

O H R N E T

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PARSHA INSIGHTS

A FREE LUNCH

"We remember the fish that we ate in Egypt free of charge" (11:4)

It's axiomatic that there's no such thing as a free lunch. Or as they say in Yiddish "Nothing is for nothing." And yet human nature has a marvelous ability to conjure the proverbial free lunch out of hefty tab.

For a while now, my son has been trying to convince me to invest in about 50 boxes of a certain brand of cereal so that we can be sure of getting a FREE plastic space station. (Of course, he contends that a space station is pretty much *de rigueur* for the average Orthodox Jewish family living in Jerusalem, a notion of which I am not totally convinced.)

The Ibn Ezra says that fish was so plentiful in Egypt that

it was virtually free. The Ramban says that in addition to fish, the Jewish People received fruit and vegetables in abundance from the farmers.

All for FREE!

But was it so free? It seems to me that being a slave is a pretty hefty price-tag no matter how much free fish and veggies there is on offer.

And let us not think that FREE OFFER myopia only affects small Jerusalem children. If we honestly analyze many of our decisions we may realize how many things we do because we have convinced ourselves that we are getting a free lunch.

In life everything has a price – the trick is to know what the price really is.

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Aharon is taught the method for kindling the menorah. Moshe sanctifies the *levi'im* to work in the Mishkan. They replace the firstborn, who were disqualified after sinning at the golden calf. The *levi'im* are commanded that after five years of training they are to serve in the Mishkan from ages 30 to 50; afterwards they are to engage in less strenuous work. One year after the Exodus from Egypt, G-d commands Moshe concerning the *korban Pesach*. Those ineligible for this offering request a remedy, and the mitzvah of Pesach Sheini, allowing a "second chance" to offer the *korban Pesach* one month later, is detailed. Miraculous clouds that hover near the Mishkan signal when to travel and when to camp. Two silver trumpets summon the princes or the entire nation for announcements. The trumpets also signal travel plans, war or festivals. The order in which the tribes march is specified. Moshe invites his father-in-law, Yitro, to join the Jewish People, but Yitro returns to Midian. At the instigation of the *eruv rav* — the mixed Egyptian multitude who joined the

Jewish People in the Exodus — some people complain about the manna. Moshe protests that he is unable to govern the nation alone. G-d tells him to select 70 elders, the first Sanhedrin, to assist him, and informs him that the people will be given meat until they will be sickened by it. Two candidates for the group of elders prophesy beyond their mandate, foretelling that Yehoshua instead of Moshe will bring the people to Canaan. Some protest, including Yehoshua, but Moshe is pleased that others have become prophets. G-d sends an incessant supply of quail for those who complained that they lacked meat. A plague punishes those who complained. Miriam tries to make a constructive remark to Aharon which also implies that Moshe is only like other prophets. G-d explains that Moshe's prophecy is superior to that of any other prophet, and punishes Miriam with *tzara'at* as if she had gossiped about her brother. (Because Miriam is so righteous, she is held to an incredibly high standard). Moshe prays for her, and the nation waits until she is cured before traveling.

SHORT CHAPTER, LONG LESSON

There is a short chapter with a long message in the parsha which Jews will hear/read this week in synagogues. It consists of two of the most familiar passages, the ones which are said when the Sefer Torah is taken out of the Holy Ark and when it is returned.

What distinguishes this two-passage chapter besides its size is the fact that it seems to have no consequential connection to the events described before and after it, an anomaly illustrated by the upside down Hebrew letter nun which appear at both ends.

The explanation given by our Talmudic Sages is that this chapter was interjected by G-d to serve as a buffer between two tragic sins of our ancestors during their sojourn in the wilderness. One of those sins is explicitly detailed in the Torah – the unjustified complaint about a lack of meat which was punished with a plague. But where is there any mention of sin preceding this chapter when all that is written is “They

traveled from the mountain of G-d”?

The answer supplied by the Midrash is that the Jews who had received the Torah from G-d at Mount Sinai showed too much interest in making a fast getaway from that mountain for fear that they would be given additional Divine commandments. They behaved like children fleeing school, anxious to leave their location simply because it was “the mountain of G-d”.

Implied in all of this is that once a Jew is anxious to abandon his connection with G-d and His Torah it is inevitable that he will sink into striving for hedonistic pleasure and grumble about a lack of satisfaction. Jews who treasure the spiritual opportunity of living and learning in Eretz Yisrael do not join in the grumbling of those whose goal is to see Israel as just another western capitalist country. They don't run away from the mountain of G-d like silly schoolchildren and it is they who will determine the destiny of Israel forever.

LOVE OF THE LAND - THE PEOPLE

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

EZRA – THE FOUNDATION OF ALIYA

When a Jew today thinks of making aliya to Eretz Yisrael or even visiting, all he has to do is get on a plane and arrive in a matter of hours. But when Ezra the Scribe laid the “foundation for aliya” (*Ezra* 7:9) by leading a large number of Jews from Babylonian exile to Eretz



Yisrael it took him four months until he arrived in Jerusalem. This is how this historic foundation is described:

“For Ezra prepared his heart to see the Torah of G-d, to do it and to teach the People of Israel the statutes and laws.” (*ibid.* 7:10)

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

“IN G-D WE TRUST”

When the Israeli Knesset was on the verge of passing an economic bill that would severely cut government support for religious education a demonstration against this unpopular measure was held in Jerusalem.

