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PARSHA INSIGHTS

THE MOST INFECTIOUS DISEASE IN THE WORLD

"A completely red cow..." (19:2)

Nothing is more frightening than plague. Plague. The invisible killer that stalks the noontday sun as it does the darkest night. A few years ago after the terrible tragedy of 9/11, much of the Western World was reduced to blind panic by the threat of plague-infected letters sent through the mail.

The most infectious disease in the world, however, is neither bubonic plague nor Anthrax. It is something with which we are all quite familiar.

In this week's Torah Portion, we learn of the mitzvah of the *Para Aduma*, the Red Heifer. An essential part of the mitzvah required a red cow of at least three years old that was completely red. If more than one hair on its entire body was any other color than red, the animal was invalid. In addition, the *Para Aduma* was disqualified if it had ever been harnessed to a yoke. Needless to say, *Parot Adumot* did not turn up every day.

It once happened that, despite searching high and low, the Sanhedrin could not find a *Para Aduma*. Eventually they learned that a certain non-Jew indeed owned a completely red cow. A delegation was dispatched to verify and negotiate for the purchase of the animal. The owner of the cow proposed a price of 400 gold coins. The delegates accepted and informed the owner that they would return the following day with the money. In the meantime, the owner of the cow told his friends about the prospective sale. As a result of this, he discovered just how rare and valuable the heifer was. When the envoys of the Sanhedrin returned the following day, the owner told them bluntly "I've changed my mind. The animal is not for sale." The delegation offered him more money but he was adamant. Offers and refusals flew back and forth until finally the Sages offered him an extra one hundred gold coins (some say a thousand). To this offer he acquiesced. The Sages told him that they would return the following day with the full sum.

After they left, the owner of the cow joked with his neighbor: "You know why they offered me so much money? Their

religion says that they have to have a cow that's never been harnessed to a yoke. I think I'll play a little trick on them."

That night, he took the *Para Aduma*, harnessed it and plowed with it. The following morning the delegation returned with the money. Before paying, however, they wanted to examine the animal. After a few seconds they turned to the expectant owner and said, "Keep the cow. We don't need it." He was dumbfounded as to how the Sages knew what he had done. He said, "Blessed be He Who chose this nation." And then, broken-hearted at losing this vast fortune, he went and strangled himself.

How did the Sages know that the animal had been used for plowing?

A cow that has never been yoked has two particular hairs on its neck that are straight. After it has been yoked they are permanently bent. Also, the eyes of an unyoked animal do not blink. After it has been yoked, it squints, trying to see the yoke.

The question remains, however, why the owner of the cow jeopardized a king's ransom for a little bit of sport. How could he risk so much to satisfy his vindictiveness? Surely it must have crossed his mind that the Sages weren't merely going to rely on his word and might have ways of verifying his claim.

Nothing is more infectious than a bad character trait. The owner's greed and his love of money caused him to renege on his original agreement. But it didn't stop there. That character flaw provoked other character flaws to surface: deceit, mockery and vindictiveness.

If we don't make the effort to improve our character in one area, necessarily we will find deficiencies festering in many other areas of our personalities.

For nothing is more infectious than a character flaw.

• Source: Midrash

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PARSHA OVERVIEW

The laws of the *Para Aduma* — the red heifer — are detailed. These laws are for the ritual purification of one who comes into contact with death. After nearly 40 years in the desert, Miriam dies and is buried at Kadesh. The people complain about the loss of their water supply that until now has been provided miraculously in the merit of Miriam's righteousness. Aharon and Moshe pray for the people's welfare. G-d commands them to gather the nation at Merivah and speak to a designated rock so that water will flow forth. Distressed by the people's lack of faith, Moshe hits the rock instead of speaking to it. He thus fails to produce the intended public demonstration of G-d's mastery over the world, which would have resulted had the rock

produced water merely at Moshe's word. Therefore, G-d tells Moshe and Aharon that they will not bring the people into the Land. *Bnei Yisrael* resume their travels, but because the King of Edom, a descendant of Esav, denies them passage through his country, they do not travel the most direct route to Eretz Yisrael. When they reach Mount Hor, Aharon dies and his son Elazar is invested with his priestly garments and responsibilities. Aharon was beloved by all, and the entire nation mourns him 30 days. Sichon the Amorite attacks *Bnei Yisrael* when they ask to pass through his land. As a result, *Bnei Yisrael* conquer the lands that Sichon had previously seized from the Amonites on the east bank of the Jordan River.

