

OHRNET

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PARSHA INSIGHTS

SELF-MADE MAN

"A thousand from a tribe, a thousand from a tribe..." (31:4)

People don't know what it is to work these days. When I was a kid I used to get up every morning at 4:30 AM, rain or shine. I'm a self-made man alright.'

More elusive than the Loch Ness Monster or the Yeti is a species called the Self-Made Man.

Reports of his existence are very frequent, but to date he has never been positively identified. All the thousands of reported sightings have turned out to be mistaken wishful thinking.

Let's take a look at a typical reported sighting:

Morris is one of the biggest corporate stock whizzes on Wall Street. He is the president of Huge and Wealthy International Inc., one of the top Fortune 500 companies. But did Fortune really give him his success? Or did it come from elsewhere?

Morris gets up every morning at 4:30 AM and works almost without a break till late every night. But does Morris give himself this strength, this drive, or does it come from somewhere else?

Morris is successful, but the bankruptcy courts are littered with financial whizzes who had no way of knowing that the bottom would drop out of their market, despite all the genius

of their planning. And even those who make it to the top, like Morris, can, in a few seconds, succumb to a heart attack, and the president of Huge and Wealthy International Inc. can suddenly become a statistic in a study on heart disease.

When we're successful, it's all too easy to pat ourselves on the back and congratulate ourselves on how clever we were. In order to keep a true perspective as to where our success really comes from we need constant reminders.

In this week's parsha, the Torah tells us that for every thousand soldiers that went out to fight for the Jewish People, another thousand stayed in Eretz Yisrael and prayed for them. In other words, for each soldier at the front, there was another 'soldier' responsible to pray for his counterpart.

You might think that this was to give those at the front added protection. *The main reason, however, was that those who were fighting shouldn't be under any illusion as to where their success was coming from.* It was not by the strength and the might of their own hand that they were victorious in battle, rather their success — like all success — comes from G-d, the maker of the 'Self-Made' Man.

Sources: Based on Rabbi Chatzkel Levenstein, heard from Rabbi Yehoshua Bertram

ANOTHER HUNDRED DOLLAR BILL

"If a man takes a vow to G-d..." (30:3)

A tramp standing by the side of the road. A big Rolls-Royce pulls up right next to him. One of the tinted windows in the back rolls down with a soft electronic purr, coming to rest at the end of its travel with a reassuring clunk. A hand in a white cotton glove emerges from the car holding a crisp new \$100 bill. A voice emanates from the car. "It's for you," says the voice. The tramp gazes at the gloved hand in disbelief. "What?" The tramp looks around to make sure no one is standing behind him. "Are you speaking to me?" says the tramp. "Here, take the money!" Gingerly, he approaches the car, half-expecting that this is some king of practical joke, and the money and the car

will vanish in a second. He extends his hand and ever so slowly grasps the note. As soon as his fingers clutch the bill securely, the hand retracts into the car. The window rises with a soft purr and the Rolls-Royce speeds into the distance. The tramp stands transfixed to the spot, beaming from ear to ear with equal amounts of incredulity and joy.

The next day the tramp is standing in the same spot. The same Rolls-Royce draws up next to him. Again, one of the tinted windows in the back rolls down with a soft electronic purr. The same white-gloved hand emerges from the car holding another crisp \$100 bill. The tramp cannot believe his luck. Again

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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

BEIN HAMETZARIM – A TIME FOR REFLECTION

The three weeks between the fast days of 17 Tammuz and 9 Av are traditionally called the days of *Bein Hametzarim*, a reference to their being between two major tragedies, the breaching of the walls of Jerusalem and the destruction of the *Beit Hamikdash*.

This period is certainly a time for serious reflection on the part of all Jews who long and pray for a totally rebuilt

Jerusalem and the restoration of the *Beit Hamikdash* in our own days. Such reflection on the fact that the sin of unjustified hatred of one Jew towards another brought about those tragedies will hopefully inspire all of us to develop better relations with all of our fellow Jews and thus secure Israel forever.

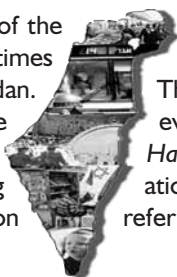
LOVE OF THE LAND - THE PLACES

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

THE EAST BANK OF THE JORDAN

With all the talk these days about the future of the West Bank (Judea and Samaria), we sometimes forget the history of the East Bank of the Jordan.

When we hear this week's Torah portion read in the synagogue we will be reminded that the Tribes of Reuven and Gad negotiated with Moshe for receiving their share of the land promised to the Jewish nation on



the eastern side of the Jordan River which was the first area to be conquered.

