

OHRNET

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PARSHA INSIGHTS

A MATCHLESS MATCHMAKER

"When you cross the Jordan to the land of Canaan, you shall designate cities for yourselves, cities of refuge..." (35:10-11)

Not long ago, the much loved wife of a great Rabbi passed away. In due course he was remarried to a lady many years his junior. The second marriage was also very happy. Someone commented to him that he had been blessed to find such a good second match. "Well," he commented, "you see, I had the best matchmaker in the world." "Oh really, who was that?" asked the other. The Rabbi replied, "Shortly before my first wife, may she rest in peace, passed away, she said to me in the hospital one day, "David, when I pass away, I want you to go to Eretz Yisrael. There's a great friend of mine who lives in Jerusalem. I'll give you the address. I want you to marry her. She's a wonderful person. I can rely on her to look after you properly."

In this week's parsha the Torah mandates the establishment of cities of refuge. Someone who had killed inadvertently could take refuge in one of these cities and escape the blood avenger of the victim's family. The

Torah chose as the sites of the refuge cities the cities of the Levi'im. Why? Why did G-d choose the cities of the Levi'im as the cities of refuge?

When someone kills, he doesn't just kill a person; he kills a son, a brother, a sister, a father, a mother. It's rare indeed that no one is affected by a murder save the victim himself. Killing someone always has a ripple effect. A relative feels implacable resentment against someone who kills a member of his family. The Levi'im, however, did not react in this way. Since it was G-d's will that there should be cities to which accidental murderers could run, they would accept a murderer into their community without any resentment, even if they were related to the deceased. Such was their spiritual level that they subordinated their feelings totally to G-d's will.

Man is not an animal. Being human means being able to subordinate our instinctive feelings to our higher selves. However it's difficult to imagine being on the level of selflessness of the Levi'im or that *rebetzin* on her deathbed. Nevertheless, just knowing that there are people like that in the world may encourage us to be a little less selfish.

For the right match can kindle a lot of light.

PARSHA OVERVIEW

The Torah names all 42 encampments of *Bnei Yisrael* on their 40-year journey from the Exodus until the crossing of the Jordan River into *Eretz Yisrael*. G-d commands *Bnei Yisrael* to drive out the Canaanites from *Eretz Yisrael* and to demolish every vestige of their idolatry. *Bnei Yisrael* are warned that if they fail to rid the Land completely 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 *levi'im*, who do not receive a regular portion in the division of the Land. Cities of refuge are to be established: Someone who murders unintentionally may flee there. The daughters of Tzelofchad marry members of their 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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LETTERS TO G-D OR PRAYERS?

As Jews this Shabbat begin their annual nine-day period of mourning for the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash and fervently pray for its reconstruction, it is interesting to note the universal focus on the Western Wall demonstrated by a ceremony which took place there the other month.

Close to a thousand letters addressed to G-d were delivered to the rabbi of the Western Wall by the Israel Postal Authority for placing into the cracks of this sacred remnant of the Temple area. It seems that thousands of people of various faiths throughout the world send letters

to G-d every year, and the common practice is to forward them to Jerusalem. Between 2,000-3,000 letters arrive here each year, many of them addressed directly to G-d at the Western Wall or the Western Wall itself.

Twice a year they are brought to the Wall to take their place alongside the *kvitlech* prayer notes which are traditionally placed there by worshippers at the site.

For Jews who rely on prayer as their form of communication with G-d this is a time for reflection on our desperate need to pray for the ultimate redemption of Israel forever.

ISRAEL Forever - SPECIAL

THE CHOSEN TARGET

“How odd / of G-d / to choose / the Jews.” This is how an Englishman named William Norman Ewer once expressed his negative feelings about Jews. Much stronger feelings about Jews and their State were expressed this week by another Englishman, London Mayor Ken Livingstone.

In an interview with Sky News, Livingstone accused Israel of “indiscriminately slaughtering Palestinians in acts that border on crimes against humanity”. The Mayor, who has a sorry record of anti-Israel outbursts, demonstrated the double standard so common to those who attack Israel. When over 50 people died on July 7th in terrorist attacks in London, he vigorously condemned the suicide bombings. But when the Palestinians kill Jews, he shows understanding for the actions by declaring:

“Given that the Palestinians don’t have jet planes, don’t have tanks, they only have their bodies to use as weapons.”

