

O H R N E T

DOUBLE ISSUE · PARSHIOT KI TEITZE - KI TAVO · VOL. 6 NO. 46

PARSHA INSIGHTS

THE HIDDEN PERSUADERS

*“And it will be that if you didn’t want her”
(21:14)*

“P”ediatricians Zap Media. No Television For Toddlers” ran the headline in a recent New York Times. “Children under two should not watch television, older children should not have television in their bedrooms and pediatricians should have parents fill out a media history along with a medical history.”

These recommendations by the American Academy of Pediatricians were coupled with a warning that “television viewing can affect the mental, social and physical health of young people.”

Studies by the American Medical Association, the Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and the National Institute of Mental Health have all concluded that there is a link between violence in television and violent behavior by young people.

And yet the beat goes on. Western man sits glued to his TV. It won’t happen to me, he thinks. I’m sophisticated. I can see right through their blatant materialism. I know that my life isn’t going to be better if I switch brands of mouthwash.

Don’t fool yourself. Just as there is a kashrut for the mouth, there’s a kashrut for the eyes. What you see goes in. It stays there.

In the 1960s, a new form of advertising was discovered and almost immediately made illegal. Madison Avenue advertising firms realized that an image of their product on a single frame in a movie playing at 24 frames per second left a subliminal message imprinted in the mind of the viewer. A message of which he was totally unaware. Because of its extreme subtlety, the message managed to sneak under the defenses of the consumer and plant itself into his subconscious.

You are what you eat. You think what you see.

Just because we don’t immediately feel the effects of watching television doesn’t mean that the message doesn’t lodge in our sub-conscious.

In this week’s *parsha* the Torah legislates that if a soldier desires a woman captured in battle, he must go through a whole process before he can marry her. “*You shall bring her into the midst of your house; she shall shave her head and let her nails grow...She shall dwell in your house and weep for her father and her mother for a full month...*” The Torah continues “*And it will be that if you didn’t want her...*” More grammatically correct, the Torah might have written “*And it will be that if you will not want her.*” — in the future tense. Why does the Torah choose the past tense here?

The answer can be found in the way the Torah describes the first

meeting between the soldier and his female captive — “*and you will see among its captivity a woman who is beautiful of form and you will desire her.*” The Torah here uses a different verb, “*and you will desire her.*” It doesn’t say “*you will want her.*”

In life, there are “wants” and there are “desires.” A want is based on logic and sound judgment. A desire is just that — a fleeting fancy which fades like a lily and rots. When the Torah says “*if you didn’t want her,*” it’s not listing an alternative, it’s stating a fact. There never was a “want,” just a “desire” — thus the past tense. Even though you “desired” her, in truth you never really “wanted” her. Your emotions hijacked your reason.

Next time you turn off your television, notice that feeling of weariness and lethargy that wells up in your body and your soul. You drag yourself out of your chair and rub your eyes to meet the light.

You just spent a couple of hours tuned into the world of desire. Nothing is real.

Do yourself a favor. Take your TV(s) out into the yard, find a .357 magnum and from the safety of your house, put a well-aimed bullet into the screen.

You’ll feel a lot better.

Source:
• *Ohel Mo’ed in Mayana shel Torah*

continued on page three

KI TEITZE

The Torah describes the only permissible way a woman captured in battle may be married. A man with two wives, one whom he hates, and she bears a firstborn son, this son's right to inherit a double portion is protected against the father's desire to favor the child of the favored wife. The penalty for a rebellious son, who will inevitably degenerate into a criminal, is stoning. The body of a hanged man must not be left hanging overnight, because it had been the dwelling place of a soul. One who finds lost property must return it. Men are forbidden to wear women's clothing and vice versa. A mother bird may not be taken together with her eggs; rather she must be sent away. A fence must be built around a roof of a house to prevent falling. It is forbidden to plant a mixture of seeds, to plow using an ox and a donkey together, or to combine wool and linen in a garment. A four-cornered garment must have twisted threads — *tzitzit* — on its corners. Laws regarding illicit relationships are detailed. When Israel goes to war, the camp must be ruled by spiritual purity. If as a result of battle a slave escapes, he must not be returned to his master. Promiscuity is prohibited. Taking interest for lending to a Jew is forbidden. *Bnei*

