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PARSHA INSIGHTS

613 PROBLEMS

“...I have removed the holy things from the house...” (26:13)

We can keep the Torah in two different ways: We can fit the Torah into our lives, or we can fit our lives into the Torah.

The first way involves seeking out as many leniencies as possible so the *mitzvot* don't interfere with our lives too much. Or we can look at the *mitzvot* as life itself – “For they are our life.”

Everyone would agree that the better we keep the *mitzvot* in this world, the bigger will be our share in the future world. That's only fair. But the truth is that a person who fits his life into the *mitzvot*, rather than fits the *mitzvot* into his life, has it better not only over there but over here too.

The Talmud relates the following story: “Rabba bar Chana and Rebbe Yochanan taught in the name of Rebbe Yehuda bar Ilai: ‘Observe the difference between the former generations and ours! The former generations brought in their produce through the front gates because they wanted to separate the tithes, whereas the

later generations brought their produce through the gardens, yards, and skylights that do not lead to the front of the house, in order to evade the obligation to give tithes. (A person need only tithe if the produce is brought through the front entrance.) What is the result? The produce is no longer blessed’.”

When the Jewish People deliberately obligated themselves to separate tithes by bringing the fruit in through the front entrance, they had a delicious aroma and succulent taste. However, when they avoided giving those tithes, even though what they did was perfectly legitimate, they diminished the taste of this world as well as the next.

You can look at the Torah as 613 problems or 613 ways to be connected to G-d. For nothing tastes as sweet as a *mitzvah*, neither in the next world nor in this one.

• Source: *Berachot 35; Midrash Hagadol 26:15*

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PARSHA OVERVIEW

When *Bnei Yisrael* dwell in the Land of Israel, the first fruits are to be taken to the Temple and given to the *kohen* in a ceremony expressing recognition that it is G-d who guides Jewish history throughout all ages. (This passage forms one of the central parts of the Haggadah that we read at the Passover Seder.) On the last day of Pesach of the fourth and seventh years of the seven-year *shemita* cycle, a person must recite a disclosure stating that he has indeed distributed the tithes to the appropriate people in the prescribed manner. With this *mitzvah*, Moshe concludes the commandments that G-d has told him to give to the Jewish People. Moshe exhorts them to walk in G-d's ways because they are set aside as a treasured people to G-d. When *Bnei Yisrael* cross the

Jordan River they are to make a new commitment to the Torah. Huge stones are to be erected and the Torah is to be written on them in the world's seventy primary languages, and they are to be covered with a thin layer of plaster. Half the tribes will stand on Mount Gerizim and half on Mount Eval, and the *levi'im* will stand in a valley between the two mountains. There the *levi'im* will recite 12 commandments and all the people will say "amen" to the blessings and the curses. Moshe then details the blessings that will be bestowed upon *Bnei Yisrael*. These blessings are both physical and spiritual. But if the Jewish People do not keep the Torah, Moshe details a chilling picture of destruction, resulting in exile and wandering among the nations.

ISRAEL Forever

A PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

“I declare today to G-d that I have come to the Land that G-d swore to our ancestors to give to us.”
(*Devarim* 26:3)

This statement which a Jew made to the Kohen when he brought his *bikurim* (first fruits) to the *Beit Hamikdash* could easily serve as a sort of “pledge of allegiance” to the Jewish homeland.

As Rashi points out in his commentary, the purpose of this declaration is to demonstrate that one is not an ingrate and

knows how to appreciate the fact that G-d gave us Eretz Yisrael. Even before making the ensuing declaration expressing thanks for the Exodus and for the bounty of his agricultural produce, a Jew expresses his gratitude for simply living in the Promised Land.

In an era of so much highly publicized complaining about the conditions of living in Israel, this week's Torah portion should remind us of how much thanks we owe for the opportunity of living in Israel forever.

