

OHRNET

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PARSHA INSIGHTS

FREEDOM FROM SLAVERY

“If you buy a Jewish slave...” (21:2-6)

A great Rabbi once described to me a late night learning session he had as a young man. It was about one in the morning and everyone had left the Beit Midrash. Alone, he battled with a tough Tosefot (medieval commentary on the Talmud).

Suddenly he heard the door of the Beit Midrash behind him swing open for a moment and then close again. He said he had to fight hard not to turn around and see who it was that was watching him being such a *tzaddik* learning away at that hour.

One of life’s great temptations is to do things to impress people.

After six years of labor a Jewish bondsman goes free. He can, however, if he so chooses, remain in slavery until the year of Yovel (every forty nine years). Prior to this extended stay he must be brought to Beit Din, where he stands next to the door and the doorpost, and his ear is pierced with an awl. Rashi explains that the significance of the door and the doorpost is that they are two “witnesses” that can testify that G-d passed over the houses of the Bnei Yisrael when He told the Jewish People that they were his servants exclusively. Someone, therefore, who voluntarily chooses *another* master should have his ear pierced in their presence.

The age of slavery may seem to have passed from the world, but in many ways it is alive and well and living inside us.

When we make the blessing in the morning thanking G-d that “You did not make me a slave,” we should ask ourselves “Am I really not a slave? Am I really unconcerned about what others think of me? How much of what I do is tailored to

impress the outside world? Isn’t that being a slave?”

After the destruction of the Second Beit Hamikdash, Rabbi Chanina ben Tradyon defied the Roman ban on teaching Torah, and gathered large groups and taught them publicly. His teacher, Rabbi Yosi ben Kisma, criticized him for putting his life in danger thus. Rabbi Chanina then asked his teacher, “Am I destined for the World to Come?” Rabbi Yosi answered, “Did you ever do something to be worthy of such a fate?” “Yes,” he replied, “Once, by accident I mixed up funds set aside for *tzedaka* with my own money, and I gave the whole thing to the needy.” “In that case,” said Rabbi Yosi, “May my lot equal yours!”

Why was Rabbi Chanina unsure of what lay ahead of him in the World of Truth? What greater reward can there be than that of someone who risks (and eventually loses) his life to guard the transmission of the Torah to perpetuity? Even more puzzling is Rabbi Yosi’s reply, “Did you ever do something to be worthy of such a fate?” What more could be expected of Rabbi Chanina than he already done?

Any public act can be dangerous; any public act can be tinged with thoughts of, “Now people are going to realize who I *really* am; now the world is going to know I’m a *tzaddik!*”

A beautiful etrog, a long *Shmoneh Esrai* prayer, and burning the midnight oil in the Beit Midrash can lead one to suffer from the enslavement to the desire to impress others.

When you give your own money that got mixed up with the *tzedaka*, no one sees it, no one is impressed at all — no one, that is, except G-d.

• Sources: Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe

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PARSHA OVERVIEW

The Jewish People receive a series of laws concerning social justice. Topics include: Proper treatment of Jewish servants; a husband's obligations to his wife; penalties for hitting people and for cursing parents, judges and leaders; financial responsibilities for damaging people or their property, either by oneself or by one's animate or inanimate property, or by pitfalls that one created; payments for theft; not returning an object that one accepted responsibility to guard; the right to self-defense of a person being robbed.

Other topics include: Prohibitions against seduction; witchcraft, bestiality and sacrifices to idols. The Torah warns us to treat the convert, widow and orphan with dignity, and to avoid lying. Usury is forbidden and the rights over collateral are limited. Payment of obligations to the

Temple should not be delayed, and the Jewish People must be holy, even concerning food. The Torah teaches the proper conduct for judges in court proceedings. The commandments of Shabbat and the Sabbatical year are outlined. Three times a year — Pesach, Shavuot and Succot — we are to come to the Temple. The Torah concludes this listing of laws with a law of kashrut — not to mix milk and meat.

G-d promises that He will lead the Jewish People to the Land of Israel, helping them conquer its inhabitants, and tells them that by fulfilling His commandments they will bring blessings to their nation. The people promise to do and listen to everything that G-d says. Moshe writes the Book of the Covenant, and reads it to the people. Moshe ascends the mountain to remain there for 40 days in order to receive the two Tablets of the Covenant.

