

OHRNET

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PARSHA INSIGHTS

THE PRINCESS AND THE BENTLEY

"Thou shalt not covet." (20:14)

How is it possible to command people not to covet? Coveting is a knee-jerk reaction, isn't it? You see someone driving along in a Bentley Continental and before you can even think twice, your envy-glands go into overdrive. Covetousness is a reflex, isn't it? It's not in the domain of intellectual control, is it?

Once there was a peasant who stood in line all day to see the king pass by. At last, the royal procession drew close. He craned his neck to catch a glimpse of the royal countenance. Immediately behind the king stood the crown princess; the peasant was taken aback. The princess was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen. She had delicate pale features. All the women he knew had coarse sun-browned skin and bad teeth. A peasant's life is not conducive to physical beauty. However, despite the princess's exquisite appearance, not for one moment did the peasant desire or covet her. She was someone so above his station in life that it never entered

his mind that he was even in the same world as her. She remained an ethereal unreality in another cosmos

The root of all desire is the unconscious assumption that we *could* have the object of our desire. If we feel that it's possible for us to have that thing, if we feel that it's within our orbit, the next step is to covet it.

The truth of the matter is that G-d puts each of us on our own separate monorail in life. Like two trains speeding past each other in the night that come ever-so-close, but never (hopefully) touch.

The fact that you have a Bentley Continental and I don't doesn't mean that if you weren't around I could have your car. It means that if you weren't around that Bentley Continental wouldn't exist.

The mitzvah of not coveting tells us to look at someone else's Bentley as peasant looks at a princess.

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PARSHA OVERVIEW

Hearing of the miracles G-d performed for *Bnei Yisrael*, Moshe's father-in-law Yitro arrives with Moshe's wife and sons, reuniting the family in the wilderness. Yitro is so impressed by Moshe's detailing of the Exodus from Egypt that he converts to Judaism. Seeing that the only judicial authority for the entire Jewish nation is Moshe himself, Yitro suggests that subsidiary judges be appointed to adjudicate smaller matters, leaving Moshe free to attend to larger issues. Moshe accepts his advice. *Bnei Yisrael* arrive at Mt. Sinai where G-d offers them the Torah. After they accept, G-d charges Moshe to instruct the people not to approach the mountain and to prepare for three days. On the third day, amidst thunder and lightning, G-d's voice

emanates from the smoke-enshrouded mountain and He speaks to the Jewish People, giving them the Ten Commandments: 1. Believe in G-d, 2. Don't worship other "gods", 3. Don't use G-d's name in vain, 4. Observe Shabbat, 5. Honor your parents, 6. Don't murder, 7. Don't commit adultery, 8. Don't kidnap, 9. Don't testify falsely, 10. Don't covet.

After receiving the first two commandments, the Jewish People, overwhelmed by this experience of the Divine, request that Moshe relay G-d's word to them. G-d instructs Moshe to caution the Jewish People regarding their responsibility to be faithful to the One who spoke to them.

ISRAEL Forever

TREES AND TORAH

The week Jews in Israel and throughout the world marked Tu B'Shvat, the New Year of the Trees, by eating fruits that grew in Eretz Israel or are related to the land in a Torah passage describing the fruits that the land is famous for. The secular community has turned it into a sort of Arbor Day in which trees are planted in national forests.

It is interesting to note the connection between trees and the Torah portion that will be read this Shabbat in syna-

gogues everywhere. Parshat Yitro relates the giving of the Torah to our people, and King David has already described, in the very first chapter of *Tehillim*, how the man "whose desire is Torah" is "like a tree planted by the parting of the waters... whose every effort meets with success."

This link between Torah and Eretz Yisrael should inspire us to plant more "Torah trees" which will bear the fruit of success for Israel forever.