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INGRATITUDE AND PROTEST

“Why did you bring us up from Egypt”, complained the people against G-d and Moshe, “to die in this Wilderness, for there is no food and no water.” (*Bamidbar* 21:5)

Public protests are hardly something new as is evident from this incident in this week's Torah portion.

That their protest was not justified is rather obvious in light of the fact that they had Heaven-sent manna to eat and water from the miraculous well which followed them.

The gross ingratitude shown by the people was punished by the sending of fiery serpents that killed a large multitude of the complainers.

There certainly are some things about the political and economic situations in Israel that are legitimate causes for complaint. But before the protesters mount the barricades they should reflect on the fact that they have “food and water”, keep their protest within the proper proportions and be grateful to G-d 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

TIFRACH — THE BLOSSOMING LAND

When the Prophet Yeshayahu uttered his vision of the ultimate redemption of the Jewish People, he described the accompanying revival of the desolate Holy Land that will “blossom like a rose” (*Yeshayahu* 35:1). The Hebrew term for “to blossom” is *tifrach* and that is the name of a set-



tlement in the south of Eretz Yisrael. The nearby settlements of Gilat, Ronen, Maslul and Peduim are also named for terms found in that prophecy.

There is a famous yeshiva in this observant community, which attracts students from all of Israel and the world.

לע"נ

מרת פייגא בת ר' דוד ע"ה

נלב"ע ט' תמוז תשע"א

ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

PARSHA Q&A ?

1. "Take a perfect *Para Aduma* (red heifer)." What does the word "perfect" — *temima* — mean in this context?
2. How many non-red hairs disqualify a cow as a *para aduma*?
3. A man dies in a tent. What happens to the sealed metal and earthenware utensils in the tent?
4. What happens to the one who: a) sprinkles the water mixed with the ashes of the *Para Aduma*; b) touches the water; c) carries the water?
5. Why was the *mitzvah* of the *Para Aduma* entrusted to Elazar rather than to Aharon?
6. Why does the Torah stress that *all* of the congregation came to *Midbar Tzin*?
7. Why is Miriam's death taught after the law of *Para Aduma*?
8. During their journey in the *midbar*, in whose merit did the Jewish People receive water?
9. Why did Moshe need to strike the rock a second time?
10. When Moshe told the King of Edom that the Jewish People would not drink from the well-water, to which well did he refer? What do we learn from this?
11. The cloud that led the Jewish People leveled all mountains in their path except three. Which three and why?
12. Why did the *entire* congregation mourn Aharon's death?
13. What disappeared when Aharon died?
14. Which "inhabitant of the South" (21:1) attacked the Jews?
15. For what two reasons did G-d punish the people with snakes specifically?
16. Why did the Jewish People camp in Arnon, rather than pass through Moav to enter *Eretz Canaan*?
17. What miracle took place at the valley of Arnon?
18. What was the "strength" of Amon that prevented the Jewish People from entering into their Land?
19. Why was Moshe afraid of Og?
20. Who killed Og?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

1. 19:2 - Perfectly red.
2. 19:2 - Two.
3. 19:14,15 - The metal utensils are impure for seven days, even if they are sealed. The sealed earthenware vessels are unaffected.
4. 19:21 - a) Remains *tahor*; b) He, but not his clothing, contracts *tumah*; c) He and his clothing contract *tumah*.
5. 19:22 - Because Aharon was involved in the sin of the golden calf.
6. 20:1 - To teach that they were *all* fit to enter the Land; everyone involved in the sin of the spies already died.
7. 20:1 - To teach that just as sacrifices bring atonement, so too does the death of the righteous.
8. 20:2 - Miriam's.
9. 20:11 - After he hit it the first time, only a few drops came out since he was commanded to *speak* to the rock.
10. 20:17 - To the well that traveled with the nation in the *midbar*. This teaches that one who has adequate provisions should nevertheless purchase goods from his host in order to benefit the host.
11. 20:22 - *Har Sinai* for receiving the Torah, *Har Nevo* for Moshe's burial, and *Hor Hahar* for Aharon's burial.
12. 20:29 - Aharon made peace between contending parties and between spouses. Thus, everybody mourned him.
13. 20:29 - The clouds of glory disappeared, since they sheltered the Jews in Aharon's merit.
14. 21:1 - Amalek.
15. 21:6 - The original snake, who was punished for speaking evil, is fitting to punish those who spoke evil about G-d and about Moshe. And the snake, for whom everything tastes like dust, is fitting to punish those who complained about the manna which changed to any desired taste.
16. 21:13 - Moav refused them passage.
17. 21:15 - The Amorites hid in caves in the mountain on the Moabite side of the valley in order to ambush the Jews. When the Jews approached, the mountain on the *Eretz Canaan* side of the valley moved close to the other mountain and the Amorites were crushed.
18. 21:24 - G-d's command, "Do not harass them" (*Devarim* 2:19).
19. 21:34 - Og had once been of service to Avraham. Moshe was afraid that this merit would assist Og in battle.
20. 21:35 - Moshe.