These two Tribes and half of the Tribe of Menashe eventually settled in this area that was called *Eiver Hayarden*. This explains why geography books of generations ago identified this as Transjordan and today it is referred to as the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

לע"נ
מרת ב"לא בת ר' דוד ע"ה
ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

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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.

PARSHA INSIGHTS

continued from page one

he extends his hand and slowly grasps the note. And as soon as his fingers clutch the bill the hand retracts into the car and the Rolls-Royce speeds into the distance. Again the tramp is overjoyed. But maybe not quite as overjoyed as the previous day.

The next day the same thing happens, and the next and the next and the next...

This goes on for about a month. One day, the Rolls-Royce draws up at the lights. This time, however, nothing happens. After a few seconds the tramp knocks on the glass, but it stays firmly closed. So he knocks harder and then starts to shout, "Where's my hundred dollars?"

The Midrash quotes the line from our parsha "*If a man takes a vow to G-d...*" and comments that a man doesn't know the length of his allotted time in this world. What is the connection between "*If a man takes a vow to G-d...*" and knowing how long we have to live?

The Talmud (*Nedarim* 10) says that when a person makes a vow to bring an offering to G-d, he shouldn't say "*To G-d, an offering.*" Rather, he should say "*An offering to G-d.*" The reason is that maybe he will utter G-d's ineffable name "*To G-d,*" and not complete the sentence by saying "*an offering*". It will thus

transpire that he uttered G-d's name in vain. The commentators explain that the Talmud is referring here to a situation where the person might die before he is able to complete the sentence. This is the meaning of the Midrash. A person does not know when his time is up, so he should be careful how he phrases a vow.

At first sight one might think that the Talmud is preoccupied with an extremely remote case. I mean, how many people drop dead in mid-sentence just when they happen to be in the middle of making a vow?

Most of us look at our lives as though we deserve to live. We may not say it, but we feel that way. That's why we complain against G-d when people die 'prematurely.' If we looked at every moment we breathe on this world as yet another hundred-dollar bill, maybe we wouldn't be so quick to complain when G-d takes back something that was a free handout in the first place. When we see every second as a separate and new gift we do not assume that necessarily we will be given the gift to complete even the sentence that we have started to speak.

• Sources: *Nachal Kedumim* and *Kedushas Levi*
in *Mayana shel Torah*

- When agents delivering *get* offer only partial testimony
- Some laws relating to purification through mikveh
- The difference between one exile and another
- A *get* written or signed by witnesses at night
- The purpose of dating the *get*
- The three-month waiting period for a woman to remarry after divorce
- The effect of *shmitah* year cancellation of debts on payment of *ketubah*
- When ten agents are delegated to write a *get*
- The proper materials for writing a *get*
- Witnesses unable to read or to sign their names
- Invisible ink on a *get* and a *get* on a Sefer Torah
- Correcting a *get* written without intention for specific wife
- *Get* written on a leaf or etched into a surface
- A *get* on a golden platter
- Emancipation document tattooed on a slave

A STRANGE WAY TO GIVE A GET

A man entered the synagogue, took out from its Holy Ark a Sefer Torah and handed it to his wife declaring “This is your *get*” and no *get* was seen.

Surely a strange way of effecting a divorce, but is it indeed effective?

Let us consider the possibilities.

If he intended to divorce her with the chapter on divorce contained in the Torah there are two problems. First of all, a *get* must be written with explicit intention (*lishmah*) for the woman who is to receive it. Even if we consider the possibility that the husband hired the scribe writing the Sefer

Torah to write the chapter on divorce with his wife in mind, it still would not be valid for it lacked the names and places of both husband and wife.

The only other possibility is that the man wrote the *get* on the back of the parchment of the Sefer Torah and it was not readily visible because the ink used was *mei milin* – an almost invisible substance. Rabbi Yosef dismissed this possibility as well because since the parchment used for a Sefer Torah is treated with *mei mulin* it would be impossible to write anything on it with *mei milin*. The conclusion was that since we did not discern a *get* written on the Sefer Torah we have no cause for considering it a valid divorce.

• Gittin 19b

What the SAGES Say

“Simply because we make an apparent comparison does not allow us to render a halachic decision.”

• Rabbi Yochanan - Gittin 19a

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BE HAPPY

From Josh in Baltimore, MD

I have befriended a guy on the Internet who is asking me many questions about Judaism. He wants to know if Judaism specifically says anything about enjoying life? I thought I once heard that the Torah says one is obligated to benefit from the pleasures that G-d gave us, (obviously within reason), and we were meant to be happy. Can you please confirm or correct this.

Dear Josh,

The Torah in Parshat Ki Tavo writes:

"Tachat asher lo avadata et Hashem b'simcha...."

"Because (tachat) you did not serve the L-rd your G-d with happiness and a glad heart when you had plenty of everything, you will therefore serve your enemies when G-d sends them against you..."