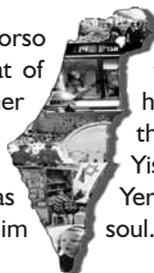
LOVE OF THE LAND - THE PEOPLE

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

ADAM HEAD MATERIAL

When G-d created the first man He formed his torso from the dust of Babylon, his head from that of Eretz Yisrael and his limbs from all the other lands. (*Mesechta Sanhedrin 38b*)

The whole world was created for man to utilize in serving his Creator, explains Maharsha, so it was necessary to form man from the entire earth and give him



mastery over it. This provides an understanding why the head, which contains the brain in which is seated human intelligence and soul power, was formed from the material of Eretz Yisrael. The very air of Eretz Yisrael makes one wise, say our Talmudic Sages, and Yerushalayim is where the Gate to Heaven is for the soul.

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PARSHA Q&A ?

1. When historically did the obligation to bring *bikkurim* begin?
2. *Bikkurim* are from which crops?
3. How does one designate *bikkurim*?
4. Who shakes the basket containing the *bikkurim*?
5. What does “*v’anita v’amarta*” mean?
6. Which Arami “tried to destroy my father?”
7. When during the year may *bikkurim* be brought?
Until when are the special verses recited?
8. Someone declaring that he separated *terumah* and *ma’aser* says: “And I didn’t forget.” What didn’t he forget?
9. What were the Jewish People to do with the 12 stones on Mt. Eval?
10. Six tribes stood on Mt. Eval and six on Mt. Gerizim. Who and what were in the middle?
11. Who “causes the blind to go astray”?
12. How does one “strike another secretly”?
13. Eleven curses were spoken on Mt. Eval. What is the significance of this number?
14. Why are sheep called “*ashterot*”?
15. How is the manner of expressing the curses in *Parshat Bechukotai* more severe than in this week’s *parsha*?
16. What is meant by “the Jewish People will become a proverb”?
17. Why did all the curses expressed in 48:16-44 befall the Jewish People?
18. “In the morning you shall say, ‘If only it were (last) evening’ and in the evening you will say, ‘If only it were (this) morning.’” Why?
19. To which tribe did Moshe give the Torah first?
20. How long does it take to understand the depth of one’s teacher’s wisdom?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week’s Questions!

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

1. 26:1 - After the Land was conquered and divided.
2. 26:2 - The seven species for which *Eretz Yisrael* is praised: wheat, barley, grapes, olives, figs, dates, and pomegranates.
3. 26:2 - When he sees the first fruit ripen on a tree, he binds a piece of straw around it to mark it as *bikkurim*.
4. 26:4 - The *kohen* places his hands under the hands of the one bringing it, and they wave the basket together.
5. 26:5 - Speak loudly.
6. 26:5 - Lavan.
7. 26:11 - *Bikkurim* are brought from Shavuot until Chanukah. The verses are recited only until Succot.
8. 26:13 - To bless G-d.
9. 10. 27:2 - Build an altar.
10. 27:12 - *Kohanim*, *levi'im* and the Holy Ark.
11. 27:18 - Any person who intentionally gives bad advice.
12. 27:24 - By slandering him.
13. 27:24 - Each curse corresponds to one of the tribes, except for the tribe of Shimon. Since Moshe didn’t intend to bless the tribe of Shimon before his death, he did not want to curse them either.
14. 28:4 - Because they “enrich” (*m’ashiro*) their owners.
15. 28:23 - In *Bechukotai* the Torah speaks in the plural, whereas in this week’s *Parsha* the curses are mentioned in the singular.
16. 28:37 - Whenever someone wants to express the idea of extraordinary suffering, they will use the Jewish People as an example.
17. 28:47 - Because they did not serve G-d with gladness when everything was abundant.
18. 28:67 - Because the curse of each hour will be greater than that of the previous hour.
19. 29:3 - To the Tribe of Levi.
20. 29:8 - 40 years.