ISRAEL Forever

IMPORTED INFLUENCE

When our ancestors were promised a "Greater Eretz Yisrael" which this week's Torah portion describes as stretching "from the Sea of Reeds to the Sea of the Philistines (the Mediterranean), and from the Wilderness until the River (the Euphrates), they were warned against being influenced by those nations they allowed to remain in their land "lest they cause you to sin against Me."

In our own day this influence is not limited to those dwelling among us. Modern technology has created a "global village" in which foreign cultures invade the minds and hearts of Jews living in their own land.

This threat to the Jewishness of the Jewish state can only be overcome by a return to the Torah values which have always distinguished us as a holy people worthy of enjoying Israel forever.

LOVE OF THE LAND- THE PLACES

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

LISHKAT HAGAZIT – SEAT OF THE SANHEDRIN

As one takes a tour of the tunnels next to the Western Wall he takes note of the signs indicating which part of the Beit Hamikdash was not far away from where he is now standing.

Using his imagination he can picture himself stand-



ing near the Lishkat Hagazit, the office in which sat the Sanhedrin. In the week when we read *Parshat Mishpatim* and all of its many laws, a memory is inspired of the Lishkat Hagazit which housed the highest court of the Jewish people.

לע"נ

מרת לאה בת ר' שמואל ז"ל

ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

PARSHA Q&A ?

1. In what context is a *mezuzah* mentioned in this week's parsha?
2. What special mitzvah does the Torah give to the master of a Hebrew maidservant?
3. What is the penalty for wounding one's father or mother?
4. "A" intentionally hits "B." As a result, B is close to death. Besides any monetary payments, what happens to A?
5. What is the penalty for someone who tries to murder a particular person, but accidentally kills another person instead? Give two opinions.
6. A slave goes free if his master knocks out one of the slave's teeth. What teeth do not qualify for this rule and why?
7. An ox gores another ox. What is the maximum the owner of the damaging ox must pay, provided his animal had gored no more than twice previously?
8. From where in this week's parsha can the importance of work be demonstrated?
9. What is meant by the words "If the sun shone on him"?
10. A person is given an object for safe-keeping. Later, he swears it was stolen. Witnesses come and say that in fact he is the one who stole it. How much must he pay?
11. A person borrows his employee's car. The car is struck by lightning. How much must he pay?
12. Why is lending money at interest called "biting"?
13. Non-kosher meat, "*treifa*," is preferentially fed to dogs. Why?
14. Which verse forbids listening to slander?
15. What constitutes a majority-ruling in a capital case?
16. How is Shavuot referred to in this week's parsha?
17. How many prohibitions are transgressed when cooking meat and milk together?
18. What was written in the *Sefer Habrit* which Moshe wrote prior to the giving of the Torah?
19. What was the *livnat hasapir* a reminder of?
20. Who was Efrat? Who was her husband? Who was her son?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this week's Questions!

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

1. 21:6 - If a Hebrew slave desires to remain enslaved, his owner brings him "to the doorpost *mezuzah*" to pierce his ear.
2. 21:8,9 - To marry her
3. 21:15 - Death by strangulation.
4. 21:19 - He is put in jail until "B" recovers or dies.
5. 21:23 - 1)The murderer deserves the death penalty.
2)The murderer is exempt from death but must compensate the heirs of his victim.
6. 21:26 - Baby teeth, which grow back.
7. 21:35 - The full value of his own animal.
8. 21:37 - From the "five-times" penalty for stealing an ox and slaughtering it. This fine is seen as punishment for preventing the owner from plowing with his ox.
9. 22:2 - If it's as clear as the sun that the thief has no intent to kill.
10. 22:8 - Double value of the object.
11. 22:14 - Nothing.
12. 22:24 - Interest is like a snake bite. Just as the poison is not noticed at first but soon overwhelms the person, so too interest is barely noticeable until it accumulates to an overwhelming sum.
13. 22:30 - As "reward" for their silence during the plague of the first-born.
14. 23:1 - Targum Onkelos translates "Don't bear a false report" as "Don't receive a false report".
15. 23:2 - A simple majority is needed for an acquittal. A majority of two is needed for a ruling of guilty.
16. 23:16 - *Chag Hakatzir* — Festival of Reaping.
17. 23:19 - One.
18. 24:4,7 - The Torah, starting from Bereishet until the giving of the Torah, and the *mitzvot* given at Mara.
19. 24:10 - That the Jews in Egypt were forced to toil by making bricks.
20. 24:14 - Miriam, wife of Calev, mother of Chur.

