

PARSHA INSIGHTS

ROLLS-ROYCE

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

A tramp stands 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?" asks the tramp. "Here, take the money!" Gingerly, he approaches the car, half-expecting that this is some king of practical joke, and the hand will whisk the money back 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, he extends his hand and slowly grasps the note. And as soon as his fingers clutch the bill, the hand retracts 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 weekly Torah portion "*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 it's possible that he will utter G-d's ineffable name "*To G-d,*" and not complete the sentence by saying the words "*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 another gift to complete even the sentence that we have started to speak.

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Matot

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.

Masei

The Torah names all 42 encampments of *Bnei Yisrael* on their 40-year journey from the Exodus until the crossing of the Jordan River into *Eretz Yisrael*. G-d commands *Bnei Yisrael* to drive out the Canaanites from *Eretz Yisrael* and to demolish every vestige of their idolatry. *Bnei Yisrael* are warned that if they fail to rid the land completely of the Canaanites, those who remain will be "pins in their eyes and thorns in their sides." The boundaries of the Land of Israel are defined, and the tribes are commanded to set aside 48 cities for the *levi'im*, who do not receive a regular portion in the division of the Land. Cities of refuge are to be established: Someone who murders unintentionally may flee there. The daughters of Tzeloachad marry members of their tribe so that their inheritance will stay in their own tribe. Thus ends the Book of *Bamidbar/Numbers*, the fourth of the Books of the Torah.

LOVE OF THE LAND

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

TIFERET YISRAEL

“Do not say ‘When I have free time I will learn’, for you may never have that free time” — Hillel (*Avot* 2:4).

This is a warning to busy leaders and to anyone preoccupied with his activities. When he finds a little free time let him not say; “What can I learn in



such a short time? When I have a big break, then I will sit down to learn”.

That break may never come. In the meantime, those fifteen minutes, a small fraction of your life that is only a long chain of such moments, has been lost to you forever.

• *Tiferet Yisrael*

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OHRNET magazine is published by OHR SOMAYACH Tanenbaum College

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Love of the Land, What's the Right Thing to Do?, The Human Side of the Story written by Rav Mendel Weinbach, zt"l

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

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PARSHA Q&A ?

Matot

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?

Masei

1. Why does the Torah list the places where the Jewish People camped?
2. Why did the King of Arad feel at liberty to attack the Jewish People?
3. What length was the camp in the *midbar*?
4. Why does the Torah need to specify the boundaries that are to be inherited by the Jewish People?
5. What was the *nesi'im*'s role in dividing the Land?
6. When did the three cities east of the Jordan begin to function as refuge cities?
7. There were six refuge cities, three on each side of the Jordan. Yet, on the east side of the Jordan there were only two and a half tribes. Why did they need three cities?
8. To be judged as an intentional murderer, what type of weapon must the murderer use?
9. Why is the *kohen gadol* blamed for accidental deaths?
10. When an ancestral field moves by inheritance from one tribe to another, what happens to it in *yovel*?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to This Week's Questions!

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

Matot

1. 30:2 - Preferably, an expert in the laws of *nedarim*. Otherwise, three ordinary people.
2. 30:10 - If she is under 12 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.

Masei

1. 33:1 - To show G-d's love of the Jewish People. Although it was decreed that they wander in the desert, they did not travel continuously. During 38 years, they moved only 20 times.
2. 33:40 - When Aharon died, the clouds of glory protecting the Jewish People departed.
3. 33:49 - Twelve *mil* (one *mil* is 2,000 *amot*).
4. 34:2 - Because certain *mitzvot* apply only in the Land.
5. 34:17 - Each *nasi* represented his tribe. He also allocated the inheritance to each family in his tribe.
6. 35:13 - After Yehoshua separated three cities west of the Jordan.
7. 35:14 - Because murders were more common there.
8. 35:16 - One capable of inflicting lethal injury.
9. 35:25 - He should have prayed that such things not occur.
10. 36:4 - It remains with the new tribe.