Yisrael are not to make vows. A worker may eat of the fruit he is harvesting, but not take it home. Divorce and remarriage are legislated. A new husband is exempt from the army and stays at home the first year to gladden his wife until the relationship is cemented. Collateral on a loan may not include tools of labor, for this prevents the debtor from earning a living. The penalty for kidnapping for profit is death. Removal of the signs of the disease *tzara'at* is forbidden. Even if a loan is overdue, the creditor must return the debtor's collateral every day if the debtor needs it. Workers' pay must not be delayed. The guilty may not be subjugated by punishing an innocent relative. Because of their vulnerability, proselytes and orphans have special rights. The poor are to have a portion of the harvest. A court may impose lashes. An ox must not be muzzled in its threshing, but must be allowed to eat. A man should marry his brother's widow if the deceased left no offspring. Weights and measures must be accurate. The Parsha concludes with the mitzvah to wipe out the name of Amalek, for in spite of knowing all that happened in Egypt, they ambushed the Jewish People after the Exodus.

KI TAVO

When *Bnei Yisrael* dwell in the Land of Israel, its first fruits are to be taken to the Temple and given to the *kohen* in a ceremony expressing recognition that it is Hashem who guides the history of the Jewish People throughout all ages. This passage forms one of the central parts of the Haggadah that we read at the Passover Seder. On the last day of Pesach of the fourth and seventh years of the seven-year *shemitta* cycle, a person must recite a disclosure stating that he has indeed distributed the tithes to the appropriate people in the prescribed manner. With this mitzvah Moshe concludes the commandments that Hashem has told him to give to the Jewish People. Moshe exhorts them to walk in Hashem's ways, because they are set aside as a treasured people to Hashem. When *Bnei Yisrael* cross the Jordan River they are to make a new commitment to the Torah. Huge stones are to be erected and the Torah is to be written on them in the world's seventy primary languages, after which they are to be covered over with a thin layer of plaster. Half the tribes will stand on Mount Gerizim, and half on Mount Eval, and the *levi'im* will stand in a valley between the two mountains. There the *levi'im* will recite 12 commandments and all the people will answer "amen" to the blessings and the curses. Moshe then details the blessings that will be bestowed upon *Bnei Yisrael*. These blessings are both physical and spiritual. However if the Jewish People do not keep the Torah, Moshe details a chilling picture of destruction, resulting in exile and wandering among the nations.

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לרפואת
שמחה בנימין בן חנה
בתוך שאר חולי ישראל

continued from page one

TO THE LIFEBOAT

“All these curses will come upon you and pursue you and overtake you until you are destroyed, because you will not have listened to the voice of Hashem, your G-d, to observe His commandments and decrees that He commanded you.” (28:45)

Once asked my Rabbi why it was that I alone among my friends had chosen to return to the faith of our fathers. My friends, almost without exception, had married non-Jews and were busy parenting non-Jewish children.

He replied to me with two words in Hebrew, “zechut avot.” The merit of the ancestors. “The Torah must have been very dear to someone in your family” he said. “Someone, your grandfather, your grandmother, prayed very hard that they should have Jewish grandchildren.”

Imagine you just bought a refrigerator. It turns up in a wooden crate. You take out the fridge and throw away the wood. Imagine you're on a sinking boat with the same refrigerator. You take the wood and throw away the refrigerator. When most of the Jewish World was reaching for a new fridge, someone in my past was hanging on to the wood for dear life.

