

OHRNET

SHABBAT PARSHAT KI TISA · 17 ADAR I 5768 · FEB. 23, 2008 · VOL. 15 NO. 21

PARSHA INSIGHTS

A WORLD OF WORDS

“...and fashioned it into a molten calf.” (32:4)

There’s something uncanny about a statue. I’m not talking about an agglomeration of scrap metal that passes for sculpture in many art galleries today, but a beautifully executed and accurate model of an earthly form. A sculpture can be amazingly real — a single moment frozen for eternity.

It’s no secret that Judaism gives sculpture short shrift. The second of the Ten Commandments prohibits the making or owning of any likeness of any earthly form, and the Oral Torah explains that (with the exception of the celestial bodies) this prohibition is aimed specifically at three-dimensional forms.

Why is sculpture so repugnant to Torah that it earns second place in the Ten Commandments? What is so terrible about a statue?

Another question. We tend to trivialize idol worship as puerile. Yet the Talmud tells us that had the Sages not prayed that the desire for idol worship be removed from the world, we would find idolatry as compelling as physical attraction.

What could be so gripping about genuflecting to an oversize dolly? And don’t think that idolatry appealed merely to the simple and the gullible; the intelligentsia were no less smitten by the overwhelming urge to prostrate themselves.

How should this be understood?

There are three parts to man: thought, speech and action.

The highest, most spiritual part of a person is thought. Thought’s defining characteristic is its evanescence; no

sooner has a thought entered our mind than it has already ceased to exist.

Speech, on the other hand, exists only in time. With the exception of G-d’s utterance of the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai nothing can be understood in a single moment. Speech takes time. To understand what someone is saying cannot be grasped in a single moment. Nevertheless speech is still ephemeral. It ceases with the silence of the speaker

Actions, the creation of things, persist independently of the one who created them. Actions seem to have a life of their own

And herein lies the problem.

At the root of all atheism is the belief that there is something called “concrete reality” — that *because* things exist, they *have* to exist. The seeming immutability of a physical object seems to demand its existence.

A statue is a moment frozen in time. It seems to say “I exist by myself; I am divorced from the moment of creation; Because I exist – I *must* exist.”

When G-d created this world, He created it through the power of speech. Why didn’t he create it through writing, or through physical construction?

This world is virtually no more than G-d speaking, as we say in the blessing, “...for everything exists through His Word.”

Every statue in the world tries to convince that there is such a thing as “concrete reality”, but in reality we live in a world of words that exists just as long as the Speaker continues to speak.

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

Moshe conducts a census by counting each silver half-shekel donated by all men age twenty and over. Moshe is commanded to make a copper laver for the Mishkan. The women donate the necessary metal. The formula of the anointing oil is specified, and G-d instructs Moshe to use this oil only for dedicating the Mishkan, its vessels, Aharon and his sons. G-d selects Betzalel and Oholiav as master craftsmen for the Mishkan and its vessels. The Jewish People are commanded to keep the Sabbath as an eternal sign that G-d made the world. Moshe receives the two Tablets of Testimony on which are written the Ten Commandments. The mixed multitude who left Egypt with the Jewish People panic when Moshe's descent seems delayed, and force Aharon to make a golden calf for them to worship. Aharon stalls, trying to delay them. G-d tells Moshe to return to the people immediately, threatening to destroy everyone and build a new nation

from Moshe. When Moshe sees the camp of idol-worship he smashes the tablets and destroys the golden calf. The sons of Levi volunteer to punish the transgressors, executing 3,000 men. Moshe ascends the mountain to pray for forgiveness for the people, and G-d accepts his prayer. Moshe sets up the Mishkan and G-d's cloud of glory returns. Moshe asks G-d to show him the rules by which he conducts the world, but is granted only a small portion of this request. G-d tells Moshe to hew new tablets and reveals to him the text of the prayer that will invoke Divine mercy. Idol worship, intermarriage and the combination of milk and meat are prohibited. The laws of Pesach, the first-born, the first-fruits, Shabbat, Shavuot and Succot are taught. When Moshe descends with the second set of tablets, his face is luminous as a result of contact with the Divine.