LOVE OF THE LAND

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

TEL AVIV – THE GATEWAY TO ERETZ YISRAEL

The emblem of this city, officially known as Tel Aviv-Jaffa, is a lighthouse and a gate, symbols of the city's historic role as the gateway from the sea to Eretz Yisrael. Jaffa ("Yafeh" in Hebrew means "beautiful") is mentioned as a port in the Book of Yonah, which is read at Mincha on Yom Kippur. Jews began returning to this port in 1840 and subsequent immigra-



tion led to the development of colonies in the area.

The climax of this growth was the establishment in 1908 of Tel Aviv, the major urban center of modern Israel. Tel Aviv was the name of a city in Babylon where exiles from Eretz Yisrael had gathered (*Yechezkel* 3:15) but, its Zionist founders gave the new city this name because it was the title of the Hebrew translation of Hertz's "Altneuland".

לע"נ

מרת פייגה בת ר' דוד ע"ה

ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

PARSHA Q&A ?

1. Yitro had 7 names. Why was one of his names *Yeter*?
2. News of which two events motivated Yitro to come join the Jewish People?
3. What name of Yitro indicates his love for Torah?
4. Why was Tzipora with her father, Yitro, and not with Moshe when *Bnei Yisrael* left Egypt?
5. Why does verse 18:5 say that Yitro came to the desert — don't we already know that the *Bnei Yisrael* were in the desert?
6. Why did Moshe tell Yitro all that G-d had done for the Jewish People?
7. According to the *Midrash* quoted by Rashi, how did Yitro respond when he was told about the destruction of Egypt?
8. Who is considered as if he enjoys the splendor of the *Shechina*?
9. On what day did Moshe sit to judge the Jewish People?
10. Who is considered a co-partner in Creation?
11. "Moshe sat to judge the people, and the people stood before Moshe...." What bothered Yitro about this arrangement?
12. Why did Yitro return to his own land?
13. How did the encampment at Sinai differ from the other encampments?
14. To whom does the Torah refer when it uses the term "*Beit Yaakov*"?
15. How is G-d's protection of the Jewish People similar to an eagle's protection of its young?
16. What was G-d's original plan for *Matan Torah*? What was the response of the Jewish People?
17. How many times greater is the "measure of reward" than the "measure of punishment"?
18. How is it derived that "Don't steal" refers to kidnapping?
19. In response to hearing the Torah given at Sinai, how far backwards did the Jewish people retreat in fear?
20. Why does the use of iron tools profane the altar?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

1. 18:1 - Because he caused a parsha to be added to the Torah. *Yeter* means addition.
2. 18:1 - The splitting of the sea and the war against Amalek.
3. 18:1 - Chovav.
4. 18:3 - When Aharon met Moshe with his family on their way down to Egypt, Aharon said to Moshe: "We're pained over the Jews already in Egypt, and you're bringing more Jews to Egypt?" Moshe, hearing this, sent his wife and children back to Midian.
5. 18:5 - To show Yitro's greatness. He was living in a luxurious place; yet he went to the desert in order to study the Torah.
6. 18:8 - To draw Yitro closer to the Torah way of life.
7. 18:9 - He grieved.
8. 18:12 - One who dines with Torah scholars.
9. 18:13 - The day after Yom Kippur.
10. 18:13 - A judge who renders a correct decision.
11. 18:14 - Yitro felt that the people weren't being treated with the proper respect.
12. 18:27 - To convert the members of his family to Judaism.
13. 19:2 - The Jewish People were united.
14. 19:3 - The Jewish women.
15. 19:4 - An eagle carries its young on top of its wings to protect them from human arrows. So too, G-d's cloud of glory separated between the Egyptians and the Jewish camp in order to absorb Egyptian missiles and arrows fired at the Jewish People.
16. 19:9 - G-d offered to appear to Moshe and to give the Torah through him. The Jewish People responded that they wished to hear the Torah directly from G-d.
17. 20:6 - 500 times.
18. 20:13 - Since it is written immediately after "Don't murder" and "Don't commit adultery," it is derived that "Don't steal" refers to a crime carrying the same penalty as the first two, namely, the death penalty.
19. 20:15 - They backed away from the mountain twelve *mil* (one *mil* is 2000 cubits).
20. 20:22 - The altar was created to extend life; iron is sometimes used to make weapons which shorten life.

