

OHR NET

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PARSHA INSIGHTS

BENTLEY FOR A DAY

"Pens for the flock we shall build here for our livestock and cities for our small children..." (32:16)

Two people. One standing at the counter of ExecuRent-a-Car, the other sitting in Jack Barclay's, the Rolls Royce/Bentley dealers. Two people about to get their new Bentley Continental GT (price — a mere \$210,000 and change). One is taking delivery of his new car. The other is renting for a day.

Which one has the most pleasure from his Bentley, the fellow who's buying the car, or the one who's renting?

Even as he takes the car keys from the ExecuRent rep, somewhere in the back of his mind the fellow who's renting the car has a "Cinderella moment"; he knows that in 24 hours he's going to have to give the car back. The other feels that the car is his. Forever. Well almost forever...

Things bring us pleasure in life to the extent that we perceive we own them.

Which is why physical things never give us that much joy. For in the back of our minds we are aware that we can never hold on to physical things. The Bentley can be stolen. It can break down (Yes! Even Bentleys break down. Shhhh!)

A person is never that happy with physical things because he knows that tomorrow someone else could be living in his house, wearing his suit, driving his Bentley.

When we feel we really own something - that gives us pleasure. And the only things we really own are spiritual things — our mitzvot and our good deeds. Those can never be taken away from us, and therefore they are the only things that ultimately make us happy.

The two tribes of Reuven and Gad asked Moshe if they could receive their portion of the Land of Israel on the eastern bank of the Jordan. This was an ideal place for them as it was well suited to grazing the large amount of livestock they

had acquired. Moshe was concerned that their settling the east bank before conquering the rest of the Land would deal a severe blow to the morale of the Jewish People in the coming confrontation with the nations of the Land. He accused them of forsaking their brothers in a time of need. They explained to Moshe that their intention had never been to settle at this point and go no further. But first came "*Pens for the flock we shall build here for our livestock and cities for our small children...*" After which, each and every one of them would lead the Jewish People in the conquest of the west bank of the Jordan.

Moshe agreed to their proposal and said, "*Build for yourselves cities for your small children and pens for your flock.*"

Interestingly, Moshe reversed the original order of the sentence. The tribes of Reuven and Gad spoke of the building the animal shelter before that of their children, whereas Moshe spoke first of the children and then of the animals. This was an implicit criticism for being more focused on their property than on their offspring: "Why did you speak of building stables for your cattle before cities for your children? It seems you attach more importance to your possessions than to your children."

In Hebrew, the word for "possessions" is *nechasim*. The word *nechasim* is related to the word *mechuseh* which means "concealed", for after a person passes from this world he no longer possesses his "possessions" — they are concealed from him by being given to someone else. Similarly, the coin known as a zuz derives from the verb *lazuz* which means "to move", meaning that money is restless. The Hebrew word for money itself *mammon* is a contraction of "*Ma atah moneh?*" meaning "What are you counting? — it's nothing."

Nothing more than a Bentley that's going to turn into a Pumpkin Continental GT.

• Adapted from Rabbi Noach Orlowek

May the Torah learning of this edition be *Liluy Nishmas*
R' NOSSON BEN R' MAYER LEHMAN

27th Tammuz 5755

Even after 10 years he remains an inspiration!

PARSHA OVERVIEW

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. *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 one casualty among *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 east of the Jordan and not enter the 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 *Bnei Yisrael*, and that it is akin to the sin of the spies. They assure Moshe that they will first help conquer 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.

ISRAEL Forever

WHEN A LEADER IS BELOVED

We live in a time when leaders in many countries, including our own Israel, are extremely unpopular with a large segment of their people. The contrast between them and the great leader of our people, Moshe, stands out in the Torah portion we will be hearing read this Shabbat in our synagogues.

When the Jews learned that G-d had told Moshe that he must initiate a war against their Midianite enemies, after which he would depart this world, they were reluctant to participate in an effort which would precipitate his death. The Torah, therefore, described the mobilization of a thousand soldiers from each tribe as forced conscription.

