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PARSHA INSIGHTS

THE PRICE OF PRIVILEGE

“These are the words that you shall speak to the Children of Israel.” (19:6)

Rashi: These words - no less and no more.

We live in a world where inflation is an everyday part of life. But there’s one thing that still costs the same as it always did. One thing that’s inflation proof. There’s one thing that costs exactly the same as it did three thousand years ago. Being Jewish.

You can join the Jewish People today for exactly the same price as it cost three thousand years ago: accepting the Kingdom of Heaven and the *mitzvot*.

Anyone can become Jewish if he wants to.

The enemies of the Jewish people have always accused the Torah of being racist, setting the Jewish People apart as a treasured people and a holy nation. But how can Judaism be racist and exclusivist if anyone can join?

It’s true the Jewish People are “privileged”. They have a special place in the purpose of Creation, to be a “kingdom of priests and a holy nation”.

There is no privilege, however, without responsibility.

Rashi tells us that the above command, to speak ‘these words’ to the Children of Israel, contains an implicit mandate not to add or subtract from G-d’s

words. However, the Sages when commenting on another verse, “Thus you will say to the House of Yaakov,” tell us that G-d instructed Moshe to convey the Torah in different ways to the Jewish People. For example, when speaking to the women he was to use gentle words. When speaking to the men, however, he was to use language as tough as sinew.

So how could Moshe on the one hand not change one word - “These are the words that shall speak” – These and no other - and on the other hand vary his words to suit his audience?

When the Jewish People heard “And you will be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy people”, there were those who heard these as gentle words, words that allowed them to bask in the glory and the exaltation of such a mission.

Other people, however, heard these self-same words but understood that they bespoke a destiny as tough as sinew. For to be a holy nation and a treasured people is a responsibility of awesome proportions.

There is a price for privilege.

• Source – *S’fat Emet*

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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.

LOVE OF THE LAND

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

WHO NEEDS PEACE?

Perhaps the greatest political controversy in Israel in our time is what price to pay for peace with those enemies who wish to destroy us.

Without entering into the practical aspects of this issue, it is worth reflecting on what the Torah says about peace in this week's Torah portion.

After promising plentiful rain, bountiful harvests



and a booming economy if Jews study the Torah and perform the *mitzvot*, G-d adds that "I will grant peace in the Land." (*Vayikra* 26:6)

One can have food and drink, explain our Sages, but they have no value if there is no peace.

"This teaches us," they conclude, "that peace is equal in value to everything else."

לע"נ
הרב חנא מנחם מנדל בן ר' יחזקאל שרגא זצ"ל
ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

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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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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.

SHABBAT 121 - 127

“Practice hachnassat orchim (hospitality), for this mitzvah is greater even than receiving the presence of the Shechinah and its reward is that one enjoys its fruits in this world while the principle remains for the World to Come.”

The first part is based on what the Patriarch Avraham did when he asked G-d to wait while he attended to the three guests who visited him. The reward is based on a statement by Rabbi Yochanan about six *mitzvot* which merit such a reward.

• *Shabbat 127a*

“Always judge a person favorably because you then deserve to be judged favorably by Heaven.”

The *gemara* cites several examples of people who did suspicious things but were judged favorably by others.

In one case the beneficiary of such treatment turned to his judge and said:

“You were correct in your understanding of what really happened and just as you judged me favorably, may you be judged favorably by Heaven.”

• *Shabbat 127b*

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

REWARD FOR PATIENCE

Taking care of his mentally unstable grandmother in the geriatric ward of the hospital was a very taxing task for the young man. Although she was unreasonably demanding and sometimes violently so, he managed to maintain his composure and to treat her with the greatest respect.

One day, while he was visiting her, she could not find her false teeth. She shouted at him, accusing him of stealing her teeth. When he tried to explain that he was innocent, she gave him such a resounding slap in the face that he felt as

though he was about to lose his own teeth. He nevertheless suffered in silence and helped her locate the lost teeth.

A patient in a nearby bed was so impressed with the behavior of this young man that she decided to suggest him as a matrimonial prospect for a relative, a girl from one of the most respected families in Israel.

The shidduch worked out and on the first day of their marriage the young couple went to visit the grandmother whose patience-inducing slap brought them together.

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BLACK IS BEAUTIFUL

From: Miriam

Dear Rabbi,

The Torah relates how Miriam and Aharon criticized Moshe for marrying a Cushite woman. Since Cush is in Africa, and I think it's considered to be Ethiopia, does this mean that the Torah would prohibit or discourage marrying a dark-skinned person? I can't accept that the Torah would have such a prejudice. And what about the Ethiopian Jews today; are they not to marry other Jews?

Dear Miraim,

Before I explain the enigmatic passages that you refer to, let me clarify from the outset that the Torah requires only that a Jew marry a Jew. The complexion of a person has nothing to do with it, other than individual taste. There are many Jews of very different physical appearances, as well as righteous converts from all over the world, and all are free to marry anyone within "the Tribe" as long as the marriage is according to the Jewish Laws of marriage which have nothing to do with skin color.