ISRAEL *Forever*

EVERY JEW COUNTS

One of the most disturbing features of life in Israel is the tremendous gap between rich and poor. This expresses itself not only in the differences in housing, automobiles and other elements of a material standard of living but also in the quality of education and medical care.

In this week's Torah portion we read about the Divine command to Moshe to count the Jewish people by requir-

ing each male from the age of 20 to contribute a half shekel for Sanctuary use. No one was required to give more and no one was allowed to give less.

While we cannot realistically expect a totally egalitarian society today we should learn two important lessons from this Torah chapter — that every single Jew counts, and that we should strive for greater equality to make the Jewish state a fairer Israel forever.

LOVE OF THE LAND - THE PLACES

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

KEREM BEN ZIMRA- NAMED FOR A SAGE

Located about eight kilometers west of Tsefat is the Moshav Kerem ben Zimra, which Jews built on the site of the village, evacuated by the Arabs during the War of Independence.

The name of the moshav stems from the tradition that buried in that area is the Talmudic Sage



Rabbi Yossi ben Zimra.

One of the statements for which this Sage is famous goes like this:

“Just as a woman is not ashamed to ask her husband for the needs of her family, so too are the prophets not ashamed to ask G-d for the needs of His people.”

PARSHA Q&A ?

1. How many “geira” are in a shekel?
2. What was the minimum age of military service in the Jewish army?
3. What were the three different types of *terumah* donated?
4. The Jews were counted after Yom Kippur and again after Pesach. Both times they numbered the same amount. How can this be? Didn't some 19-year olds turn 20 during that six month period?
5. How many ingredients comprise the incense of the *Mishkan*?
6. According to Rashi, why are sailors called “malachim?”
7. What is the difference between *chochma* (wisdom), *bina* (understanding), and *da'at* (knowledge)?
8. Shabbat is a “sign.” What does it signify?
9. When did the Jewish People begin to give contributions for the building of the *Mishkan*?
10. How many books are there in Tanach?
11. From where did the men take the earrings that they donated to make the calf?
12. Why did Aharon build the altar for the golden calf by himself?
13. Why did Moshe break the Tablets?
14. How can two brothers belong to two different tribes?
15. Why did Moshe ask that his name be erased from the Torah?
16. How has the sin of the golden calf affected the Jewish People throughout history?
17. In verse 33:2, G-d says that the inhabitants of *Eretz Canaan* would be driven out of the Land. In that verse, only six of the seven Canaanite nations are mentioned. What happened to the seventh?
18. How did G-d show that He forgave the Jewish People?
19. How did Moshe become wealthy?
20. How do the light rays shining from Moshe's face show us the powerful effect of sin?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

1. 30:13 - Twenty.
2. 30:14 - Twenty.
3. 30:15 - For the *adanim* (sockets), for the purchase of communal sacrifices, and for the building of the *Mishkan*.
4. 30:16 - Their ages were calculated based on Rosh Hashana, not based on their individual birthdays.
5. 30:34 - Eleven ingredients were used making the incense.
6. 30:35 - Because they stir (*malach*) the water with their oars.
7. 31:3 - *Chochma* is knowledge acquired from others. *Bina* is the deduction of new knowledge from what one has already learned. *Da'at* is holy inspiration.
8. 31:13 - It is a sign between G-d and the Jewish People that He has chosen them and a sign to the nations of the world that He has sanctified the Jewish People.
9. 31:18 - The 11th of Tishrei.
10. 31:18 - 24.
11. 32:2,3 - From their ears.
12. 32:5 - He hoped that by building it by himself it would take longer and in the interim Moshe would return.
13. 32:19 - Moshe reasoned: If the Torah forbids those who have estranged themselves from the Torah to partake in even a single commandment (Pesach sacrifice), surely the entire Torah cannot be given to a whole nation which has estranged itself from G-d!
14. 32:27 - Half-brothers, sharing the same mother.
15. 32:32 - So people shouldn't say “Moshe was unworthy to plead for mercy on behalf of the Jewish people.”
16. 32:34 - Whenever G-d punishes the Jewish People, part of that punishment comes as payment for the sin of the golden calf.
17. 33:2 - The seventh nation, the Girgashites, voluntarily emigrated.
18. 33:14 - He agreed to let His *Shechina* dwell among them.
19. 34:1 - Moshe carved the Tablets out of precious stone. G-d commanded Moshe to keep the leftover fragments.
20. 34:35 - Before the sin of the golden calf, the people would not have been afraid to look at the light rays, but after the sin they were afraid.