Rashi calls attention to the love Jews had for their true leaders. Although these same Jews were sometimes extremely critical of Moshe, even to the point that he felt threatened by their seeming rebelliousness, when the chips were down and his leaving them seemed imminent, they demonstrated their love for him by refusing to volunteer for a war which would hasten his departure.

This is the nature of a leader who is not elected by his people but appointed by G-d. But it does set a standard for elected leaders in Israel who must strive to win the affection of all their people in order to guarantee peace and prosperity for Israel forever.

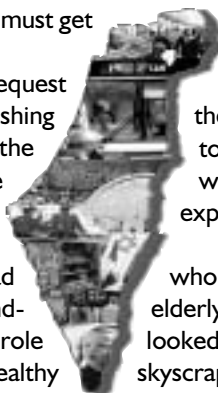
LOVE OF THE LAND - THE LEGENDS

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

A LIFE SAVED TWICE OVER

“May I please get ahead of you in this line? I have to catch a plane back to America and I must get a pizza for the trip to the airport.”

The elderly gentleman generously granted this request and soon the tourist was outside, pizza in hand, rushing towards his cab. But then a huge explosion rocked the air and he realized that the Sbarro restaurant he had just left had been the victim of a terrorist suicide bombing. Rushing back to see what happened to the man who had given him his place and thus had possibly saved his life, he found him alive but wounded. After expressing his deep appreciation for his role in saving his life, he informed him that he was a wealthy businessman back in New York and he would be glad to help him any time he was in need. He left his business card and was on his way to the airport.



The opportunity to keep his promise soon came. The son of the elderly man phoned him that his father required major surgery in an Israeli hospital and could not afford to pay for it. Upon hearing this, the businessman responded that he was ready to come to Israel himself to see that everything would go well with the operation and that he would cover all expenses.

He soon found himself sitting together with the son who called him in the lobby outside the area where the elderly man was undergoing the critical operation. As they looked up at the television screen they saw an impressive skyscraper in Manhattan in which the businessman had his offices. Then they saw one plane after another crash into it. The date was September 11th, one which would never be forgotten as a day when one life saving led to another.

PARSHA Q&A ? _____

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?

PARSHA Q&A! _____

Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

1. 30:2 - Preferably, an expert in the laws of *nedarim*. Otherwise, three ordinary people.
2. 30:10 - If she is under 12 and 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.

WHAT'S THE RIGHT THING TO DO? _____

REAL-LIFE QUESTIONS OF SOCIAL AND BUSINESS ETHICS

MAKE-BELIEVE ANGER

Question: I am aware of the danger of losing one's temper and I try my best to avoid doing so. But I find it difficult to discipline my children when they get out of hand without demonstrating how upset I am with their behavior. What is the right thing to do?

Answer: Your dilemma has already been dealt with by our Talmudic Sages (*Mesechta Shabbat 105b*).

Rabbi Yochanan ben Nuri is quoted as comparing one who breaks things or disposes of his money in anger to an idol worshipper. (A classic example of such behavior was recently provided in Israel by a man who became so incensed with a member of his family that he took three

million shekels of the family savings and set them afire.) If the purpose of such a demonstration of anger is to impress upon the members of one's household how strongly he objects to their behavior, it is permissible to even do some nominal breakage.

Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzato, in his classic *Mesillat Yesharim*, points out that even while the Sages mentioned in the *gemara* were demonstrating their anger, it was only a show, for in their hearts there was no anger. This should be the guideline for you in disciplining your children. Learn to show anger but make sure that you are calm inside because real anger can cause you to lose control and act in a counterproductive way.

- Purity preparations for receiving the Torah at Sinai
- Two approaches re which day of the month Torah was given
- Three decisions taken by Moshe on his own
- Coercion and consent in receiving the Torah
- Crowns gained and crowns lost
- Putting the mouth before the ears
- The sounds of Sinai
- Moshe's adventures in Heaven
- The meaning of the name Sinai
- The Patriarchs as pleaders
- Carrying coloring or cleaning materials
- Carrying spices, metals, seeds and grasshoppers
- When the amount carried means more to one man than to others
- Carrying from private to public domain through neutral area
- Carrying in normal and abnormal fashions

THE NORM IN CARRYING

One is considered guilty of a violation of the Shabbat laws which carries with it the death penalty if done intentionally after being warned and obligates him to

offer a sacrifice for atonement if done unintentionally, only if his action is done in normal fashion.