Although Livingstone is not representative of most people in the U.K., such double-talk is hardly new for some of the British. While Lord Balfour laid the groundwork for the creation of the Jewish State with his historic declaration, it is well known that the Colonial Office in charge of the Mandate did their utmost to prevent it from coming into being. Livingstone’s remarks are so transparently biased and hypocritical that no rebuttal is required. To those who share his attitude toward G-d’s Chosen People, we can only offer the rebuttal of another Englishman, Cecil Browne, to Ewer’s jingle:

“But not so odd / as those who choose / a Jewish god / and spurn the Jews.”

LOVE OF THE LAND - THE LEGENDS Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael

THREE VERSIONS OF A NAME

What Jews in Israel call Shechem, the Arabs call Nablus. There are three versions for the source of this name:

- **NEAPOLIS** – When the Romans built a new city next to the site of ancient Shechem they named it Neapolis, Latin for “new city”. The Arabs corrupted its pronunciation into Nablus.

- **NEVALAH** – When the sons of Yaakov took up arms against the residents of Shechem, it was because



a *nevalah* – an outrage – had been committed against their sister Dinah.

- **NAB – LUS** – The Arab tradition is that this name is a combination of two Arabic words Nab (tooth) and Lus (snake). Their legend speaks of a giant snake in the vicinity of Shechem named Lus who was slain and whose teeth were placed on the gates of Shechem. Those who entered the city would look at those teeth and exclaim “they are the Nab of Lus”.

PARSHA Q&A ? _____

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*?

PARSHA Q&A! _____

Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

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.

WHAT'S THE RIGHT THING TO DO? _____

REAL-LIFE QUESTIONS OF SOCIAL AND BUSINESS ETHICS

WHAT'S REALLY IN A NAME?

Question: We are expecting a child and there is the usual dilemma regarding the name we should give it. There is no disagreement between us as to whose side of the family will have the deceased member's name perpetuated but there is a reluctance to inflict on our child the unusual name of a relative which will make it the laughing stock among friends. What is the right thing to do?

Answer: While there is no religious obligation to name a child after a relative it is customary to do so. It has been suggested that there is even a hint to this practice in the blessing which the Patriarch Yaakov gave to his grandchildren: "There shall be called in them my name and the name of my fathers."

If the name will cause problems, there is an option of finding a Hebrew translation of the name which is probably of European-Yiddish origin or a corruption thereof. Another option is to add a name to the unusual one by which your child will be called by his friends (although in some circles this is discouraged because it fails to really achieve perpetuation of the name).

Custom also encourages giving a name connected with the time of the year in which the baby is born or the portion of the Torah read that week.

In any event you should be congratulated for looking to tradition rather than consulting some book on baby names or picking one out of your hat.

Whatever name you decide to give, we wish you the greatest *Yiddishe nachat* from your expected child.

- When it takes two to carry
- Insignificance of a supporting role
- Carrying a man or animal, alive or dead
- Cutting nails and other forms of beautification
- Milking, cheese-making and removing honey from its comb
- Sweeping and dust control in the home
- Status of the flowerpot, with or without a hole
- How long a cracked vessel retains its status as a vessel
- Throwing and handing objects from one domain to another
- The sources for the prohibition on carrying
- Mystery of the first Jew executed for Shabbat violation
- The penalty for suspecting the innocent
- Throwing farther or closer than intended
- The wagons and boards of the *Mishkan* Sanctuary
- From pit to surface carrying

MIRACLE WITHIN A MIRACLE

When Moshe was sent by G-d to command Pharaoh to send the Children of Israel out of Egypt, he was accompanied by his older brother Aharon who was to play an important role in this mission. Should the Egyptian ruler challenge them to provide some miraculous sign that they had indeed been Divinely sent, it was Aharon's

assignment to cast his staff in front of Pharaoh where it would turn into a serpent.

This was indeed done, but failed to convince Pharaoh who called upon his sorcerers to duplicate through black magic this same sort of transformation. They succeeded in doing so, but the Torah relates that "the staff of Aharon swallowed all of their staffs." (*Shmot* 7:12).

"This," says Rabbi Elazar, "was a miracle within a miracle."

Rashi's explanation of the double miracle is based on the Torah's description of the staff swallowing all of the staffs rather than the serpent swallowing all of the serpents. Not only was there the miracle of the swallowing, but also that it took place after the serpents had reverted to staffs which are not naturally capable of ingesting.

