust survivor who lived in my neighborhood in Jerusalem attributed his survival. The story is as follows:

After learning this teaching as a young boy, he was very careful to recite the blessing with great intent. When the

Nazis invaded Poland, despite his young age, he was directed right, and to life, because of his height. There, each prisoner was ordered to report his abilities in order to aid the Nazi enemy. Young and frightened, he had no idea what he'd say. Suddenly, a voice whispered behind him, "You're a cook". He was directed to the kitchen, and needless to say, although he suffered, it was not from lack of food.

After some time, a certain particularly cruel Nazi officer was visiting the camp and became incensed at seeing such a well-fed Jew. He ordered the young man to go outside and dig a trench-hole with a hammer, or otherwise not return to his work in the kitchen. Obviously, the implication of being assigned this impossible task was death. After having attributed his survival to his continued commitment, he offered a prayer to G-d, not to forsake him such that he should die on account of food.

Just then, a convoy of Nazi soldiers drove by, and upon seeing this pitiful Jew hack away at the hard earth with a hammer, they jeered at him and wildly began pelting him with potatoes, tomatoes and cucumbers as they drove by. But the Jew saw in this seeming curse, the blessing of G-d's bounty raining upon him. Strengthened and heartened he stood up and gathered all the food in piles.

Shortly thereafter, a convoy of Polish soldiers came driving by. Thinking he was a German responsible for overseeing the food in the camp, they asked if they could have some. Quickly, the young man gathered his wits and capitalized on the situation by commanding them to dig a large storage pit there, after which they could have some food. Unloading pick-axes and shovels from the vehicles, the soldiers quickly dug a big ditch, for which the Jew "insisted" they take all the food, so none should be left.

When the Nazi officer returned, he couldn't believe his eyes. The Jew was standing over a huge trench hole holding the hammer. The officer begrudgingly said something about G-d's miraculous care of the Jews and sent him back to the mess where he stayed, relatively well-fed, until the camp was liberated by the Allies.

Till the end of his days, this man was known for his great piety in matters associated with bread in general, and "Birkat HaMazon" in particular, which he insisted was the "staff of life" to which he owed his life.

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HAVE YOU HEARD THIS BEFORE?

Question: Everyone enjoys the pleasure of being the first to tell someone else some news or an interesting story. I often find, however, that many times I have already heard the news or the story and am tempted to tell my informer that there is no need for him to waste my time. What is the right thing to do?

Answer: Assuming that what you are being told does not come under the category of *lashon hara* (gossip or slander) to which you are forbidden to lend an ear, the issue which faces you is whether to sacrifice a few moments in order to make your informer feel good.

Professional comedians used to introduce their jokes with

the line "Stop me if you've heard this". But it is rare that a friend of yours will give you this escape hatch. It then becomes important for you to reflect on what our Talmudic Sages have said about a smile given to another person being more appreciated by him than offering him a cold, refreshing drink. This teaches us the importance of making others feel good, something that you accomplish by making believe you have never heard the news or story before.

And don't forget the "golden rule" of the Sage Hillel: not to do to others what you don't want done to you. How do you feel when someone interrupts you by saying "I've heard this already"?

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

YOU CAN TAKE IT WITH YOU

In his wonderfully inspirational and entertaining book "A Collectors Collection", Rabbi Chaim Orange tells the following heartwarming story:

Jake was desperately looking for a place to spend the night while traveling to New York from the Midwest. After unsuccessful attempts at a couple of gas stations to locate a motel in the remote area where he found himself, an attendant at a third gas station suggested he try a retirement home up the road.

He succeeded in persuading the staff on duty to let him spend the night there. The next morning he asked the manager if he knew of any Jewish synagogues in the area. The reply he received was negative with a surprising addition: "In fact, the only other Jew I have ever known was a resident

here in our facility, and he died just this morning."

Realizing that he had been directed there by Providence to care for a *meit mitzvah* (a Jew who has no one to take care of burying him), Jake quickly arranged to have the body transferred to New York for burial. Upon arrival at the first cemetery he was asked to provide \$3,000 for a burial plot. The same thing happened at a second cemetery but Jake kept on trying. At the third cemetery he was welcomed and informed that someone had once donated several thousand dollars to cover just such an emergency.

Out of curiosity they checked their records to see who that donor was. It turned out that the Jew who had made that foresighted contribution was the very one who was now awaiting burial.

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