“It is a tree of life to those who hold on to it, and its supporters are praiseworthy.” We say these words from *Mishlei* (Book of Proverbs) every time we put the Torah back into the Holy Ark. Maybe we say them as we are putting the Torah away and out of sight to

remind us what the Torah really means to the Jewish People. It is our plank of wood in a stormy sea. It's not so much that the Jewish People have kept the Torah, rather the Torah has kept us.

In its description of the Holy Ark which housed the Ten Commandments, the Torah tells us that the Ark's carrying staves are never to be separated from the Ark itself: *“The staves shall remain in the rings of the Ark, they may not be removed from it.” (Shemot 25:15)*

These staves represent the financial supporters of Torah. Just as the staves of the Ark may not be removed, so are the Torah's supporters and benefactors inseparable from Torah scholarship. However, the Ark never really needed the staves because, not only did it bear its own weight, but it would lift up those who were “carrying” it.

When Rabbi Eliezer Gordon, the founder of Telshe Yeshiva, got married, his father-in-law, Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Neviezer wanted to support him so that he could devote himself to study and become a great Torah scholar.

As Rabbi Gordon's family began to grow, he became increasingly uncomfortable with the feeling that he was burdening his father-in-law, and frequently asked Reb Avraham to allow him to accept one of the numerous rabbinical positions that were then being offered to him. Despite difficult

financial times, Reb Avraham refused to let him accept. He insisted that he carry on studying.

Reb Avraham's wife asked her husband how long he intended to support their daughter and son-in-law. He replied “My dear wife, who knows who is supporting whom...”

When finally Rabbi Gordon was offered the Rabbinate of *Eisheshok*, his father-in-law felt he could not restrain him from accepting such an important post.

The day after the Gordon family left for *Eisheshok*, Reb Avraham Yitzchak, Rabbi Gordon's father-in-law, passed away. It then became clear who had been supporting whom. The Ark carries those who “carry” it.

“It is a tree of life to those who hold on to it, and its supporters are praiseworthy.” Those who support Torah are certainly praiseworthy, and they will be happy with their support, but for the Torah to be a tree of life that will sustain us and our descendants, the Torah must be to us like a tree of life. We must hold on to it like a plank of wood in a shipwreck.

The month of Elul is a time when we re-dedicate ourselves to the Torah and its values. We must hold on to it for dear life. For it is our only unsinkable lifeboat.

Sources:

- Rabbi Zev Leff in *Shiurei Bina*, Rabbi Moshe Newman

I DIDN'T KNOW THAT!

Honoring parents and sending away the mother bird are two commandments which the Torah equates regarding their reward: “In order that He will bestow good upon you, and long life...” (Devarim 22:6) Why should sending away a bird, a simple act, share the status of a very difficult mitzvah, honoring parents? What is the connection between these two mitzvot?

When a person approaches a bird's nest to take the young, the mother bird

could easily fly to safety. But instead, she stays by the nest in order to protect her young, putting herself in danger. To capture her in this position would be to take advantage of her self-sacrifice for her young, and the Torah forbids this. Surely, then, we must honor our parents, who sacrifice so much for us.

- Based on *Oznaim L'Torah*

“And you shall take from the first of

every fruit of the earth...and place (them) in the basket.” (Devarim 26:2) By Torah law, *bikkurim* have no minimum amount which one must give. The Sages, however, required that one give a sixtieth of his crop (*Rambam Hilchot Bikkurim 2:17*). This amount, one out of sixty, is hinted in the above verse “and place in the basket.” The Hebrew word for basket — *teneh* — has the numerical value of 60.

- *Vilna Gaon*

TILL THE LAST JEW GETS HOME

In *Eretz Yisrael* Jews begin praying for rain by saying “*vetain tal u'matar livracha*” in the ninth blessing of the *shmone esrei* on the seventh of the month of Cheshvan.

Why on this date and not Succot time when rain is already needed?

On Succot itself we don't pray for rain because the answer to such a prayer would prevent us from dwelling in the succah, and would be interpreted as a sign that Hashem rejects our efforts to serve him by fulfilling that mitzvah. But why don't we begin as soon as Succot is over?