- The animal that did damage in the garden that it entered by accident or by intent
- How to calculate payment for damage done
- The mourning shoes of Eliezer Zeira
- Storing grain in another's field
- Causing a fire through another party
- When the fire damages only the plowed field
- The cause of plagues and the caution to be taken
- King David's halachic dilemma in battling the Philistines
- Responsibility for fire which spreads beyond natural obstacles
- When fire destroys something within or near a grain pile
- Fire caused by sparks or a candle near the street
- The fine of double payment for theft and four or five times for sale or slaughter of stolen animal
- The methodology for learning from Torah sources

THE COLOR OF THE SHOES

What color were the shoes traditionally worn by Jews in Talmudic times? From the story told in our *gemara* about Eliezer Zeira wearing black shoes as a sign of mourning for the destruction of Jerusalem, it appears that black shoes were not the norm. Another *gemara* (*Mesechta Ta'anit* 22a), which tells of a Jewish prison warden in the employ of the Romans who concealed his Jewish identity by wearing black shoes, serves as another indication that Jews did not wear black shoes.

In contrast to these two sources is a *gemara* (*Mesechta Beitzah* 15a) that indicates the opposite. There the issue is a ban on sending a white shoe to someone during the Chol Hamoed Intermediate Days of Yom Tov because there is the

danger that an effort will be made to blacken them in a manner that is forbidden. The inescapable conclusion from this is that black shoes were indeed the norm.

The resolution provided by the Tosefist Rabbeinu Tam is that Jews wore black shoes but the shoelaces were white. Eliezer Zeira added black laces to his black shoes as an expression of mourning and the prison warden did the same to hide his Jewishness.

The *gemara* (*Mesechta Sanhedrin* 74b) rules that when there is an attempt by their oppressor to force Jews to wear shoelaces like those of non-Jews in order to make them assimilate, it is obligatory for a Jew to die rather than comply. This is further proof that Jews wore shoelaces of a color different than that of their non-Jewish neighbors.

• *Bava Kama* 59b

What the SAGES Say

"Catastrophes strike the world when there are wicked people, and the first victims are the righteous."

• *Rabbi Shimon bar Nachmeni quoting Rabbi Yonatan - Bava Kama* 60a

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GOLD AND SWORDS

From: Ken Lipworth

Dear Rabbi,

I am puzzled as to how the Israelites produced the golden calf. These people were slaves. It seems totally incongruous that, as slaves, they would have owned any gold jewelry.

In a similar vein, from where did the Jews get swords to fight the battle against Amalek? It would seem highly unlikely that they took swords out of Egypt. As slaves, they would not have owned swords. Given the haste with which they fled, it would seem highly unlikely that they would have been able to beg, borrow or steal any as they fled.

It wouldn't seem that they made weapons after the Exodus either. Even if they had the knowledge and skill to make swords, it would hardly seem likely that they would have had the time or the means to mine the ore, smelt the ore to produce the iron, and set up blacksmithing workshops to convert the iron into swords, since the encounter with Amalek happened shortly after their departure.

So, it seems incongruous that people who were cruelly oppressed slaves and so poor that they didn't have straw to build the bricks that Pharaoh wanted would own gold earrings and swords. Where did they get them from?

Dear Ken,

Your questions are very astute and rational. The answers happen to be explicit in the relevant Torah verses.

Long before the Israelites arrived in Egypt, G-d revealed to Abraham their future enslavement: "And He said to Abram, 'You shall surely know that your seed will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and they will enslave them and oppress them for four hundred years'" (Ex. 15:13). At the conclusion of that awesome night vision, G-d promised, "And also the nation that they will serve will I judge, and afterwards they will go forth with great possessions" (ibid v. 14).