One of the demonstrators did something very original. He pulled out a 200 Shekel bill bearing the likeness of a former president of Israel, the late Zalman Shazar, and read aloud the following words from one of his writings which

appear in tiny print on this bill:

“The nation of Israel always, even in its darkest hours, made sure to preserve this precious asset, that of Torah study for all its children... Every town that did not have a teacher did not have the status of a town.”

At the conclusion of the quote he turned to some journalists and asked: “Does Finance Minister Netanyahu know what's printed on the bills that his office prints?”

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THE MYSTERIOUS COW

The *korban* Pesach (paschal offering) can be offered only with a male lamb or kid goat. It is therefore surprising to find the Torah declaring (*Devarim 16:2*) “You shall slaughter a *korban* Pesach for Hashem, your G-d, from sheep and cows.”

Different approaches are offered by our Sages in explaining this apparent paradox. In his commentary on Chumash, Rashi mentions one of them. Since one is supposed to eat the flesh of the *korban* Pesach when he has approached satiety through eating sacrificial flesh, this is impossible to achieve when there are many subscribers to one animal and each will receive only a small portion. It is then a mitzvah for that company to offer that same day another sacrifice called “the *chagiga* of the 14th (Nissan)” and to eat its flesh before eating the *korban* Pesach. This sacrifice can be brought from the cow family, and it is to this which the passage refers. The shankbone and egg that we place on our Seder plate on Pesach are reminders of these two sacrifices.

In our gemara, however, we encounter a different approach suggested by Rabbi Nachman. If someone designated an animal to serve as a *korban* Pesach and it wandered away, another animal is offered in its place. Should the lost animal subsequently turn up it is considered as *motar hape-sach* – a Pesach leftover – and is offered as a *shelamim* sacrifice. This is derived from the above-mentioned passage in the following manner: The sheep and cows mentioned hint at the Pesach leftover whose status now is that of the only *korban* category which is not limited to any particular animal or to a specific gender – the category known as *korban shelamim*.

• *Zevachim 9a*

THE SPECIAL SACRIFICE

“They slaughtered the Pesach Sacrifice and the *kohanim* took the blood from their hands to sprinkle (on the altar) and the Levites flayed (the carcasses)” (*Divrei Hayamim II 35:11*)

This is the description of the service performed in regard to the Pesach Sacrifice offered one year during the reign of the righteous King Yoshiyahu. It is difficult, however, to discern from this passage exactly who was doing what. There are four stages in the offering of a sacrifice: slaughtering; receiving the blood in a sacred vessel; carrying it to the altar; and sprinkling the blood on the altar. The receiving of the blood and the sprinkling can be performed only by a *kohen*, while the slaughtering can be done by any Jew. Whether a *kohen* is required for carrying the blood after it has been

received in a vessel depends on how we interpret the above passage.

Rabbi Chisda assumed that the same non-*kohen* who did the slaughtering was the one from whose hands was taken the blood for the sprinkling. The conclusion he therefore reaches is that a non-*kohen* is qualified for carrying the blood. This interpretation is refuted by Rabbi Sheishet who rules that a non-*kohen* is not qualified for carrying the blood and that all he did in this case was hold onto the blood until a *kohen* took it from him to carry and sprinkle.

There was something very special about this particular Pesach Sacrifice. In another passage (*ibid. 35:18*) we are told that there was no Pesach Sacrifice such as this even in the days of the Prophet Shmuel and all the kings of Israel. There are several explanations of what made it so special.

Rashi explains that this was the one time that the animals needed by all the Jews for their sacrifices were supplied by the king from his own funds. Radak writes that it was the first time since before the days of Shmuel that the entire nation wholeheartedly offered the Pesach Sacrifice. Metzudat David's approach is that this sacrifice was offered by the *kohanim* and Levites with extraordinary care and purity. This is consistent with his commentary that slaughtering and holding were not done by an ordinary non-*kohen* but by a Levite who had a higher level of holiness.

• *Zevachim 14a*

The Weekly Daf

by RABBI MENDEL WEINBACH

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PARSHA Q&A ?

1. Toward which direction did the wicks of the menorah burn, and why?
2. From what material and in what manner was the menorah made?
3. Moshe was commanded to cleanse the *levi'im* by sprinkling on them "*mei chatat*." What is "*mei chatat*"?
4. Which three "*t'nufot*" (wavings) are in the Parsha?
5. Why did G-d claim the firstborn of the Jewish People as His possession?
6. Why are the words "Bnei Yisrael" repeated five times in verse 8:19?
7. When a *levi* reaches age 50, which functions may he still perform?
8. Why was the mitzvah of Pesach Sheini not commanded directly to Moshe?
9. What similarity is there between the menorah and the trumpets?
10. What three purposes did trumpet signals serve?
11. How many tribes marched between the Gershon-Merari detachment and that of Kehat? How was the time differential used?
12. The tribe of Dan, who traveled last, was called "the gatherer of all the camps." What did they gather?
13. When the Jewish People entered the Land, who took temporary possession of Jericho?
14. Which aron is referred to in verse 10:33?
15. Which two topics are out of chronological order in the Parsha?
16. Which tastes did the manna not offer, and why not?
17. Moshe was commanded to choose 70 elders to help him lead the Jewish People. What happened to the elders who led the Jewish People in Egypt?
18. Who did Moshe choose as elders?
19. What was the prophecy of Eldad and Medad?
20. Why did Miriam merit to have the people wait for her?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to This Week's Questions!