Carrying from a private domain to a public one while holding an object in either his right or left hand, on his lap or on his shoulder is considered normal carrying. Among the abnormal ways of carrying listed in the *Mishneh* is carrying something in the mouth.

Tosefot raises a question regarding this based on another *gemara* (*Mesechta Keritot 13b*) which states that one who eats a forbidden food on Shabbat and carries it out into the street while doing so bears guilt not only for consuming the forbidden item but also for carrying from a private domain to a public one. The resolution put forward by Tosefot is that it is normal to carry in the mouth the food that one is eating while our *Mishneh* is referring to non-food items that are not normally carried in the mouth.

Another example of abnormal carrying mentioned by the Sage Rav quoting Rabbi Chiya is placing the object on the head. Even for the people in the town of Hutzal who were accustomed to carrying jugs of wine and water on their heads rather than in their hands, such carrying on Shabbat would not constitute normal carrying because it is not normal by universal standards.

• *Shabbat 92a*

WHAT THE Sages SAY

"G-d attached a condition to the world He created that if Israel would accept the Torah the world would continue to exist and if they failed to do so He would return the world to pre-creation desolation."

• *Rabbi Shimon Lakish - Shabbat 88a*

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

WHAT'S (NOT) IN A NAME

When a Jordanian couple named their son Yitzchak Rabin, they probably did not anticipate the consequences. The social pressures from their anti-Israel neighbors became so intense that they were forced to leave Jordan and become refugees in Israel.

When they applied for citizenship in the country

whose former prime minister's name was the cause of their statelessness, there was an initial reluctance to accommodate them. "After all," it was argued, "who asked them to name their baby that way?"

In the end, however, humanitarian considerations and media pressure moved the Minister of the Interior to grant the family at least temporary citizenship.

BLESSING IN D'SKIES

From: Martin in NJ

Dear Rabbi,

First, I enjoy reading your very logical responses to questions. I have been reading about Jewish life for many years trying to understand what it means to be a Jew. I think I am beginning to understand. One item that will help me fit the pieces together is a good meaning of the word "bless". What does it mean to "bless" something? Or better, a "blessing" FOR something may be a better question. I think I figured it out, but am yearning for an official answer. Thank you in advance.

Dear Martin,

Thank you for your encouraging words of blessing. I feel fortunate to be part of your search for the meaning of Judaism.

The word commonly associated with "blessing" in Hebrew is *beracha*. Sometimes this is understood as praising or lauding. However, many sources indicate that *beracha* more accurately refers to a flow of increase and bounty.

For example, in *Blessed by a Rabbi* we referred to the story in the Talmud (*Berachot 7a*) in which G-d asked the High Priest performing the Yom Kippur service to bless Him. There, we don't find that Rabbi Ishmael included any praise in his blessing, just a prayer and a request that G-d's mercy be increased. Similarly, when Yaakov said to Esau, "Take my blessing" (*Gen. 32:11*), we don't find that Yaakov praised or blessed him at all. Rather, in giving him gifts and thereby increasing his possessions, Yaakov gave him *beracha*. The same applies with the verses, "He will bless your bread" (*Ex.*

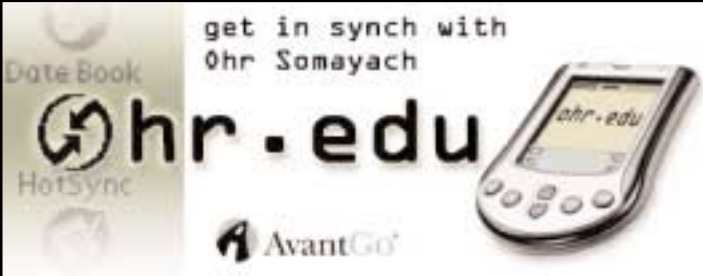
23:25) and, "He will bless the fruit of your womb" (*Deut. 7:13*). Obviously the intention is not that G-d will laud our bread and offspring, but rather will give us plenty and bounty.

