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PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

A Spoonful of Sugar

“On the tenth day of the seventh month there shall be a holy convocation for you and you shall afflict yourselves. (29:7)”

My right knee’s been playing me up recently and the doctor told me to use a stick. So hobbling around the Yeshiva, I came across an old friend and veteran Mentors’ Mission Mentor, Rabbi Ovadia Kranz. He said, “Wow! You’re a youngster! You shouldn’t be using a stick.” “I know I’m a youngster – but this knee keeps arguing with me about that.” He said, “Let me tell you a story. A couple of months ago, I did something to my shoulder and my back. The doctor said that it was probably mild arthritis and sent me to the gym to do physio. I used to go twice a week. Next to me in the gym was this guy who had a knee-replacement. He was working out on a machine on the knee curl machine. He used to *krechs* (groan) and complain all the time about the pain the treatment was causing his knee, and I used to *krechs* about the pain the shoulder pulls were giving my back and shoulders. So, one day I said to him, ‘Max.’ His name was Max, by the way. ‘Max. I’ve got an idea. Let’s swap machines. You do the shoulder pulls and I’ll do the knee curls, and neither of us will be in pain.’ ‘Yeah,’ he said, ‘but neither of us is going to get better either.’”

“A spoonful of sugar” may make the medicine go down. But it must go down one way or the other. If you just take the sugar and leave out the medicine, nothing’s going to change. Every challenge, every spiritual exercise that Hashem sends us is uniquely designed to fix a spiritual dose of arthritis or heal a spiritual knee replacement. If we don’t accept the “Doctor’s Orders” – we may avoid short term pain but we will never fix the underlying problem.

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TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Gittin 44-50

A Ransom Payment

“Captives may not be redeemed for more than their value due to ‘tikun olam’ (lit. “fixing the world”, i.e., for the good of the society).”

The *gemara* on our *daf* asks for the meaning of “tikun olam” in this *mishna*. How does the decree of Sages not to redeem captives for more than their value help society?

The *gemara* offers two possible explanations. One is that paying exorbitant ransom would cause undue burden on the community’s resources. The second reason is that paying too much would greatly encourage more prisoner-taking for the sake of large payments. What is the practical difference between these two reasons? Rashi explains that if the hostage has a wealthy relative who wants to free him, according to the first reason the relative should be permitted to do so, but according to the second reason he should not be permitted, since doing so would be detrimental to the safety of the community.

However, asks Tosafot, we find later in our *masechta* that Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananya paid an excessive ransom to free a youngster, which seems to contradict the second reason taught on our *daf*. Two possible answers are offered by Tosafot. One is that Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananya saw that the youngster was a blossoming Torah scholar, whose real value was “priceless”. Another possible reason to permit overpayment and not fear that this payment would encourage further kidnappings is that this story took place in the era of the destruction of the Second Beit Hamikdash, when kidnapping Jews for ransom required no special incentive.

▪ Gittin 45a

A Nation Like a Dove

Rabbi Ilish said, “The Jewish People are compared to a dove, so I can trust the dove’s words and I will be saved by a miracle.”

Rabbi Ilish was kidnapped along with the daughters of Rav Nachman. One day he sat with a man who understood the language of birds. First a raven came and “said” something. The man explained to Rabbi Ilish that the raven was saying, “Flee Ilish, flee Ilish!” Rabbi Ilish, however, said that the raven was lying and did not trust it. Later, a dove came and “said,” according to the man who was with Rabbi Ilish, “Escape Ilish! Escape Ilish!”

When Rabbi Ilish heard this, he said, “The Jewish People are compared to a dove, so I can certainly trust the dove’s words, and I will be saved by a miracle.”

Rashi on our *daf* writes that we learn that the Jewish People are compared to a dove based on the verse in Shir Hashirim (5:2), where Hashem says to the Jewish People, “My dove, My perfect one.” One might wonder, however, in what way is the Jewish People compared to a dove?