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

1. 8:2 - They leaned toward the middle wick so people wouldn't say that the menorah was lit for its light.
2. 8:4 - It was made from one solid piece of hammered gold.
3. 8:7 - Water containing ashes of the *para aduma*.
4. 8:11 - The wavings of Kehat, Gershon and Merari.
5. 8:17 - Because in Egypt He spared them during *makat bechorot*.
6. 8:19 - To show G-d's love for them.
7. 8:25 - Closing the courtyard gates of the Mishkan and Beit Hamikdash; singing during the avoda; loading the wagons to transport the Mishkan.
8. 9:7 - The people who asked about it were rewarded by being the catalyst for the teaching of this mitzvah.
9. 8:4, 10:2 - They were each made from a single, solid block.
10. 10:2-7 - Announcement of the gathering of Bnei Yisrael, the gathering of the *nesi'im*, and the beginning of a move of the encampment.
11. 10:17-21 - Three: Reuven, Shimon and Gad. In the meantime Gershon and Merari set up the Mishkan.
12. 10:25 - They gathered and returned things lost by the other tribes.
13. 10:32 - The children of Yitro.
14. 10:33 - The aron which held the broken pieces of the first tablets, which was taken to the battlefield.
15. 9:1, 10:35,36 - The Pesach sacrifice, and the traveling of the aron.
16. 11:5 - Cucumbers, melons, leeks, onion and garlic - these are harmful to nursing women.
17. 11:16 - They were consumed in the fire at Taverah (11:3).
18. 11:16 - People who were supervisors in Egypt and had pity on Bnei Yisrael at risk to themselves.
19. 11:28 - "Moshe will die and Yehoshua will lead the Jewish People into the Land."
20. 12:15 - Because she waited for Moshe when he was cast into the river.

MENTAL RETARDATION

From: A. in Canada

Dear Rabbi,

What is the position of Judaism on mental retardation? I have a little girl with a rare syndrome and I wonder how Judaism interprets this situation. Thank you for your answer.

Dear A.,

Firstly, please accept my prayers that G-d send a *refua shelayma* — a complete recovery — to your daughter.

One of the most painful mysteries of the world is our inability to understand how someone, innocent of all sin

suffers sickness. It is taught by the Rabbis that children — who never even had a chance to sin — born with similar problems as your daughter are pure and great souls who are here in this world to rectify a particular problem to reach their ultimate perfection and enter the World to Come. They do not need a “whole” body in the way that we do, and often G-d takes away their ability to function “normally” because they are so spiritually aware.

I have spoken with people who told me that they saw the Chazon Ish stand up each time he saw a retarded child because he was of the opinion that they were very lofty souls.

By the way, depending on the degree of retardation, the child may be obligated in mitzvah observance, and a local rabbinical authority should be consulted.

I hope and pray that this is of some comfort to you.

WHAT'S THE RIGHT THING TO DO?

REAL-LIFE QUESTIONS OF SOCIAL AND BUSINESS ETHICS

THE CABBIE HAS NO CHANGE

Question: I recently hailed a cab and upon reaching my destination took out a hundred dollar bill to pay my fare. To my dismay the driver said that he did not have enough change because he had just gone on duty. Whose responsibility is it to start scrambling to find someone who will break such a large bill?

Answer: When you enter a cab you are hiring the services of the driver and his car to get you to your destination. Since you have a legal and moral obligation to pay the cabbie upon completion of his service it is your responsibility to ensure that you have the kind of currency which can serve as payment, or something close enough to the amount of the anticipated fare for which any cabbie can be expected to have change available. Lacking this it seems that the proper thing to do upon telling the cabbie your destination is to inquire of him whether he has change for the large bill with which you intend to pay him for the ride.

A fine distinction can be made between this situation and that of paying for a purchase in a shop or supermarket. When someone is selling you something and making a profit on the sale, he is prepared to accept payment in any form, whether it be a check, credit card and sometimes in the case of small neighborhood food stores even keep a record of it in a ledger for a later payment. It is understandable therefore that the merchant involved sees it as his responsibility to either be ready with change or to accept any other arrangement. The cabbie, on the other hand, is providing a service for which only cash is acceptable since he may never meet his passenger again.

As a postscript to the above it has been suggested by a farsighted do-gooder that it is a good idea to always carry around small bills and change because you may be able to help someone break a large bill and do him a favor at no cost to yourself. Who knows – you may even be in a position to settle the dispute between the cabbie and his passenger!