Even before Moses returned to Egypt to redeem the Israelites, in the revelation of the burning bush, G-d outlined in detail how the events of the Exodus would unfold, including the details of the above promise of wealth: "And I will stretch forth

My hand and smite the Egyptians with all My miracles that I will wreak in their midst, and afterwards he will send you out. And I will put this people's favor in the eyes of the Egyptians, and it will come to pass that when you go, you will not go empty handed. Each woman shall borrow from her neighbor and from the dweller in her house silver and gold objects and garments, and you shall put them on your sons and on your daughters and you shall empty out Egypt" (Ex. 3:20-22).

This is in fact what happened. Describing the eve of the Israelites departure, the Torah relates, "And the children of Israel did according to Moses' order, and they borrowed from the Egyptians silver objects, golden objects, and garments. The Lord gave the people favor in the eyes of the Egyptians, and they lent them, and they emptied out Egypt" (Ex. 12:35-36). This wealth was the Israelites' just recompense for centuries of forced labor, affliction and servitude.

Interestingly, the Midrash cites an even more lucrative aspect of the Exodus. On the verse, "Moses caused Israel to journey from the Sea of Reeds" (Ex. 15:22, see Rashi), our Sages noted that Moses had to force them to go; otherwise they would have preferred to remain at the seashore. Why? In pursuing the Israelites, the Egyptian army bedecked their horses and chariots with every manner of jewel-studded gold and silver ornaments. After the raging waters collapsed back over the Egyptian Army, the Israelites found washed onto the seashore not only the lifeless warriors, but also their accompanying jewels and gold and silver. The Midrash thus remarks that the Jews (reluctantly) left the Sea of Reeds with even greater wealth than they had taken from Egypt.

Regarding the swords, here too the Torah explicitly refers to when the Israelites got them: "So G-d led the people around by way of the desert to the Reed Sea, and the children of Israel were armed when they went up out of Egypt" (Ex. 13:18). Despite the Midrashic explanations of the Hebrew word "*chamushim*", the literal and plain meaning is referring to weapons. In fact Rashi says that the purpose of this verse is to answer your very question: Where did the Israelites get the swords to fight Amalek? From the Egyptians during the Exodus. Just as they received gold from them, they also received weapons. It is also quite possible that just as they gathered even more wealth at the Sea of Reeds, they salvaged even more weapons from the drowned Egyptian Army at the seashore than they had taken from Egypt.

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WHO WILL BE THE SANDAK?

Question: A *ba'al teshuvah* – a returnee to a Torah way of life – was faced with a dilemma. When a son was born to him, his father, a non-observant Jew, asked for the privilege of being the *sandak* who holds the child during circumcision. The request was refused because the new father wanted to follow the tradition of according this honor to a righteous, G-d-fearing person and not to one who publicly violated the Shabbat. Upon hearing this, his father promised that if he would be the *sandak* he would

begin observing Shabbat. What was the right thing to do?

Answer: This question was put before the great halachic authority, Rav Yosef Shalom Eliyashiv. His ruling was that as much as there is a great merit for the circumcised child to be held by a *tzadik* the merit would be much greater if giving this honor to his grandfather would be an impetus for him to become Shabbat observant.

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY _____

THE TIRELESS SEXTON

The old man serving as the volunteer sexton of a synagogue was very much appreciated by the worshippers, but they felt it was too much for a man of his age and tired to convince him to turn over his duties to a younger man. His stubborn refusal to retire had a most interesting background.

Before the Holocaust he had served as a sexton in the synagogue of his small European town. When the Nazis came he was sent to a death camp. Once he was caught by the Gestapo while performing a mitzvah and sentenced to death by hanging.

He was taken to the gallows in the camp courtyard where all the Jewish prisoners were gathered to witness his execution. The hangman placed him on the hanging platform and

began tying the noose to place around his neck. Even at that moment he did not give up hope and made a vow that if he somehow survived he would devote the rest of his life to serving as a volunteer sexton.

Just as the noose was set to be put around his neck the rope came apart. The Nazis had never seen anything like this before and interpreted it as a sign that he should be freed from the gallows. Not long afterwards American soldiers liberated the camp.

The first thing he did was to find the nearest synagogue and offer his services as its sexton. His offer was gladly accepted and nothing could prevent him from continuing to fulfill his vow for as long as he lived.

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