One explanation for this comparison is taught by our Sages in *Masechet Shabbat* (130a). “The Jewish People are compared to a dove as is stated: ‘The wings of a dove covered with silver, and its pinions with brilliant gold’ (Tehillim 68:14). Just as the wings (rather than its beak – Rashi) of the dove protect it from its enemies, so too do the mitzvahs of the Jewish People protect them from their enemies.”

Another explanation for this comparison is taught by our Sages in the Midrash Rabbah for Shir Hashirim (1:15) where Hashem says to the Jewish People, “Your eyes are like doves.” The Midrash teaches that we learn from this that “Just like a dove, from the time she meets her mate, is faithful to him, likewise the Jewish People are faithful to Hashem from the time they first knew Him.”

▪ *Gittin 45a*

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Hashem tells Moshe to inform Pinchas that he will receive Hashem’s “covenant of peace” in reward for his bold action – executing Zimri and the Midianite princess Kozbi. Hashem commands Moshe to maintain a state of enmity with the Midianites, who lured the Jewish People into sin. Moshe and Elazar are told to count the Jewish People. The Torah lists the names of the families in each tribe. The total number of males eligible to serve in the army is 601,730. Hashem instructs Moshe how to allot the Land of Israel to the *Bnei Yisrael*. The number of the Levites' families is recorded.

Tzlofchad's daughters file a claim with Moshe. In the absence of a brother, they request their late father's portion in the Land. Moshe asks Hashem for the ruling, and Hashem tells Moshe that their claim is just. The Torah teaches the laws and priorities which determine the order of inheritance.

Hashem tells Moshe that he will ascend a mountain and view the Land that the Jewish People will soon enter, although Moshe himself will not enter it. Moshe asks Hashem to designate the subsequent leader, and Hashem selects Yehoshua bin Nun. Moshe ordains Yehoshua as his successor in the presence of the entire nation.

This Torah portion concludes with special teachings of the service in the Beit Hamikdash.

Q & A

Questions

1. Why was Pinchas not originally a kohen?
2. Why was Moav spared the fate of Midian?
3. What does the yud and hey added to the family names testify?
4. Korach and his congregation became a "sign." What do they signify?
5. Why did Korach's children survive?
6. Name six families in this Parsha whose names are changed.
7. Who was Yaakov's only living granddaughter at the time of the census?
8. How many years did it take to conquer the Land? How many to divide the Land?
9. Two brothers leave Egypt and die in the midbar. One brother has three sons. The other brother has only one son. When these four cousins enter the Land, how many portions will the one son get?
10. What do Yocheved, Ard and Na'aman have in common?
11. Why did the decree to die in the desert not apply to the women?
12. What trait did Tzlofchad's daughters exhibit that their ancestor Yosef also exhibited?
13. Why does the Torah change the order of Tzlofchad's daughters' names?
14. Tzlofchad died for what transgression?
15. Why did Moshe use the phrase "G-d of the spirits of all flesh"?
16. Moshe "put some of his glory" upon Yehoshua. What does this mean?
17. Where were the daily offerings slaughtered?
18. Goats are brought as musaf sin-offerings. For what sin do they atone?
19. Why is Shavuot called Yom Habikkurim?
20. What do the 70 bulls offered on Succot symbolize?