לע"נ

מרת פייגא בת ר' דוד ע"ה

ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

- Covering the blood of *shechitah* by a non-competent
- How many coverings for multiple *shechitah*
- Covering by someone other than the slaughterer
- Covering or uncovering of blood by the wind
- If blood mixes with water
- The material to be used for covering blood
- The reward for the humility of the Patriarch Avraham
- The dirt of an idol worshipping city that was destroyed
- The prohibition of eating *gid hanasheh* (displaced sinew)
- Whether it applies to sacrificial animals
- To which side of the animal does it apply
- The Patriarch Yaakov and the angel he fought
- The fat of the *gid hanasheh*

KEEPING KOSHER IN EGYPT

“Have meat slaughtered and prepare it, for with me will these men dine at noon.” (*Bereishet* 43:16)

This was the order which Yosef gave to the man in charge of his house in order to provide hospitality for his brothers. Rabbi Yossie the son of Rabbi Chanina explains this order as providing assurance to the sons of the Patriarch Yaakov that they were eating kosher meat.

“Have meat slaughtered”, he says, “means that he invited them to inspect the slaughtered throat to ensure that there had been a proper *shechitah*. ‘And prepare it’ means that the forbidden *gid hanasheh* (displaced sinew on the hip pocket) was removed from the animal in front of them.”

These precautions were taken because Yosef’s brothers, like the Patriarchs, observed the *mitzvot* even before the Torah was given.

Maharsha calls attention to the fact that only in regard to the removal of the *gid hanasheh* it is mentioned that this was done *in front of them*. His conclusion is that if one of Yosef’s Egyptian attendants had slaughtered the animal in front of them, it would not have sufficed because *shechitah* performed by a non-Jew is not valid. Yosef therefore invited his brothers to do the slaughtering themselves. But in regard to removing the *gid hanasheh* it was certainly sufficient for even a non-Jew to carry this out in front of them.

What is difficult to understand is how Yosef’s brothers viewed these concerns for their religious observance shown by someone whom they believed to be an Egyptian official. We can only surmise that the proximity of Egypt to Eretz Yisrael and the fame of Yaakov’s family allowed for others to be aware of the lifestyle of the Patriarchal families so that they assumed that an Egyptian potentate would certainly know this as well.

• *Chullin* 91a

What the SAGES Say

“Every day an echo goes forth (from Heaven) and declares ‘The entire world is sustained in the merit of My son Chanina (Rabbi Chanina ben Dossa) and My son Chanina is content with a *kav* of carobs from Erev Shabbat to Erev Shabbat.’”

• *Rabbi Yehuda in the name of the Sage Rav - Chullin 86a*

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OLD AGES

From: Bob Mogel in Omaha, Nebraska

Dear Rabbi,

In the Hebrew Bible it states that in Biblical times people lived to be hundreds of years old. How is this possible given the fact that people don't live nearly as long today even with the advances in medical technology?

Dear Bob Mogel,

There are several reasons for the gradual reduction in life-span from Biblical times to the present.

G-d initially intended to grant people eternal life. According to Kabbalistic texts, if Adam and Eve had refrained from eating from the Tree of Knowledge until Shabbat, thereby exercising free will to perfect themselves, G-d would have allowed them to eat of the Tree of Life and then from the Tree of Knowledge (Arizal, Sefer HaLikutim, Gen. #3, p. 26; Ramchal, Tikunim Chadashim #8). They would have obtained a level of spiritual excellence entitling them to live with full knowledge forever.

However, Adam and Eve transgressed the Will of G-d, bringing upon themselves the consequence of the warning, "But of the Tree of Knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for on the day that you eat thereof, you shall surely die" (Genesis 2:17). This isn't intended literally - they didn't die on that day. Rather it means that they brought upon themselves mortality.

Based on the verse, "For a thousand years in Your eyes are like a day that passed" (Psalms 90:3), our Sages explain that man's life-span was limited to one of "G-d's days" which equals 1000 years. According to this, Adam should have lived to be a thousand years old. Why does the verse assert, "Adam lived nine hundred and thirty years, and he died" (Gen. 5:5)? The Midrash explains that Adam, with his great spiritual insight, foresaw that King David was destined to die as an infant, so he contributed seventy years of his own life to David (Yalkut Shimoni, Gen. 41).