- The oaths of Moshe and of King Tzidkiyahu
- An opening for vow nullification based on a condition stated at the time vow was made
- Openings based on clash with Torah commands
- Payment of *ketubah* as a factor in vow nullification
- Openings based on considerations for holy days or for personal and family honor
- Rabbi Yishmael, the beautifying Sage
- Mix-up of languages and the happy ending
- Who can annul the vow of a *na'arah mu'orassah* — a girl between the ages of 12-12 1/2 betrothed but not yet married
- The source for the power of the father and the *chatan*
- What happens when either of them dies or when one of them annuls the vow
- When a person makes conflicting successive declarations in regard to sanctifying an animal or in regard to maintaining or annulling a vow
- When a *na'arah mu'orassah* vows and is divorced and remarried the same day

TO WHOM DOES ONE TURN

In search for an opening with which to nullify a vow taken by a Jew to forbid another Jew to benefit from him, the court may challenge the vow taker with violation of Torah commands that his vow has caused. One of these is the obligation of supporting an impoverished relative: "If your brother becomes poor... you shall support him... that your brother shall live with you." (*Vayikra* 25:35-36) The court may ask him whether he would have made such a vow had he realized that it would prevent him from fulfilling his obligation to support his poor relative. If he responds that he would not have made the vow, the court can annul it.

This ruling of Rabbi Meir in the *mishna* is thus challenged by Rabbi Huna bar Katina in our *gemara*: Why can the vow-

maker not parry this challenge by asking why he bears sole responsibility for supporting this poor relative and it is not sufficient for him to contribute to the general fund?

Even before dealing with the *gemara's* response it is important to deal with the question of how he can contribute to the communal fund which may help his poor relative if he has taken a vow not to benefit him.

The commentaries point out that this is not a problem since the money goes to the charity trustee who has the prerogative of using those funds for any deserving recipient. Therefore it is not considered a violation of the vow even if it goes to the relative.

To the challenge of Rabbi Huna came the response that when a man becomes poor he turns to his relatives before appealing to the general fund.

Nedarim 65b

What the SAGES Say

"All Jewish girls are basically attractive and it is only poverty which causes some of them to appear otherwise."

Rabbi Yishmael - Nedarim 66a

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SOUND ADVICE

From: Abraham in LA

Dear Rabbi,

Is it a mitzvah to “guard” one’s hearing the way one is supposed to “guard” one’s tongue?

Dear Abraham,

Regarding the specific prohibition of spreading slanderous speech, the prohibition applies equally to the speaker as well as the listener. This means that one is not allowed even to “just” listen to slander. When one hears such forbidden speech, defending the person being spoken of usually doesn’t help, and often it makes things worse since the speaker will only further justify his remarks. Rather, he should politely change the subject. If that doesn’t help, he should find a way to end the conversation or leave. If that’s not possible, he should make every effort not to hear the bad talk or at least not accept it.

This guarding of our hearing is part of a more general attempt to guard all of our senses from physically and spiritually harmful influences, with the idea of sanctifying ourselves with holiness and purity.

