

OHRNET

SHABBAT PARSHAT EMOR · VOL. 19 NO. 29

IN ISRAEL: 13 IYAR 5772 - MAY 5, 2012 · OUTSIDE ISRAEL: 20 IYAR 5772 - MAY 12, 2012

PARSHA INSIGHTS

THE END OF RULE BRITANNICA

“Speak to the kohanim, the sons of Aharon...”

I must admit to more than a tinge of nostalgia when I read of the recent demise of that great 244 year-old creaking behemoth, the Encyclopedia Britannica.

Actually Britannica will continue in its electronic version but its weighty printed tomes will no longer grace the walls of many a suburban home. Britannica really stopped publishing its print edition in 2010 when it only managed to sell 12,000 copies worldwide, a paltry number to justify its vast team of experts churning out articles.

And as far as its online future is concerned? I’m not convinced. There’s some hot competition out there.

Like Wikipedia.

Nowadays, people are far more likely to search Wikipedia than Britannica. One reason of course is because Wiki is free – and everyone likes free. However, there’s another reason here.

Anyone can write an entry in Wikidpedia.

In our society the axiom that democracy is the only legitimate form of social organization is virtually unchallengeable.

The idea of a benevolent dictatorship strikes most people as an impossible oxymoron.

Our mindset is that the will of the majority is the best, the fairest and the only way to run society, and this ideology seeps into other areas of life as well — including encyclopedias. Critics of Britannica claim that it suffers from the biases of the experts it employs. Wiki, however, suffers no less from its biases, both cultural and personal. The difference is really between quality and quantity. Do you want your information brought to you by a panel of experts in the field or a vast multitude whose credentials are unverified?

Presumably, the democratization of our lives has its limits: I’m not sure how many of us would submit to extensive inva-

sive surgery based on a straw poll taken on Twitter, however gung-ho the yay-sayers might be.

The idea that if you ask enough people a question you’re bound to come up with the right answer is inimical to Torah thought. The spiritual Masters teach, “The opinion of the unlettered,” presumably the vast majority, “is the opposite of the Torah scholars.”

Rabbi Nota Schiller once observed, “The Torah is a democracy of opportunity and an aristocracy of opinion.” Anyone can open a Talmud and start to learn. However, for one’s opinion to be significant it must pass a self-policing system of peer approval that validates only the greatest and the most expert.

If you think about it, the Torah was not given as the “Ten Suggestions – Please twitter this to your friends and see what they think.” It was given as Ten Statements – Divine and immutable.

The priesthood too is a totally undemocratic exclusive club to which only birth gains you entry.

As it says in this week’s Torah Portion, “And G-d said to Moshe, ‘Speak to the *kohanim*, the sons of Aharon.’”

We know that the *kohanim* are the sons of Aharon without the Torah having to remind us. Why then does the Torah stress this?

Not everything in life is democratic: Someone with Eastern features cannot elect to be Caucasian, Women cannot decide to be men, and a Yisrael cannot decide to be a *kohen*. A *kohen* is imbued with an innate higher level of holiness merely because of his lineage, because he is a descendant of Aharon HaKohen.

Google me on that – you’ll see I’m right.

OHRNET magazine is published by OHR SOMAYACH Tanenbaum College

POB 18103, Jerusalem 91180, Israel • Tel: +972-2-581-0315 • Email: info@ohr.edu • www.ohr.edu

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PARSHA OVERVIEW

The *kohanim* are commanded to avoid contact with corpses in order to maintain a high standard of ritual purity. They may attend the funeral of only their seven closest relatives: father, mother, wife, son, daughter, brother, and unmarried sister. The *kohen gadol* (High Priest) may not attend the funeral of even his closest relatives. Certain marital restrictions are placed on the *kohanim*. The nation is required to honor the *kohanim*. The physical irregularities that invalidate a *kohen* from serving in the Temple are listed. *Terumah*, a produce tithe given to the *kohanim*, may be eaten only by *kohanim* and their household. An animal may be sacrificed in the Temple

after it is eight days old and is free from any physical defects. The nation is commanded to sanctify the Name of G-d by insuring that their behavior is always exemplary, and by being prepared to surrender their lives rather than murder, engage in licentious relations or worship idols. The special characteristics of the holidays are described, and the nation is reminded not to do certain types of creative work during these holidays. New grain may not be eaten until the *omer* of barley is offered in the Temple. The Parsha explains the laws of preparing the oil for the menorah and baking the *lechem hapanim* in the Temple. A man blasphemes G-d and is executed as prescribed in the Torah.

ISRAEL Forever

EVERY PARENT A TEACHER

The responsibility of adults to supervise the education of the very young is hinted at in the very first passage of this week's Torah portion.

"Say to the *kohanim*," Moshe is told by G-d in regard to the laws of ritual purity," and tell them." This seeming redundancy is explained by Rashi as instruction for the adults to pass on this caution to the very young.