Therefore, when we talk about blessing something, or giving a blessing for something, it is not about praising, but rather an expression of our desire that something be improved, and a request from G-d for that bounty. This is also the case regarding the many blessings, or *berachot* we make to G-d. What is usually translated as, "Blessed are you, Hashem our G-d" is actually a request and expression of belief that the flow of Divine energy and influence affecting the subject of the *beracha* be increased. So, for example, when we make a *beracha* before eating an apple we are actually drawing down an influx of spiritual bounty sustaining this specific apple and all fruit trees in general.

When we give a *beracha* to someone for something, we have in mind increasing and improving the Divine Providence flowing down upon the person regarding that thing — be it health, wealth, happiness, finding a soul-mate or the like. As mentioned in *Blessed by a Rabbi*, even the blessing of a simple person is very valuable. Still, when giving a *beracha* to someone, it is very important to have a humble heart before G-d (*bericha* means bending the knee, a symbol of humility). Also, keeping in mind what we've explained about what *beracha* is and how it works, it is a very good idea to begin by blessing G-d, before blessing the person. This way one increases the source of *beracha* on high (*bereicha* means a pool) before directing its flow down below.

Sources:

- *Nefesh HaChaim 2:1*
- *Pele Yoetz, "Berachot"*



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Re: “The “Aliyah Business” (Ohrnet Balak)

While I appreciate your scholarship on this question of *aliyot*, I respectfully disagree with your response. Your suggestion to the writer that he should try to outbid the others in the congregation could lead to resentment and despair at never being called to the *bima*.

The Talmudic rabbis tell us that one who is rich is one who is happy with his lot. Well, how can we be happy if we are never called to the *bima* because of our financial standing? A fairer way is for the shul to set aside some non-financially based *alliyot* or accept the lowest bid from time to time so everyone not only gets a chance on the *bima* but has the opportunity to ‘enjoy their financial lot.’

• Larry

I am really shocked by your response to the gentleman who was concerned because he could not afford to donate for an *aliyah*. Your response was to spend enough money to outbid the next poorest man in the congregation. If this man is not rich you have doomed him to never having an *aliyah*. While certainly the need to auction off *aliyot* may be necessary (but many congregations find fair ways to avoid this), the strict application of this policy is certainly divisive and not conducive to “*shalom bayit*”.

• Michael E.

Ohrnet replies to these and similar letters we received:

In our column “The Aliyah Business” we never meant to

suggest that all the aliyot should be sold. In virtually every synagogue where aliyot are sold it is customary to auction only a couple of aliyot so that everyone gets a chance to have an aliya on a rotation basis.

Our intention was merely to explain why auctioning even those should not be frowned upon.

Re: “Reading for Everyone” (Ohrnet Chukat)

Your answer is a narrow view of the world.

In Yemenite and Syrian synagogues, among others, men called to the Torah generally do read the Torah. In other synagogues of the *Adut Hamizrach* the courtesy of offering the *Yad* to the reader by the *Ba'al Koreh* is common (unless it is known that the person called will or should not accept it).

In fact this approach leads to a relatively large number of adults who can and do read regularly. (And my 15-year old is an example every Monday and Thursday morning and will continue to be one.) He has learned very quickly who should and should not be offered the *Yad*. There is also a teen-aged reader on Shabbat *mincha* and many other cycles of the Shabbat reading during the year in our Moroccan synagogue. The more qualified adults all recognize the importance of good training so they can have the mitzvah of reading for themselves as they grow older. A Syrian friend pointed out that one of the most important heritages is to teach a child to be a competent reader.

Needless to say, these are all fine readers.

• Steve Kohn
Ra'anana, Israel

OHR BITS

Witty Advice for Circling Life

“They may forget what you said, but they will never forget how you made them feel.”

• Carl W. Buechner

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