Rabban Gamliel explains that we delay our prayer for rain in consideration for the Jew who has come to Jerusalem from the most distant point in *Eretz Yisrael* to fulfill the mitzvah of a pilgrimage to the *Beit Hamikdash*. We are concerned that he should be able to return home without getting caught in the rain. Since such a journey to a point near the Euphrates River could take up to fifteen days, we wait that amount of time before praying for rain.

This consideration would seem to be limited to the time when we had a *Beit Hamikdash* to which we were commanded to make a pilgrimage three times a year on the Festivals. But no distinction is made by the Talmud or the commentaries between then and now.

One of those commentaries, Rabbeinu Nissim ben Reuven (Ran), offers an interesting explanation.

This practice extends even into the period after the destruction of the *Beit Hamikdash* because it was the custom of Jews to continue coming to Jerusalem during the Festivals. (He even notes that in his time — about six hundred years ago — they were still doing so.) Out of consideration for these Jews who were perpetuating the spirit of the *Beit Hamikdash* pilgrimage, the prayer continued to be delayed so that they too could arrive home without getting caught in the rain.

Anyone who lives in *Eretz Yisrael*, especially Jerusalem, can testify that this custom of visiting Jerusalem and the site where the *Beit Hamikdash* stood on the Festivals is still very widely practiced.

• *Ta'anit 10a*

THE HEAVENLY SIGN

The fast days legislated by our Sages in a season when there is no rain begin in the month of Cheshvan and end with the month of Nissan. The reason for not fasting beyond Nissan, says the *mishna*, is that rain which falls (in *Eretz Yisrael*) after the month of Nissan is the sign of a heavenly curse, since it is counterproductive at such a late date.

As a source for this, the *mishna* cites the confrontation the Prophet Shmuel had with the Israelites after they demanded a king to rule them in his place. To demonstrate to them that Heaven disapproved of the manner in which they had made this demand, he declared: “Today is the time of the wheat harvest and I shall call to Hashem and He shall deliver thunder and rain; thus shall you know and see how great is the evil in the eyes of Hashem which you have done to demand a king.” (*Samuel I 12:17*)

Although the surface reading of our *mishna* would indicate that anytime rain falls after Nissan it is a cursed sign, the commentaries cite a statement in the Jerusalem Talmud (1:8) to the effect that this is so only if no rain had fallen previously; only then is rain after Nissan a curse rather than a blessing.

This distinction, points out Tosefot Yom Tov in his commentary on the *mishna*, is evident in the text of this *mishna* as it appears in the standard editions of the Mishnayot. In contrast to the text “Nissan has passed and *rain falls*” which appears in the standard editions of the Talmud, the text there reads “if Nissan has passed and *rain has not fallen*.” Although both texts refer to rainfall after Nissan, the Mishnayot text indicates, like the Jerusalem Talmud, that the problem is only when rain has not previously fallen. As a parallel, Tosefot Yom Tov cites the *mishna* in *Masechta Moed Katan* (3:3) which distinguishes between plants which were watered before a holiday and those that weren't, in regard to the benefit they will derive from being watered during the intermediate days of the holiday.

We may suggest that there is even a hint in the biblical text to this distinction. The passage following Shmuel's statement (12:18) relates that the prophet called to Hashem “and Hashem delivered thunder and rain on *that day*.” The stress on “that day” seems to signal that no rain had fallen before that day, and that is why it was considered a sign of Heavenly disfavor, which would not have been the case if rain had fallen before “that day.”

• *Ta'anit 12b*

COMPLAIN TO THE MANUFACTURER

“*Shalom Aleichem, Rebbe,*” said the stranger to Rabbi Elazar ben Shimon. Rabbi Elazar was returning home from his studies in Migdal Gedor in an exceedingly good mood because of the vast amount of Torah knowledge he had acquired at the Yeshiva.