- The reconciliation of the two caskets
- What interrupts counting the clean days of the zav
- How many days for full-term birth
- The impact of fear on the menstrual cycle
- During which part of the menstrual cycle is a woman more prone to bleeding
- The status of a woman who gives birth through Caesarian section
- Which disqualifications of a sacrifice cause it to be removed from the altar
- A discussion of the female anatomy in reference to the laws of *nidah*
- Ages of puberty in boys and girls

COUNTING THE DAYS

“**A**nd G-d let her have *harayon* (conception of a child).” *Ruth* 4:13 This terse report on Ruth’s conceiving and bearing a child whose descendant will be King David serves as a guideline to the length of time between conception and birth.

The *gematria* (numerical equivalent of the word *harayon* (*hei* = 5, *reish* = 200, *yud* = 10, *vav* = 6, *nun* = 50) is 271,

which is the equivalent of nine 30-day months plus one.

If conception did not take place right away, this period could extend to 272 or even 273 days.

Aware of this schedule, the early extremely righteous Jews purposely planned for conception to take place on a day in the week so that the actual birth would not take place on Shabbat and necessitate a violation (though permitted for lifesaving) of the holiness of that day.

• *Nidah* 38b

WHAT THE Sages SAY

“Even those who say that those who give birth in nine months do not give birth before full term agree that those who give birth in seven months such a birth can take place in six months and two days.”

• *The Sage Mar Zutra - Nidah* 38b

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SATURDAY OR SHABBAT

From: Ken

Dear Rabbi,

My wife and I are both professionals, work all week indoors, and don't get to see each other, or our children very much. We are very much challenged by the idea of observing Shabbat indoors, first in shul, then in the house. We need to get out with our kids, be active and celebrate "G-d's Creation" by using it, not refraining from enjoying it. It's for this reason that we don't keep the Shabbat. Do you have any insights that might help us resolve these tensions? Much thanks.

Dear Ken,

First, let me commend you on caring about the Shabbat, and being honest about your dilemma.

Like yourselves, many people in our modern day are greatly challenged by the need to find a healthy balance between the demands of modern career life and traditional family values.

However, rather than viewing Shabbat as exacerbating the problem, you should really see that it's the solution to the problem.

Two of the many pitfalls in the modern work ethic and routine are that people tend to view their own efforts as the source of their success; and, related to this, since professional success "depends" on time investment and effort, the emotional, psychological and spiritual needs of the children are necessarily neglected.

These are two of the many ailments that Shabbat cures. Shabbat halts the cut-throat rat-race and says: Stop! Realize that the G-d is the source of the material world, and therefore the source of its blessing. Recall that there are more

important things in life than one's profession, like family and friends.

Now while you seem to recognize and recall this, you think that Shabbat is in the way. You want, as you say, to celebrate G-d's Creation by using it with your family, not refraining from enjoying it. But this is misleading.

When you give your kids a gift, and in their excitement they open up the wrapping, tear apart the packaging and then run off to play with the toy for hours, wouldn't you expect them to thank you first, and give you a kiss and a hug? And not so much for the reason that you need the recognition, but rather because, out of your love for them, you want them to do what's right and refined, for their sake.

Shabbat is not the time to use the world, but rather the prelude to using it by recognizing and thanking G-d for being able to enjoy it, for our sake.

And when you take your family out to "celebrate" Creation, while you might have lots of fun, you are not necessarily spending quality time with them. Often, outings are more of a distraction from each other than a way of connecting with each other.

Shabbat, on the other hand, with the time spent walking together to and from shul, directly interacting with each other around the Shabbat table or learning, reading and discussing together with the children what they have learned during the week, is the ideal way to spend quality time of content with the family.