Maharsha, however, offers a different explanation based on a Midrash. Reverting to a staff was indeed necessary in order to prevent Pharaoh from claiming that it is natural for a serpent to swallow others. But such swallowing of one staff of others should have produced a very thick staff. The fact that not only did an inanimate thing like Aharon's staff do the swallowing but that no change was visible within it was literally "a miracle within a miracle".

• *Shabbat* 97a

WHAT THE Sages SAY

"One guilty of wrongly suspecting an innocent person of wrongdoing is punished by Heaven with injury to his body. Moshe wrongly suspected his people of failing to believe that G-d sent him to liberate them from Egyptian bondage and was immediately struck with leprosy on his hand."

• *Rabbi Shimon Bar Lakish - Shabbos* 97a

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

WHOSE LAND IS IT?

Rabbi Meir Simcha Hacoen, the rav of the Latvian city of Dvinsky in the last century and author of the "Ohr Somayach" (for whom Yeshivat Ohr Somayach is named) was famous for the brilliance and sensitivity which made him such an outstanding judge and arbitrator.

Two men once came before him to resolve a dispute between them over ownership of a certain property. When his efforts for reaching a compromise failed, the rav told the

litigants that they must join him in a visit to the disputed land. He there placed his ear to the ground and then turned to the two claimants to inform them as to what he heard the land say:

"Each of these men says I belong to him but the truth is that both of them will belong to me."

This shocking reminder of mortality moved the two to reach the compromise suggested by the rav.

JUDO-ISM

From: L. Froehlich in Gaithersburg, MD

Dear Rabbi,

Several years ago, I took a class in Aikido, one of the eastern martial arts. Like its counterparts, Aikido is premised on the concept that a "force"— in this case known as "ki" or "chi"— flows through the universe and the body and can be focused by a person to use, for example, in personal defense. Is this concept of "ki" (or "chi") inconsistent with mainstream Jewish belief? In other words, can a Jew believe in one G-d and also accept the idea that there is an unseen energy flowing in the universe and through one's body that can be tapped with proper training? (After all, there are other unseen forces and things in the universe that do not seem to conflict with Jewish belief, e.g., gravity, electromagnetic energy, cosmic rays.) Is there any analogous concept in Judaism?

Dear L. Froehlich,

While I'm not an expert in Aikido, I do have a black belt (and coat) in Judo-ism, maybe that will help.

The idea there can exist such a force as you have

described is not inconsistent with mainstream Jewish belief, as long as you believe that this force, like all forces, is created by and controlled by G-d. I think your analogy to gravity is a good one.

Is there an analogous concept in Judaism? There are positive forces of Divine energy permeating all of Creation. One of them is referred to as "*ruach Elokim*," a Divine "wind" or spirit, which gives a person extra-human powers, strengths and abilities. This is the power to which the Bible attributes Samson's source of strength.

But Judaism also has a concept of "*ruach tumah*," an impure spirit. This force also lets a person tap into powers, but is detrimental to one's spiritual state.

Another point to consider is that some Eastern disciplines involve what we consider idolatrous practices. For example, using certain names or words, bowing to the room, bowing to the force, or "talking to" the force. We are not allowed to direct requests to spiritual forces, only to G-d.

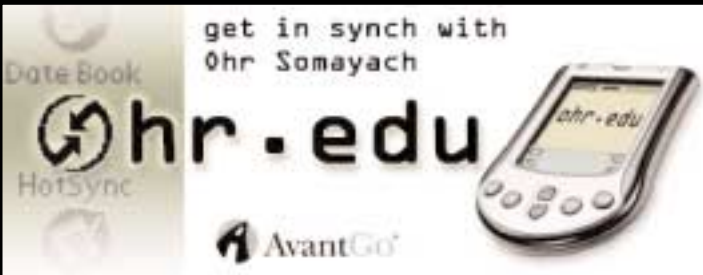
In conclusion, believing in the existence of such a force can be okay, while the way one relates to that force can border on idol worship if done incorrectly. We must avoid turning to impure forces, but rather tap into and reveal the positive Divine energy pulsating through all existence, including within ourselves.

OHR BITS

Witty Advice for Circling Life

"Only those who see the invisible can achieve the impossible."

• Frank Gaines



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