In the most basic sense this means that the adult *kohanim* must refrain from causing children to become contaminated by contact with the dead. But there are a couple of other messages here for all parents in regard to bringing up their

children.

One is that a parent cannot simply rely on the school to teach his child what is right and what is wrong. The other is that parents must seek to provide a role model for their children through their own behavior.

Many of the shortcomings of the education in the secular schools in Israel are due to a lack of parental attention to these messages. It is hoped that the reading of this week's Torah portion will succeed in bringing home these messages and produce a generation which can be a source of pride 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

THE PEACEFUL LAND

"I will grant peace in the Land" is what G-d promised His people (*Vaykira 26:6*) if they would study the Torah He gave them and perform the *mitzvot*.

This promise of peace comes after those of plentiful rain and bountiful harvests. This order is thus explained by Rashi:



"Lest you say: 'We have food and we have drink but what value do they have if we have no peace?' — the Torah follows the promise of economic success with the Divine promise that there will be peace in the Land."

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

לע"נ

מרת פייגה בת ר' דוד ע"ה

ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

PARSHA Q&A ?

1. Which male descendants of Aharon are exempt from the prohibition against contacting a dead body?
2. Does a *kohen* have an option regarding becoming ritually defiled when his unmarried sister passes away?
3. How does one honor a *kohen*?
4. How does the Torah restrict the *kohen gadol* with regard to mourning?
5. The Torah states in verse 22:3 that one who “approaches holy objects” while in a state of *tumah* (impurity) is penalized with excision. What does the Torah mean by “approaches”?
6. What is the smallest piece of a corpse that is able to transmit *tumah*?
7. Who in the household of a *kohen* may eat *terumah*?
8. If the daughter of a *kohen* marries a “zar” she may no longer eat *terumah*. What is a *zar*?
9. What is the difference between a *neder* and a *nedavah*?
10. May a person slaughter an animal and its father on the same day?
11. How does the Torah define “profaning” the Name of G-d?
12. Apart from Shabbat, how many days are there during the year about which the Torah says that work is forbidden?
13. How big is an *omer*?
14. On what day do we begin to “count the *omer*”?
15. Why do we begin counting the *omer* at night?
16. How does the *omer* differ from other *minchah* offerings?
17. The blowing of the shofar on Rosh Hashanah is called a “*zichron teruah*” (sound of remembrance). For what is it a reminder?
18. What is unusual about the wood of the *etrog* tree?
19. Who was the father of the blasphemer?
20. What is the penalty for intentionally wounding one’s parent?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week’s Questions!

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

1. 21:1 - *Challalim* — those disqualified from the priesthood because they are descended from a relationship forbidden to a *kohen*.
2. 21:3 - No, he is required to do so.
3. 21:8 - He is first in all matters of holiness. For example, a *kohen* reads from the Torah first, and is usually the one to lead the blessings before and after meals.
4. 21:10-12 - He may not allow his hair to grow long, nor attend to his close relatives if they die, nor accompany a funeral procession.
5. 22:3 - Eats.
6. 22:5 - A piece the size of an olive.
7. 22:11 - He, his wife, his sons, his unmarried daughters and his non-Jewish slaves.
8. 22:12 - A non-*kohen*.
9. 22:18 - A *neder* is an obligation upon a person; a *nedavah* is an obligation placed upon an object.
10. 22:28 - Yes. The Torah only prohibits slaughtering an animal and its mother on the same day.
11. 22:32 - Willfully transgressing the commandments.
12. 23:7-36 - Seven.
13. 23:10 - One tenth of an *eipha*.
14. 23:15 - On the 16th of Nissan.
15. 23:15 - The Torah requires counting seven complete weeks. If we begin counting in the daytime, the seven weeks would not be complete, because according to the Torah a day starts at nightfall.
16. 23:16 - It was made from barley.
17. 23:24 - The *akeidat* (binding of) Yitzchak.
18. 23:40 - It has the same taste as the fruit.
19. 24:10 - The Egyptian killed by Moshe (*Shemot* 2:12).
20. 24:21 - Death.

- Combinations of parts of animal carcasses to form the amount for which the punishment of lashes is due
- The laws concerning the blood of teeming creatures (*sheratzim*)
- Other combinations of ritual contaminators
- The miraculous rescue and the blood on the curtain
- How much of sacred property illegally used constitutes *me'ilah*
- When an agent performs *me'ilah* on behalf of another
- Variations of *me'ilah* where a sender and an agent are involved
- Using money given to a guardian for safekeeping

HIDDEN IN ROME

“I saw the *parochet* of the *Beit Hamikdash* in Rome and there were some drops of blood on it.” This statement of Rabbi Elazar, son of Rabbi Yossi, refers to the opportunity he was given to enter the treasury of the Romans where articles stolen from the *Beit Hamikdash* were stored.