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Parsha Insights written by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair • General Editor: Rabbi Moshe Newman • Design: Rabbi Eliezer Shapiro

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- Redeeming a field sold after two years of being non-productive
- When the first purchaser sells to another at a price higher than what he paid and the seller wishes to redeem it
- If a field or Hebrew slave increases in value how do we set the cost of redemption
- The punishment for doing business with *shmitah* produce
- The duty to redeem a Jew who sold himself to a non-Jew
- Restrictions on the source for money to redeem a sold field
- Sale and redemption of a house in a walled city
- The similarity of such redemption to usury
- Is it the solar or lunar year which counts in regard to redemption
- The decree of Hillel regarding the ability of the seller of such a house to compel buyer to accept payment
- Examples of walled cities
- How houses sold in an unwalled city are redeemed
- The special nature of areas around the city

POETIC JUSTICE

During the seventh *shmitah* year there is a prohibition against performing agricultural work in order to remember that the earth belongs to G-d. There is also a less severe prohibition against doing business with products which grow by themselves during that year.

How serious are the consequences of violating this latter prohibition, which is described as “dust” in comparison with the former, is suggested by the order of laws which appear in the Torah (*Vayikra* 25:12-48) following the ban on commerce with the produce of the Yovel year which is similar to the *shmitah* year in regard to the prohibition against such

activity. The violator will reach a situation of financial distress which will compel him to sell his belongings, his house and even himself if he fails to change his ways.

Tosefot asks why the Sages assumed that these punishments are for the violation of the prohibition against commerce with *shmitah* produce rather than assume that they are retribution for the more serious sins of actually doing agricultural work?

The answer given is that Heavenly punishment for sin is the form of the poetic justice of “measure for measure”. Since the punishment comes in the form of selling one’s possessions, it can be assumed that the sin was also one of selling rather than one of performing agricultural work.

• *Arachin* 30b

WHAT THE Sages SAY

“Once a person has sinned and repeated his sin he views such action as permissible.”

• *Rabbi Huna - Arachin* 30b

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UNFIT TEFILLIN

From: Michael

*Dear Rabbi,
I received a pair of tefillin from my grandfather (of blessed memory) when I became a bar mitzvah about ten years ago, and now I've started wearing them regularly. Since he was a religious man, do I have to check that they're kosher, or can I rely on the fact that he was Jewishly knowledgeable and assume that they're OK?*

Dear Michael,

Tefillin definitely have to be "kosher". The laws governing the making of the boxes and the parchments of tefillin are very complicated and involved, as well as the laws of actually writing the relevant passages on the parchments. This means that they absolutely must be obtained from G-d-fearing, reliable tefillin-makers and scribes.

There are certain requirements that can't even be detected after the writing of the parchments and the construction of the boxes are complete. And even if all was prepared correctly, tefillin that were not properly kept could become damaged and rendered unfit.

In cases such as yours, even well-meaning and observant grandparents (or other such family members) are often not knowledgeable enough or careful enough to buy good-quality, kosher tefillin from properly reliable sources. Also, the matter of years of disuse calls in to question whether the tefillin were properly guarded from possible damage.

Therefore you certainly must have the tefillin checked by a G-d-fearing expert to make sure that you are, in fact, fulfilling the mitzvah of tefillin as you intend. If, for whatever reason, they are found to be unkosher and cannot be repaired, while

they may have sentimental value to you, that's not enough to be able to use them for the mitzvah.

In such case, regarding having already used them, even though technically you may not have fulfilled the mitzvah, be assured that G-d is certainly pleased with your good intention, in which your departed grandfather has a part and from which he derives spiritual benefit, but you'll still have to acquire (either by buying or borrowing) a kosher pair.