So what's the explanation of the events you mention?

First of all, we find in the Torah that Moshe married only one woman, and she's identified elsewhere as Tziporah who was originally of Midian: "Pharaoh...sought to slay Moses; so Moses fled from before Pharaoh. He stayed in the land of Midian, and he sat down by a well....Now the chief of Midian had seven daughters...Moses consented to stay with the man, and he gave his daughter Tziporah to Moses" (Ex. 2:15-21). So we see that Moshe's wife was from Midian (in Arabia) and not Cush (in Africa).

In addition, if Miriam's and Aharon's complaint against Moshe was that he married a black woman, what does that have to do with the explanation of their complaint presented in the very next verse: "Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses regarding the Cushite woman he had married, for he had married a Cushite woman. They said, 'Has the Lord spoken only to Moses? Hasn't He spoken to us too?'" (Num. 12:1-2). What does the fact that they are also prophets have to do with the skin color of his spouse?

Rashi's explanation for all this is as follows:

When Eldad and Meidad were given a special prophetic experience amidst the camp (Num. 11:26), Miriam overheard Moshe's wife Tziporah saying, "Woe to their wives if they will separate from them as my husband separated from me". Miriam understood from this that Moshe had separated from his wife on account of being a prophet. She felt this was unjustified and was critical not of Tziporah, but rather of Moshe for separating from her and causing her anguish.

This explains why, after consulting Aharon about whether he also separated from his wife, they both base their claim against Moshe on the fact that they were also prophets, yet neither separated from their spouses. It also explains G-d's response to their claim, "The Lord suddenly said to Moses, Aaron and Miriam, 'Go out, all three of you, to the Tent of Meeting!'" Rashi explains that Moshe, not needing a mikveh as a result of marital relations, was prepared for this sudden communication, while neither Aharon nor Miriam were prepared and suffered a burning need to immerse themselves in water. Since G-d would interact with Moshe at all times with no forewarning, as opposed to them who would have to initiate and therefore be able to prepare for the experience with G-d, they realized the need for Moshe's separation.

But according to this understanding, why does the Torah refer to Tziporah as a Cushite? The answer is that it has nothing to do with her being from Cush. Rather, this is a term used throughout Jewish sources to refer to an exceptional person of distinction. In a non-pejorative way, it's as if to say, just as a dark-skinned person stands out among light skinned ones, this person is "head and shoulders above the rest." (if it were pejorative, it would be expressed as a white-skinned person among dark people – rather the sources compare the dark person to the distinguished individual).

Other examples of this are in Psalms (7:1) where King Shaul is called "Cush ben Yemini". The Talmud (Mo'ed Katan 16b) explains that "just as a Cushite is distinguishable by his skin, so was Shaul distinguished by his deeds". Similarly, in Amos (9:7) the Jewish people are called "sons of Cush". Here too the Talmud explains "just as a Cushite is distinguishable by his skin, so are the Jewish people distinguished by their ways from all other nations".

written by Shimon O'Heron

David Hong
Singapore
Media Design
Shoresh Program

Poor and alone in Maryland as a young boy, David's family was taken in by Christians, fed and clothed. After his father finished his Doctorate, the memory of that kindness went with them back to Singapore where they joined a Methodist community. Years later, after marriage and starting his own media company, David and his wife – confused by all the options - wanted to find the core principles that tied all sects of Christianity together. For a

while, the principle of "Love people" worked well. Until one day, a friend told them they must keep the Sabbath. This claim re-launched the couple's investigation and led them to Messianic Judaism. At this point, they had never met a real Jewish person and assumed Judaism to be some form of Christianity. Still, things were not clear. They sought to study about the concept of 'Messiah' because that seemed to be the point of agreement for all groups. This led them to studying Jewish texts and hearing authentic Jewish lectures for the first time. Today, their Jewish souls have been activated, and they are working on making *aliyah* to live in Israel ASAP.

WHAT'S THE RIGHT THING TO DO?

REAL-LIFE QUESTIONS OF SOCIAL AND BUSINESS ETHICS

KOSHER KEEPING PETS

Question:

I recently heard that there is an American company which produces kosher food for dogs and cats. I keep kosher but I can't understand why my pet has to keep kosher. What's the right thing to do?

Answer:

Your pet certainly does not have to keep kosher but you do! This includes not deriving any benefit from those foods which the Torah has prohibited us to eat and to derive ben-

efit from.

In regard to pet food, you must be careful not to feed your pet anything which has a blend of meat and dairy ingredients, something fairly common in commercial pet foods. Since many pet foods have grain in their ingredients and are therefore *chametz*, you must be careful not to feed them to your pet on Pesach or even to have such food in your possession.

In conclusion, keeping kosher is not only what you feed yourself, but what you feed your pet as well.

Remembering Rav Weinbach

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