Maimonides states that from here we learn that one is supposed to serve G-d with joy and gladness.

If you stop and think about it, we shouldn't need a verse in the Torah to tell us this. It should be common sense that we should be happy. So why command us to do something that is common sense? A parable told by the Alexander Rav provides an answer.

There was a boy who was trained by his tutor to read the Aleph Bet. One day the father proudly stood by to watch his son recite the letters with the vowels. The boy began, "Kamatz Aleph Aw, Kamatz Bet Baw, etc." until he came to Kamatz Hey...suddenly he couldn't continue. The father was embarrassed and threatened his son with a beating. "Come on you can do it. Just look under (tachat) the Hey, what's under the Hey? WHAT'S UNDER THE HEY?"

At which point the boy burst out in tears and declared "But father, you told me to not tell anyone that you hid a stolen calf under the hay."

Just as this easy task for the boy was blocked by something underneath and behind the scenes, so it can be with happiness. Happiness should come easily in life. However, sometimes something underneath prevents this happiness. The Torah reminds us that our job is to deal with these underlying factors and open the way to serving G-d with happiness.

Sources:

- Devarim 28:47
- Maimonides - The Halachot of Lulav, 8:15
- Ma'ayana Shel Torah, Devarim 28:47

SOMETHING'S WRONG

From Harlan in Jerusalem

Recently someone came over to me and asked me if I shave with a razor. When I told them that I do, he told me that the Torah says that this is not allowed, and that I must use an electric shaver or grow a beard. I was very hurt by this and angry that a stranger mixed into my affairs. Later I heard that the person was actually obligated to rebuke me by Torah law. I can't believe that the Torah would command someone to hurt another person's feelings. Was he really right in 'butting in'?

Dear Harlan,

The Torah in Parshat Kedoshim writes:

"You should not hate your brother in your heart; rebuke your countryman and do not bear a sin on his account."

Maimonides and other Halachic authorities quote this verse as the source for a positive commandment to rebuke someone who has transgressed a law. This applies to both Biblical and Rabbinic laws. In your case we are talking about the violation of a Torah commandment so he was obligated to admonish you.

But that's not all there is to it. Although we've established that there's a commandment to rebuke, we must understand that there are also laws that govern the method of rebuke.

Maimonides in his Codes writes that the one who rebukes must do so due to pure motivation of returning him to the path of Torah. If the transgression was done privately, then the rebuke should also be in private. It should be done with care, compassion and with honor. The point is not to sting the person or to satisfy some perverse sense of pleasure but rather to help him do the right thing.

In short he did the right thing but probably could have done it in a more sensitive way. (I personally would never rebuke anyone holding an open razor!)

Sources:

- Vayikra 19:17
- Maimonides - The Book of Mitzvot, positive commandment 205
- Sefer Hachinuch - positive commandment 239
- Avotot Ahava, by Rabbis Moshe Newman and Mordechai Becher
- Maimonides - The Book of Knowledge, 6:7

WHO GETS THE CASH?

Question: In our *Parshat Bechukotai* "The Human Side of the Story" feature the story was told about a group of girls in Petach Tikvah who found \$33,000 in an abandoned dresser and divided the money among themselves. When the mother of one of them discovered what had happened she alerted the police who found the owner and returned all the money to her. From a halachic point of view did the girls have a right to keep the money?

Answer: The Torah obligates a Jew who finds a lost object to make an effort to locate its owner and return it to him.

If there is no indication of the identity of the owner an effort must be made to publicize the find in the hope that the owner will come to claim it by providing proof that it belongs to him.

In the above-mentioned case the young ladies were negligent in failing to search the drawers in the hope of finding papers that would identify the owner. After all, this is what the police simply did!

This should serve as a lesson to all finders of treasure that "all that glitters you cannot hold."

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

THE SURPRISE BARGAIN

A Jew of substantial means was looking for a home in Bnei Brak with more room than his current location. When he heard about a particular apartment in a desirable area he quickly went to visit its owner.

When the seller stated his asking price of \$200,000 the prospective buyer, who expected it to be closer to \$300,000, was surprised. Rather than jump at this opportunity to get a real bargain he asked the seller why he was selling at such a low price. The answer was that he had \$200,000 worth of pressing debts and had been advised by his local rabbi to sell his home at a price that would

quickly draw a buyer so that he could settle his debts.

The buyer excused himself and went to the above-mentioned rabbi to verify the story he had just heard. He then returned to the seller and plunked down \$200,000 in cash. He informed the seller that he refused to allow him to lose so much money because of his desperate situation and was therefore lending him the money to pay his debts and to enable him to sell his apartment at its full value.

By thus passing up the opportunity to gain a financial bargain he succeeded in gaining a bargain of a mitzvah of helping a fellow Jew.

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