Answers

1. 25:13 - Kehuna (priesthood) was given to Aharon and his sons (not grandsons), and to any of their descendants born after they were anointed. Pinchas, Aharon's grandson, was born prior to the anointing.
2. 25:18 - For the sake of Ruth, a future descendant of Moav.
3. 26:5 - That the families were truly children of their tribe.
4. 26:10 - That kehuna was given forever to Aharon and his sons, and that no one should ever dispute this.
5. 26:11 - Because they repented.
6. 26:13,16,24,38,39,42 - Zerach, Ozni, Yashuv, Achiram, Shfufam, Shucham.
7. 26:46 - Serach bat Asher
8. 26:53 - Seven years. Seven years.
9. 26:55 - Two portions. That is, the four cousins merit four portions among them. These four portions are then split among them as if their fathers were inheriting them; i.e. two portions to one father and two portions to the other father.
10. 26:24,56 - They came down to Mitzrayim in their mothers' wombs.
11. 26:64 - In the incident of the meraglim, only the men wished to return to Egypt. The women wanted to enter Eretz Yisrael.
12. 27:1 - Love for Eretz Yisrael.
13. 27:1 - To teach that they were equal in greatness.
14. 27:3 - Rabbi Akiva says that Tzlofchad gathered sticks on Shabbat. Rabbi Shimon says that Tzlofchad was one who tried to enter Eretz Yisrael after the sin of the meraglim.
15. 27:16 - He was asking G-d, who knows the multitude of dispositions among the Jewish People, to appoint a leader who can deal with each person on that person's level.
16. 27:20 - That Yehoshua's face beamed like the moon.
17. 28:3 - At a spot opposite the sun. The morning offering was slaughtered on the west side of the slaughtering area and the afternoon offering on the east side.
18. 28:15 - For unnoticed ritual impurity of the Sanctuary or its vessels.
19. 28:26 - The Shavuot double-bread offering was the first wheat-offering made from the new crop.
20. 29:18 - The seventy nations.

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

By Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

Piercing Spears

In one of the most dramatic acts of zeal preserved in the Bible, Aaron's grandson Phineas responded to a very public sin committed by Kozbi and Zimri with righteous indignation. Outraged with the horrid desecration of Hashem's name that the pair had committed, Phineas rose up and took a *romach* (commonly translated as "spear"), whereupon he speared the two sinners on the spot and put an end to their aberration (Num. 25:7). In this essay, we take a closer look at the Hebrew word used for Phineas' weapon of choice – the *romach* – and compare it with other Hebrew words like *chanit* and *kidon* that seem to refer to the same or very similar weapons. According to the *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*, *romach* may be translated as "lance;" *chanit*, as "spear;" and *kidon*, as "hunting knife/scimitar." However, this essay focuses on the Hebrew etymology of those words and tries to show what how their inner meanings relate to their core roots.

The word *romach* appears only once in the Pentateuch (Num. 25:7), in that one instance of Phineas arming himself to attack Kozbi and Zimri in middle of their sin. Nonetheless, the word *romach* does appear another 14 times throughout the rest of the Bible. The classical lexicographers like Menachem Ibn Saruk (920–970), Yonah Ibn Janach (990–1055), and the Radak (1160–1235) all trace the word *romach* to the trilateral root REISH-MEM-CHET, which is only used in reference to that weapon.

Later lexicographers give alternate explanations of the word *romach*, explaining it as deriving from a compound root comprised of multiple roots fused together. For example, Rabbi Moshe Tedeschi Ashkenazi (1821–1898) in his work *Otzar Nirdafim* on Hebrew synonyms writes that the word *romach* is related to the biliteral root MEM-CHET ("erase/annihilate"), which recalls the destructive nature of the weapon.

Similarly, *Ohalei Yehuda* notes that with but a single stab, a *romach* proves fatal to any human – whether an exalted individual or lowly person. Because of this, he explains the word *romach* as a portmanteau of the roots REISH-(VAV)-MEM ("high/exalted") and MEM-CHET ("erasing/annihilating"), thus explicating the word as referring to the fact that it is lethal even against the highest-ranking individuals. Indeed, Kozbi was Midianite princess and Zimri was the prince of the Tribe of Shimon, yet both were swiftly felled by Phineas' mighty *romach*.

Alternatively, *Ohalei Yehuda* suggests that the word *romach* derives from the biliteral roots REISH-MEM ("high/lift/remove") and CHET-YOD (*chai*, "life"), because the *romach* maintains the ability to kill one's victim, which effectively "removes" their "life."

Interestingly, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (to Ex. 15:1, Num. 25:7) follows the trilateralist approach that traces the word *romach* to the root REISH-MEM-CHET, but he sees that root as bearing phonetic affinity to the similar word *ramah* ("throwing/shooting"), via the interchangeability of CHET and HEY. In his view, it seems, the word *romach* refers to a weapon used by "throwing," but not generally by "stabbing."