The sage was so put off by the exceptional ugliness of his greeter that, instead of returning the greeting, he remarked on the greeter’s unpleasant appearance and asked him if all the people where he came from were equally ugly.

“I don’t know about that,” replied the ugly stranger, “but I suggest that you go to the manufacturer who created me and complain to Him about how ugly His creation is.”

When Rabbi Elazar realized that he had deeply hurt the stranger he begged his forgiveness. But the latter was adamant in refusing to forgive him until he “brought his complaint to the manufacturer.” All the way home he rode behind the stubborn stranger imploring his forgiveness until they finally reached his city where a crowd came out to welcome him with cries of “*Shalom Aleichem*, our rabbi and teacher.”

Now it was the stranger’s turn to embarrass the sage and he related to the townspeople what had transpired between them. They begged him to nevertheless forgive him because of his greatness in Torah, and he consented to do so on the condition that the sage not make such behavior habitual.

The commentaries explain that the mysterious stranger was the Prophet Eliyahu in disguise who appeared in this fashion in order to teach the sage a lesson. Maharsha points out that Rabbi Elazar had assumed that there was something morally corrupt about the man which was reflected in his external appearance, just as wisdom is reflected in the visage of a wise man. Such an assumption did not, however, justify rude behavior, and Eliyahu’s response cured him of it.

• *Ta’anit 20a*

CITIZENS OF THE WORLD TO COME

“Is there anyone in this marketplace of Beilafst who is a citizen of the World to Come?” This was the question posed by Rabbi Broka of Chozah to someone who was privy to such heavenly secrets — the Prophet Eliyahu.

Although the prophet was at first hard pressed to find someone of such status among the throngs in the busy marketplace, he did eventually point to two brothers who passed before them and identified them as citizens of the World to Come. The sage was curious to know what these two ordinary looking people had done to deserve that title, so he asked them what they were involved in.

“We are happy people who make other people happy,” they replied. “When we see someone depressed we cheer him up, and if we see two people quarrelling we make fun of their situation until they make peace.”

Rashi explains their peacemaking role as a ticket to the World to Come on the basis of our Sages teaching that one who brings peace between one man and another is rewarded both in this world and in the World to Come.

The connection between cheering up a depressed person and the World to Come, writes Maharsha, can be understood through what our Sages say about Hashem empathizing with the suffering of a sinner executed for his crime by declaring, “How heavy is My head, how heavy is My arm.”

Every Jew, say our Sages, has a share in the World to Come. But his connection with it is only in the hereafter. Rabbi Broka was looking for a “citizen” of that world whose life reflected those other-worldly values and who was only a “tourist” in this world. Those two entertainers had that other-worldly perspective of Hashem being unhappy, as it were, if one of His creatures was unhappy. Their sensitivity to Hashem’s happiness which motivated them to cheer up a depressed person proved that they were indeed “citizens” of the World to Come even while here on earth.

• *Ta’anit 22a*

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PARSHA Q&A ?

KI TEITZE

1. Why must a captured woman mourn her family for a month in her captor's house?
2. What fraction of the inheritance does a first-born receive if he has a) one brother? b) two brothers?
3. What will become of a *ben sorer u'moreh* if his parents don't bring him to court?
4. Why is it a degradation to Hashem to hang a criminal's body on the gallows overnight?
5. What do you do if you find a lost object that costs money to maintain?
6. Why does the Torah forbid wearing the clothing of the opposite gender?
7. Why does the Torah link the mitzvah of sending away the mother-bird with the mitzvah of making a railing on the roof of your house?
8. When is it permitted to wear wool and linen?
9. What three things happen to a man who falsely slanders his bride?
10. Although the Egyptians enslaved the Jewish People, the Torah allows marriage with their third-generation converts. Why?
11. Why is causing someone to sin worse than killing him?
12. If one charges interest to his fellow Jew, how many commandments has he transgressed?
13. What is the groom's special obligation to his bride during their first year together?