PESACHIM 16 - 22

“During the time (erev Pesach) when one may still eat chametz, the chametz may be fed to one’s animals, and it may be sold to a non-Jew and it is permitted to derive benefit from the chametz.”

This statement begins the second chapter of mesechta Pesachim. The *gemara* on our *daf* asks why the *mishna* needs to teach that it may be sold to a non-Jew if it is actually still permitted for *any* benefit, as is stated in the next few words of the *mishna* (commentary of *Rabbeinu Chananel*).

The answer given by the *gemara* is that the Tana of our *mishna* is teaching that he disagrees with the opinion of another Tana that is found in another *beraita*. That *beraita* teaches that there is a dispute between Beit Hillel and Beit Shammai as to whether one may sell chametz to a non-Jew before Pesach if he does not know if the chametz will be consumed before Pesach. Beit Shammai does not allow this sale since the Jewish seller must be sure that the chametz is not in existence when Pesach begins. Beit Hillel holds that it is sufficient that the chametz is no longer owned by the Jew.

The Tana of our *mishna* teaches that there is no such dispute between Beit Shammai and Beit Hillel and the only requirement is that the chametz be sold to a non-Jew at a permitted time, even if it is unknown if the chametz will be consumed before Pesach or not – like the opinion of Beit Hillel in the *beraita*.

• Pesachim 21a

“Just as I received Heavenly reward for the *drisha* (the interpretation), so too will I receive reward for the *prisha* (abandoning the interpretation).”

This statement is taught on our *daf* by the Sage Shimon the Amsonite (others say it Nechemya the Amonite). Originally he was involved in interpreting the meaning conveyed by the word “et” each time it appears in the Torah. He thought at first that this word carries an additional special meaning in each and every instance it appears.

However, when he came to the verse, “You shall fear (et) the L-rd your G-d” (Dev. 10:20) he reached an impasse. What could this “et” include as an object of fear that could be equated with G-d? Only G-d metes out punishment for wrongdoings. He therefore concluded that there is no special meaning conveyed by the word “et” wherever it appears in the Torah.

When questioned by his Torah students, “Rabbi, what will be with all the interpretations you made until now with the word ‘et?’”

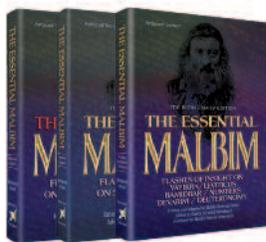
He replied, “Just as I received Heavenly reward for the *drisha* (the interpretation), so will I receive this reward for the *prisha* (the abandonment of this approach).” He reasoned that it was a mitzvah to cease his original approach to interpret the word “et” and to “recall” his original teachings he had made, and in doing so he would be suitably rewarded.

• Pesachim 22b

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SHORTCUT-ITIS

From: Monica

Dear Rabbi,
I have come to the realization, with the help of some of my friends, that I tend to make mistakes and then have to do things over, or buy things that break or don't suit me and then have to buy something else instead. Do you have any idea why this might be, and what I might be able to do to correct it?

Dear Monica,

The Talmud (Eruvin 53b) relates that once Rabbi Yehoshua was on a journey and came to a crossroads with paths going in several directions. The rabbi asked a young boy who was sitting at the junction which path led to town. The boy pointed to one route and said it's the short, long route; he pointed to another saying it's the long, short route. Wishing to save time, the rabbi chose the short route.

As he approached town, his path was barred with thickets and briars. Retracing his tracks back to the crossroads, he demanded to know why the boy had sent him down the wrong path. The boy replied that he had properly described both options, and that it was the rabbi himself who chose the short, long path.

We all have a tendency to look for shortcuts. Whether it's to save time or money or effort or embarrassment or

whatever it may be, we're inclined to choose the shorter, easier path. But as the above story indicates, such shortcuts often cost more time, money, effort, or embarrassment in the long run.