When Rabbi Israel of Rozhin passed away, his sons decided to distribute his belongings among themselves according to lots. It turned out that one of his younger sons received the prized tefillin of their grandfather, the great Maggid of Mezritch. When two students of the eldest son heard that he was upset over not having received the tefillin, they secretly removed the parchments of the Maggid's tefillin and replaced them with other kosher ones, it being their intention to give the illustrious parchments to their rabbi at a later opportunity.

After two years, that opportunity arose. But when the eldest brother found out what they had done, he was beside himself with grief at the thought that his younger brother had used kosher, but fake "Maggid-tefillin", for all that time. He rushed to his brother's town only to find that he had two pair of tefillin, one which he wore, and another, the Maggid's, which he would take in his hands, gaze at, and with a sigh, return to their place.

When his older brother asked him the reason for this odd behavior, the younger replied that since having received the tefillin, he somehow, unexplainably, felt it improper to use them but rather longed for the day that he would feel fit to wear them. Realizing that it was precisely his younger brother's righteousness which guarded him from using the imposter pair, the elder brother told him the true story and explained that it was not he who was unfit for the tefillin, but rather the tefillin were unfit for him.

WHAT'S THE RIGHT THING TO DO?

REAL-LIFE QUESTIONS OF SOCIAL AND BUSINESS ETHICS

THE TWO-HEADED CREATURE

Question: In a previous column you dealt with the issue of cell-phones. Can you offer some guidelines on how to properly use this very useful and sometimes very disturbing instrument?

Answer: No one can question the value of these instruments of communication for some people. But this instrument is a two-headed creature in more ways than one. In our last discussion on this subject we focused on the failure of people to turn off their cell-phones when they are in public places which insist on their doing so. We also discussed the insensitivity of people carrying on loud conversations that disturb fellow passengers on public vehicles. There are, however, other dangers in cell-phones which caring parents should be aware of.

Many cell-phones in use today provide access to so-called

information and entertainment material that hardly any parent would wish his child to be exposed to. As a result, the control that parents try to maintain in the home is lost.

Speaking of control it was once assumed that parents could somehow supervise with whom their son or daughter is in contact by knowing that phone calls made to them would be made to their home. There are, unfortunately, some unsavory people who exploit the cell-phone revolution for developing relationships unknown to parents and unwelcome to them.

Parents who give their children a cell-phone so that they can always "be close to home" should take the necessary precautions to prevent this two-headed creature from pulling them away from home.

Ephraim Stern

Jerusalem

Optometrist

Currently a student at Ohr Somayach

Mr. Stern, a Korean War veteran, was touched by the 6-Day War while living in New York and began sending his daughters on trips to Israel. All three of his girls eventually married and settled in Israel, so when he retired, the Holy Land became his Holy Home.



met his wonderful wife, Ellen, in Ibiza, a resort. She has been a professional artist since the age of 14, and since her husband began learning at Ohr Somayach, she has graciously donated her Biblical paintings in thanks for all it has given her and her husband. Mr. Stern calls Ohr Somayach “a revelation.” Ohr Somayach’s learning program has given him a new lease on life, a new sense of family, and a new purpose.

Life is a masterpiece of “The Great Artist” and the Torah is His template. May we

Ephraim Stern received his degree in Optometry. He all merit to see its beauty.

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

WHO IS LISTENING?

“Oh Merciful G-d, I am an orphan without any means and I hope to soon get married. Please help me.”

This was a part of the impassioned plea made years ago by a poor yeshiva student at the Kotel.

Although he had directed his prayer to Heaven alone, the passion with which he said his words caused his voice to rise enough for them to be heard by a Jew standing near him. When both had concluded their prayers and were about to leave the area, the young man was approached by the man

who had overheard his prayers, the owner of a thriving food store in Jerusalem.

“I heard you describing your desperate situation,” he informed him, “and I am prepared to personally provide you with the funds you need to arrange a wedding and purchase a home.”

A touching story but, even more than that, another reminder that when G-d answers the prayers which He has heard, He makes sure that the right party hears as well and answers those prayers on His behalf.

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