If the body is likened to the Temple, the head is like the holy menorah in the inner Sanctuary. Just as the menorah had six symmetrical branches from a central stem supporting a total of seven vessels, so too the eyes, ears and nostrils are symmetrically located around the mouth forming a total of seven apertures in the face. Accordingly,

our intellect is the pure oil that flows into and illuminates these holy vessels. Just as the Temple in general, and the Sanctuary in particular, had to be guarded from impurity to maintain their sanctity, it is extremely important to keep our bodies, senses and minds free of impurities. Only then can the intellect burn brightly through our senses and illuminate goodness and purity into the world.

There are many examples of *tzaddikim* sanctifying and thereby sensitizing their senses, making them privy to normally extra-sensory information. Here’s one about hearing:

The great Rabbi Zusha of Anipoli initially wandered anonymously around Europe in a spiritually motivated, self-imposed exile. During one of his journeys, he was sitting in the *shul* of a small town when a woman emotionally burst in looking for her husband. She explained that he had suddenly left her without giving her a proper bill of divorce and that she was roaming the country in search of him. Rabbi Zusha calmed her down and told her that he was in the local inn of that very same small town. Everyone rushed to the inn, and sure enough, there she found her husband.

Years later, responding to those who marveled how the Rabbi, far from home, not knowing a soul in that small, remote town, knew to direct the forlorn woman to the inn, Rabbi Zusha explained: “All my life I guarded with great care to hear only good, spiritually beneficial things. G-d thereby protects me to hear only such things. That morning, I passed the inn and heard a man say he was so-and-so from such-and-such a town. As I was reflecting on how I wouldn’t hear such a trivial, mundane matter for nothing, the woman came into *shul*...”

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

A FAMILY SWITCH

A former student of Ohr Somayach recently sent us an e-mail with his personal “human side of the story”: In September 2003 he joined the “Shoresh” Introductory Program of the yeshiva and a few months later joined the large Jewish Learning Exchange group (which comes around this time for 2-3 weeks of learning and traveling) on a tour of Israel. At the tomb of Rabbi Yonatan ben Uziel in Amuka where people in need of a soul-mate come to pray, he prayed for his father, divorced from his mother for ten years, to remarry.

A week or two later he got a call from his father asking him if he knew a certain young man in his yeshiva whose

mother he was dating. “My future step-brother, I soon discovered, was one of the most serious students at the yeshiva”, he recalls, “and I couldn’t figure out how my dad, who was not even Shabbat observant when I left home, could be dating his mother.”

“Four months later my father announced his engagement. What a switch on the stereotype of a yeshiva for Ba’alei Teshuva! Instead of the picture so many have of a student quickly becoming religious and going on to build a Torah-true family, here I was just getting religious while learning in yeshiva and it was my dad getting engaged in four months!”

WHEN NOT TO BE AN INFORMER

Question: Someone in my class in a Yeshiva high school did something childish which upset the teacher in our General Studies department and I am the only one who knows who it is. The head of the Yeshiva demands that I reveal his identity. The guilty party, however, is a serious student who just slipped this one time and I am afraid that my revelation may lead to his expulsion, which can create an unnecessary addition to the list of dropouts. What is the right thing to do?

Answer: At a recent conference for educators on the subject of avoiding improper speech sponsored by the Chofetz Chaim Heritage Foundation a case similar to yours was mentioned by one of the speakers.

Your counterpart in this true story was also instructed to

inform on his classmate and he too had your reservations. After refusing several times to his Rosh Yeshiva's demand that he reveal the identity of the offender, the rabbi got up from his seat, gave him a kiss and told him:

"Well done! I did what I had to do and you did what you had to do."

What the Rosh Yeshiva was saying is that he trusted the judgment of the youngster before him that the damage such a revelation would cause to a really good boy would outweigh any gain to the school by disciplining him. You too must make such a calculation and hold your tongue unless your classmate's behavior is a serious threat to other students, in which case you have an obligation to cooperate with the school authorities.

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