So it sounds to me that you may be suffering from an acute case of shortcut-itis. That would explain why you attempt to do things, but make mistakes and then have to do things over, or why you buy things that end up not serving your needs, either because they break or are not what you should have bought in the first place. Either case would result from attempting to save time, money or effort at the expense of proper planning or prescient purchasing.

Some people are naturally careful and thorough. Although in extreme cases this may lead to paralysis, generally they will tend not to suffer from short-long routes or cheap-expensive purchases. On the other hand, while you might be easy-going, flexible and adaptable, such people may have to work harder on planning, prioritizing, defining what they want and need, and deciding when spending is saving.

To avoid being impetuous and precipitous, which exposes one to mistakes, before making any decisions, it might help you to remember the old carpenter's adage: "Measure twice, cut once!" Take a little extra time to think about what you're going to do, how you're going to do it, and what materials will best suit your objective – and then you're most likely to need to do so only once.

@ OHR Profiles of Ohr Somayach Alumni and Students

written by Shimon O'Heron

Asher Shimshon Burrows North Carolina Beit Midrash

Moving from a quiet, "hippy farm" to the bustling, Orthodox "ghetto" of South Fallsburg, NY gained Asher Burrows a knack for handling transitions. Yet, the move to a modern community in Miami was too much. The Rabbis there seemed starched and the people seemed ignorant compared with NY. Eventually he made his way into secular private school where he realized, "anyone that has



learned a little *gemara* is much smarter than other people." After a few encounters with the "outside world" (Hari Krishnas, possible gun-runners, non-Jews), he decided his Judaism needed more depth than whatever he had gathered in his youth. He joined a Daf Yomi class and met a Belzer Chassid that changed his life. He saw his choices as follows: be an expert in something insignificant or be a jack-of-all-trades and great at nothing. He chose "to be an incredible person" instead and joined the Derech Program at Ohr Somayach in Jerusalem to do just that. Whether Asher is making menorahs by hand or putting hours into Tosefot – the outcome has been incredible.

HANDLING SENSITIVE INFORMATION

Question:

Someone recently asked me to provide some information about a young lady I know in order to decide whether to meet her for the purpose of matrimony. I am aware that she has a medical problem but am reluctant to ruin her chances for a long-awaited marriage. What is the right thing to do?

Answer:

“You shall not place a stumbling block in the way of a blind man.” (*Vayikra* 19:14)

The Midrash explains that this refers to misguiding someone who is “blind” in regard to a particular matter by giving him advice that is against his best interests. If you are questioned directly about her health situation, you must answer honestly. If no question is asked about her health, you may

assume that this is not an issue (since the asker may himself have a problem which forces him to compromise on this point) and you are not required to volunteer the information you have.

It is interesting to note that the Midrash’s prime example is when someone is asked whether a particular lady is a kosher candidate for marriage with a *kohen* and he lies by replying in the affirmative. This example is particularly relevant in this age of *ba’alei teshuva*. A young lady may be a wonderful candidate for marriage but ineligible for a *kohen* either because her father is not Jewish or because of premarital relations with a non-Jew.

In general, one should consult a rabbinic authority familiar with the laws of *lashon hara* if any question arises in providing information on *shidduchim*.

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

PIDYON HABEN BECOMES POPULAR

Secular Jews in Israel are beginning more and more to show interest in fulfilling the mitzvah of *pidyon haben* – redemption of the first-born son.

While circumcision has long been an accepted practice even among the non-religious, the same has not been true of *pidyon haben*, which many secular Israelis have mistakenly viewed as some sort of folklore.

To make such Jews more familiar with the meaning and details of this mitzvah a conference was held not long ago in

Jerusalem. The organizers said that in the last two, three years interest in *pidyon haben* has been growing and the conference was intended to provide answers to questions about the practice.

Observers of this phenomenon are hoping that the renewed redemption of the first-born among all Jews will hasten the ultimate redemption of G-d’s “first-born” – the People of Israel.

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