Later, as a result of further "misconduct", man's life-span was shortened even more: "And the Lord said, Let My spirit not quarrel forever concerning man, because he is also flesh, and his days shall be a hundred and twenty years" (Gen. 6:3). Rashi explains G-d's intention: Behold My spirit is quarreling within Me whether to destroy or to have mercy. Let this quarrel in My spirit not endure forever, rather since man is only flesh, and nevertheless he does not subordinate himself before Me, let him live no more than 120 years. Ibn Ezra (c. 1100, Spain) explains that life-spans would gradually decrease, until the maximum will be around 120. (For example, Adam lived to 930, Shem 600, Abraham 175, Jacob 147, Moses 120.)

Finally, until the Flood, there were no extremes in seasons; the weather was always comfortable and temperate. After the Flood, G-d tells Noah that there will be constant seasonal changes (Gen. 8:22). Malbim (1800s, Eastern Europe) explains that until the Flood, the earth's axis had no tilt relative to the sun. As a result of the flood, the earth's axis tilted in relation to the sun. Thus, the earth's climate changed drastically, resulting in a weakening of the human constitution and ability to withstand these constant changes in weather.

As for technology's inability to slow the aging process, "The scientific study of aging is a young discipline" (National Geographic Nov. '97). Compared to many areas of science, relatively little is known about aging. Richard A. Knox refers to getting older as the "black box of aging," and calls it a "mystery" (The Boston Globe 1997).

By way of example, take the case of Jeanne Calment who died in France at the age of 122. How was she able to live *that* long? No one knows. Given that she lived that long, why *only* that long? "Officials gave no specific cause of death" (Houston Chronicle News Services 8/5/97). Medically speaking, it seems she could have lived another ten - or 100 years. Let's suggest it's because of this universal decree - we'll know for sure after (app.) 120.

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THE DOUBLE ERROR

Question: I hired the services of a painter to do some extensive work in my home and he quoted a reasonable price of \$3,000 for the job. When he completed his work he asked for \$2,750. Aware that he had quoted a higher price I asked him if he wasn't making a mistake in the sum he was asking. To my surprise he replied, "Well, if you're bargaining I'll settle for \$2,500." I gladly paid him that sum but my conscience bothers me in regard to the \$500 I saved as a result of this double error. What is the right thing to do?

Answer: A similar question was put to Rabbi Yitzchak Zilberstein, Rabbi of the Ramat Elchanan community in Bnei Brak, and he compared the settlement made in your case to that of one made as the result of a mistake of a rabbinical judge.

In *Shulchan Aruch Choshen Mishpat* (25:5) we find a case of

one of the litigants in a financial lawsuit consenting to a compromise settlement in order to avoid taking an oath which the judge had imposed on him to substantiate his claim. If the judge subsequently realizes that he had erred in requiring the oath, the compromise that had been reached on its basis is no longer binding since the concession made in reaching the compromise was the result of a mistake.

In the case you mentioned, the painter also was not consciously forgoing payment due him but simply forgot the price you initially agreed upon. If you loan someone \$3,000 and later ask him to pay the \$2,500 he owes you, would you consider that a forfeiting of your claim to the other \$500 that you subsequently remember he owes you as well?

In conclusion, give the painter the \$500 you saved as a result of his double error.

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY _____

WHAT ARE "PHYLACTERIES"?

"I haven't missed a day in the last six years." This was the proud boast of a recent visitor to Ohr Somayach in Jerusalem as he spoke of his dedication to the mitzvah of *tefillin* which he discovered in the middle years of his life in a most interesting way.

A professional musician for most of his adult life, he was overjoyed at receiving front row tickets to a Broadway musical from a close relative who was a member of the cast. It turned out that this production had a pronounced anti-Semitic and anti-religious flavor. As he watched a song and dance skit poking fun at Jews wearing phylacteries his blood began to boil. Although married out of his faith and even

unaware of what phylacteries were, his Jewish soul rebelled against this sacrilegious satire and he decided to do something about it. After the show he called a rabbi with whom he had been studying in his quest to return to his Jewish roots and asked him to purchase for him the most expensive set of phylacteries, whatever they were.

"You mean *tefillin*," explained the rabbi, adding that a male adult Jew is obliged to put them on every day except for Shabbat and Holidays.

This did not weaken his resolve, and his commitment to *tefillin* eventually led him to a full Jewish life-style and marriage to a fine religious woman.

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