The background for this rare opportunity was the mission of this Sage and Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai to Rome to seek annulment of an anti-religious decree. When these Sages saved the emperor's daughter from the attack of a demon, they were rewarded with an offer to enter the royal treasury

and take whatever they wished. The only thing they took was the document of the dangerous decree — which they then destroyed. It was during this incident that Rabbi Elazar took note of the spots on the *parochet* which had served as the partition between the Holy and the Holy of Holies. He identified them as the blood of the bullock and goat sacrifices which had been sprayed in the direction of the *parochet* in the Yom Kippur service.

But the *parochet* was not the only sacred item which the Romans kept in their vaults. In *Avot* of Rabbi Natan (Chapter 41, it is reported that along with the *parochet* the menorah, the table, the *kohen gadol's* headband and the vessel used for preparing the incense are all still to be found in Rome.

• *Me'ilah* 17b

WHAT THE SAGES SAY

“Let the miracle (to save Jewry from a Roman decree) come from wherever it may (even through the help of a demon).”

• *Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai - Me'ilah* 17b

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

PRAYER ON THE ROAD

You are driving along the coastal road in Israel and look at your watch. In a quarter of an hour the sun will set and you have not yet said your afternoon Mincha prayers. The nearest town with a synagogue is more than a half hour away. What does an observant Jew do?

It is not an unfamiliar sight for motorists to see a car parked on the side of the road and its driver fervently “shaking” next to it as he prays under an open sky. For those who

happen to be in one particular part of that road, this will no longer be a problem. A large sign on the side of the road announces that Mincha and Maariv services starting ten minutes before sunset are available at the Havatzelet Hasharon synagogue only a minute's drive away.

Who knows, perhaps there will be as many such signs informing you how far away a *minyan* is as there are telling you how far away Tel Aviv is.

MEDIUM RARE?

Robert L. from Atlanta, Georgia wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

I recently saw a well-known medium on television. He is supposedly able to communicate with the dead; he took several calls where he was able to relate very specific information about the deceased to the callers. As skeptical as I am about these sorts of things, I was very impressed by his ability; he seemed very genuine. My question is this: The Torah specifically forbids communication with the dead. But, the mere fact that it is prohibited makes me wonder if it is, in fact, possible. Otherwise, why would G-d mention it? Thanks!

Dear Robert L.,

Regarding your question, there's an apparent dispute between Maimonides [Rambam] and Nachmanides [Ramban].

Nachmanides indicates that certain occult practices can be effective, but that they are forbidden by the Torah. G-d created a universe which follows an ordered structure called "nature." Nachmanides writes that sorcery and the occult

"contradict" G-d's will because they act in opposition to the simple, plain structure and order of nature. The Torah forbids these things because G-d wants us to conduct ourselves in this world according to natural laws.

Maimonides indicates otherwise. Writing about occult practices such as communicating with the dead, Maimonides calls them "falsehood and deception" used by idolaters to deceive the masses and gain their loyalty. He writes that it's wrong for the Jews, who are extremely wise and rational, to think there's any benefit in these things.

This comment of Maimonides seems to contradict explicit passages in the Talmud and Midrash that refer to departed spirits communicating with the living and revealing things about the past and future. Some commentators explain that Maimonides is referring to an ideal person who lives totally according to the truths of the Torah. Such a person will rise above all these practices, and from that exalted vantage point see that these practices have no reality. However, these forces of falsehood can indeed affect a person who has not yet reached this level.

Sources:

- Ramban, Deuteronomy 18:9-15
- Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Laws of Idolatry 11:16
- Tractate Berachot 18b

WHAT'S THE RIGHT THING TO DO?

REAL-LIFE QUESTIONS OF SOCIAL AND BUSINESS ETHICS

ANOTHER SORT OF ADDICTION

Question: This past Pesach I was a guest at a friend's Seder and was the "victim" of the traditional stealing of my *afikomen* by one of my host's children. In order to get it back I had to promise the youngster a gift. Am I really obligated to keep this promise or is this a mere ritual?

Answer: Rabbi Zeira (*Mesechta Succa 46b*) warned that a person should never make a promise of a gift to a child and fail to keep his promise. Doing so, he pointed out, trains the youngster that it is proper to lie.

The same passage from the Prophet Yirmiyahu that he cites as a warning that lying can be addictive was quoted by the Sage Rav (*Mesechta Yevamot 63a*), when he praised and

scolded his son Chiya for lying with good intentions. Rav had a difficult wife who would always prepare a meal for him completely opposite to what he had requested. Chiya served as a go-between and when he grew old enough to realize what was happening he switched the instructions given to him by his father. When Rav arrived home to surprisingly find the meal he really wanted, he asked his son whether his mother had suddenly changed her contrary ways. Upon hearing Chiya's explanation of the switch, Rav complimented him on his cleverness but warned him not to ever lie in that fashion again lest he become addicted to deviating from the truth.

Go ahead and give the child the gift you promised.

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