So Shabbat is not in the way; it is the way.

That being said, there's no reason why one can't celebrate Creation on Shabbat without using it. A family can go for walks in the neighborhood, the park, a forest, along the shore or any other such place accessible and appropriate for Shabbat. Kids can play ball, Frisbee and the like, and families and friends can even meet in a picnic-like setting. And even if one can't go everywhere, do everything and for as long as he'd like to on Shabbat – there's always Sunday!

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

THE CANDLE CURE

In our "Generation of Return" it often happens that one spouse becomes committed to the observance of *mitzvot* while the other lags behind.

One such case involved a woman who had become Shabbat observant and came to complain to her local rabbi that her still irreligious husband smokes on Shabbat and ruins the atmosphere of holiness that she tries to maintain in their home.

His advice to her was to ask her husband to refrain from

smoking as long as the Shabbat candles burned. When she reported that her husband had agreed to this compromise and actually refrained from smoking as long as the candles burned, the rabbi advised her to use thicker candles the next Shabbat. Once again the husband was faithful to his commitment. After a few weeks she lit even larger candles until she finally started lighting those "Yahrzeit candles" which burned throughout the Shabbat and kept her home cigarette smoke-free throughout the Holy Day of Rest.

The Propaganda of Poverty

By Rabbi Mendel Weinbach

“The Jews have all the money!” This bloody battle-cry of anti-Semitism in Europe is now being turned on its head by secular critics who shed crocodile tears about Jews who have no money.

“As in Israel, the religious population in America is disproportionately represented among the poor.”

Thus reports the Jerusalem Post in its review of a new study of Jews living in New York, and funded by the UJA Federation of New York, which found that 74 percent of their children in the city are Orthodox. To blur the credit which is due to these Jews for rebuilding the Jewish community in New York, the report notes that the poverty rate among the religious community, the main source of population growth, is 48 percent compared to 27 percent for Jews as a whole. “It is the nature of their tight-knit communities and strong ethos of charity,” concludes the report, “that makes them better equipped to deal with poverty.”

“To deal with poverty?” we ask. “What poverty?”

To describe these Jews as pitifully poor and dependant on charity reflects a total ignorance of both the condition and the values of these Jews. No one is without food, clothing

and shelter. They are content with the basic necessities and do not view themselves as unfortunate victims. This is because they follow in the footsteps of their forefather Yaakov who asked Heaven only for “bread to eat and clothes to wear.” The Hebrew phrase *mistapek bemu’at*, which means being content with less, is a supreme value in this community.

Add to this the fact that for many of these “poor” people, it is more important to spend time and energy in Torah study, prayer and good deeds than in earning more money to purchase the luxuries needed by others.

In Israel anti-religious elements constantly point to the so-called “poverty level” of religious Jews as an excuse for planning legislation which will end the practice of deferring Yeshiva students from military and national service and force them to enter the workforce at an early age and escape “poverty”.

This is “propaganda poverty” masquerading as concern for lower income Jews but in actuality part of a secular agenda to radically change the nature and values of Jews faithful to their sacred tradition.

WHAT'S THE RIGHT THING TO DO?

REAL-LIFE QUESTIONS OF SOCIAL AND BUSINESS ETHICS

GIVING A LIFT

Question: As I drive to shul or work in the morning I pass people waiting for a bus who may be going in my direction. Offering them a lift causes me to lose precious moments in my tight schedule and irritate the drivers in the cars behind me. What is the right thing to do?

Answer: One of the *mitzvot* that guarantees a Heavenly reward in this world and the next is *hachnasat orchim* - hospitality to guests. The late Torah giant, Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, *zatzal*, once noted that in our modern society one usually has guests for meals because he wants their company and this can barely qualify as benevolent hospitality. The greatest opportunity for fulfilling this mitzvah today, he said, is offering someone a ride in your car.

A visitor from the States told us about a eulogy which he heard last month for a Jew who, until he died at the age of 97, never missed going to shul in the morning to pray with a minyan despite his frail condition. One day he was standing on the sidewalk futilely trying to hail a cab. As a last resort he waved to a passing garbage truck. When the Brooklyn Sanitation Department worker heard his problem he invited him in to the cab of his truck and went out of his way to drive him to shul.

This story is not only a lesson in what King David tells us about G-d fulfilling the wishes of those who revere Him but also a challenge to those who indifferently pass up the opportunity for inviting a guest into their car.