The word *chanit* appears a total of forty-seven times in the Bible, but none of those are in the Pentateuch. While trilateralists Ibn Janach and Radak (in their respective *Sefer HaShorashim*) trace the word *chanit* to the trilateral root CHET-NUN-HEY ("camping," "resting," "store"), the biliteral Menachem Ibn Saruk does not even list this word in his lexicon on Biblical Hebrew!

There are three more ways of understanding the etymology of *chanit*: Rabbi Tedeschi Ashkenazi writes that the word *chanit* derives from the root CHET-NUN-HEY ("camping") and refers to the fact that this weapon would often be stabbed into the ground where it would be "camped." *Shoresh Yesha* also connects *chanit* to that root, but he explains that the *chanit* is a weapon that military camps are sacred of. Finally, *Ohalei Yehuda* sees the word *chanit* as related to the word *chadah* ("sharp/pointed"), probably due to the interchangeability of the letters NUN and DALET.

*A more complete treatment of this subject can be found exclusively at:
https://ohr.edu/this_week/whats_in_a_word/

COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

Havdalah Introduction (part 2) – Farewell, My Beloved

“Hashem, my G-d, will illuminate my darkness.”

(King David in Tehillim 18:29)

Havdalah begins: “Behold, Hashem is my salvation. I shall trust and not fear, because Hashem is my might and my praise, Hashem, and He was a salvation for me. You can draw water with joy from the springs of salvation. Hashem is our salvation, Your people is Your blessing, Selah.”

The transition from Shabbat into the week is a spiritually painful moment. As we so joyfully sing Lecha Dodi, Shabbat is the source of all our blessings, including those during the week. Shabbat brings with it so much good that its departure leaves a spiritual void. This is why Havdalah opens with a series of uplifting verses from Tanach. They are a form of a spiritual salve, to assist us to entering the week while taking with us as much of the holiness of Shabbat as possible. In effect, the verses remind us that the conclusion of Shabbat does not mean that we have lost our connection to Hashem. Rather, now it is incumbent upon us to ensure that Shabbat’s beauty and warmth spills into our week by impacting positively on the way that we conduct ourselves.

We start with a declaration of pure faith from the prophet Yeshayahu (12:2), “Behold, Hashem is my salvation, I shall trust and not fear.” We are taking leave of Shabbat and, despite the fact that we are departing Hashem’s domain and reentering our own, we know that Hashem will remain with us wherever we are. But it is more than just intellectual knowledge. After having spent twenty-five hours in the most sublime spiritual state, we are certain that Hashem will guard over us in the physical realms as well. Which is why we confidently state, “I shall trust and not fear.” Because we know and we feel that our relationship with Hashem is not reserved solely for Shabbat.

And then we say, “You can draw water with joy from the springs of salvation.” These poignant words follow the previous verse in Yeshayahu. In the same way that a spring of fresh water does not dry up, so too the blessings that Hashem showers upon us will never cease. What could be a greater source of joy and comfort than to know that we will be blessed throughout the week because of the delight that we felt over Shabbat!

This is why we continue with a verse from Tehillim (3:9), “Hashem is our salvation, Your people is Your blessing, Selah.” Rashi explains that King David is declaring that it is Hashem’s responsibility to save His nation. But it is our responsibility to praise Hashem and to give thanks to Him for saving us.

The Chazon Ish writes that Hashem comes to our assistance when we reach the point of not seeing any possible salvation according to the rules of nature. It is in the most challenging of times that a person realizes that the only One they can place their trust in is Hashem.

Is there a more perfect moment for declaring our commitment to Hashem than at the end of Shabbat? The day of Shabbat transcends the physical and testifies that we, His chosen nation, are beholden not to nature but rather only to Hashem.

To be continued...

PEREK SHIRA

by Rabbi Shmuel Kraines

THE SONG OF THE SNAKE

The Snake says: “Hashem supports all of the fallen and straightens all of the bent.” (*Tehillim 145:14*)

The snake is symbolic of evil and sin. Slithering and hissing, brandishing long venomous fangs and displaying its forked tongue, its very appearance suggests wickedness. Animals generally kill only what they can eat, whereas the snake kills creatures much too large for it to swallow. Despite its relatively small size, the snake kills more humans than does any other animal. The primordial snake brought down Man from his lofty, holy status, and almost destroyed the entire world. Hashem therefore diminished the snake with ten curses and cut off its legs, bringing it right down to the ground. Even so, He “supported its fall” and allowed it to continue to exist, and to certain extent, even to “straighten” itself and raise up its head. Moreover, its punishment brought it an element of blessing since the removal of its legs enabled it to slip through crevices and escape predators.

If even the snake, which brought destruction and misery to the world, merited Hashem’s mercy and support, all the more so should we seek to support the unfortunate of our nation. To this end we let the base tones of the world’s orchestra rise from the song of the fallen snake.

**Sources: Avos D’Rabbi Nassan Ch. 42; Metzudas David; Bereishis Rabbah 20:5*

**In loving memory of Harav Zeev Shlomo ben Zecharia Leib*

LETTER AND SPIRIT

Insights based on the writings of Rav S.R. Hirsch by Rabbi Yosef Herschman

Authentic Peace

Last week, we read about the fiasco of *Baal Pe’or*, where many Jews were seduced by Midianite women, and then persuaded to worship the idol *Pe’or* in the most detestable ways.

As the leaders of the nation assembled to sit in judgment over the guilty, the brazen Zimri paraded a Midianite princess around, in full view of the whole community, encouraging continuation of the reprehensible crime. The sight of such impudence, at the entrance to the Sanctuary – the sight of such heinous degeneracy at the site that was to safeguard the holiness of the people – reduced the nation, including its leaders, to helpless tears.

Only one man – Pinchas – summoned the strength for manly action. As a young man, he saw the tears of helplessness as a sign that Israel’s leaders had lost faith in their nation’s future. He took a spear in hand and slew the Jewish man and the Midianite woman in an act that spared the people the wrath of Hashem. The plague that already had claimed 24,000 lives, and would have claimed the lives of many more, ceased immediately.

Pinchas demonstrated that as long as there is even one person left on earth to champion the cause of Hashem and Torah, then Hashem's cause – the survival and education of humanity – is not lost. Our Torah portion opens with Pinchas being rewarded with the covenant called peace. The supreme harmony of peace is entrusted here to that spirit and activism which thoughtless people – anxious to mask their passivity and neglect of duty as “love of peace” – like to brand and condemn as “disturbances of the peace.” But in reality, one who dares to struggle against the enemies of what is good and true in the eyes of Hashem is a fighter for the covenant of peace on earth. Authentic peace is harmony with the Will of Hashem.

The converse is also true. One who does not stand up for truth, one who will not struggle to attain it, is called “a hater of peace” in Psalms 120:6. Only if people will respect truth, and endeavor to have their actions, desires, speech and actions correspond to that truth, will they be able to work together in harmony.

When it comes to our personal sphere of desires, rights and possessions, we are encouraged to pursue peace, at almost any price. If it is only our personal interest, property rights or honor that is at stake, we should avoid even the most justified quarrel. But when the price for peace includes the values of humanity, in general, and of the Torah in particular, it is too high a price.

In Scripture, when truth and peace are juxtaposed, truth ordinarily precedes peace. (Zechariah 8:19; 8:16) Truth comes first and peace only second. Peace, as Pinchas has taught us, is a *product* of truth. And this is why peace cannot be pursued at the expense of the truth.

Eternal priesthood is promised to Pinchas and to the loyal heirs among his sons because he was zealous on behalf of Hashem, and took bold action to atone for all those who remained silent around him. In acting for the sake of Hashem's truth, he is rewarded with eternal peace.

- Sources: Commentary, Bamidbar, 25:12, Mishlei page 196, Tehillim 120:6

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