14. When is a groom required to fight in a non-obligatory war?
15. What type of object may one not take as collateral?

KI TAVO

1. When did the obligation to bring *bikkurim* begin?
2. *Bikkurim* are from which crops?
3. How does one designate *bikkurim*?
4. Who shakes the basket containing the *bikkurim*?
5. What does "*v'anita v'amarta*" mean?
6. Which Arami "tried to destroy my father?"
7. When during the year may *bikkurim* be brought? Until when are the special verses recited?
8. Someone declaring that he separated *terumah* and *ma'aser* says: "And I didn't forget." What didn't he forget?
9. What were the Jewish People to do with the 12 stones on Mt. Eval?
10. Six tribes stood on Mt. Eval and six on Mt. Gerizim. Who and what were in the middle?
11. Who "causes the blind to go astray?"
12. How does one "strike another secretly?"
13. Eleven curses were spoken on Mt. Eval. What is the significance of this number?
14. Why are sheep called "*ashterot*"?
15. How is the manner of expressing the curses in Parshat Bechukotai more severe than in this week's parsha?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

KI TEITZE

1. 21:13 - So her captor will find her unattractive.
2. 21:17 - a) 2/3 b) 1/2
3. 21:22 - He will eventually rob and kill to support his physical indulgences.
4. 21:23 - Because humans are made in Hashem's image; and because the Jewish People are Hashem's children.
5. 22:2 - Sell it and save the money for the owner.
6. 22:5 - It leads to immorality.
7. 22:8 - To teach that one mitzvah leads to another, and to prosperity.
8. 22:12 - Wool *tzitzit* on a linen garment.
9. 22:18 - He receives lashes, pays a fine of 100 silver *selah*, and may never divorce her against her will.
10. 23:8 - Because they hosted Yaakov and his family during the famine.
11. 23:9 - Murder takes away life in this world, while causing someone to sin takes away his life in the World to Come.
12. 23:21 - Three; two negative commandments and a positive commandment.
13. 24:5 - To gladden her.
14. 24:5 - When he remarries his ex-wife.
15. 24:6 - Utensils used to prepare food.

KI TAVO

1. 26:1 - After the Land was conquered and divided.
2. 26:2 - The seven species for which *Eretz Yisrael* is praised.
3. 26:2 - When he sees the first fruit ripen on a tree, he binds a piece of straw around it to mark it as *bikkurim*.
4. 26:4 - The *kohen* places his hands under the hands of the one bringing it, and they wave the basket together.
5. 26:5 - Speak loudly.
6. 26:5 - Lavan.

7. 26:11 - *Bikkurim* are brought from Shavuot until Channuka. The verses are recited only until Succot.
8. 26:13 - To bless Hashem.
9. 10. 27:2 - Build an altar.
10. 27:12 - *Kohanim, levi'im* and the Holy Ark.
11. 27:18 - Any person who intentionally gives bad advice.
12. 27:24 - By slandering him.
13. 27:24 - Each curse corresponds to one of the tribes, except for the tribe of Shimon. Since Moshe didn't intend to bless the tribe of Shimon before his death, he did not want to curse them either.
14. 28:4 - Because they "enrich" (*m'ashirot*) their owners.
15. 28:23 - In Bechukotai the Torah speaks in the plural, whereas in this week's Parsha the curses are mentioned in the singular.

ECLIPSE

Nathan from Mombasa, Kenya, wrote:

Dear Rabbi,
 "What is the Jewish significance of the recent solar eclipse?"

Dear Nathan,

To answer your question, I'm sending you the following essay. (It's from Ohr Somayach's "Torah and Nature" series available from our website <http://www.ohrnet.org> and by email from <info@ohr.org.il>).

THE SOLAR ECLIPSE: RAYS OF HOPE

What is the meaning of a solar eclipse? To the ancient Chinese, solar eclipses meant that dragons were devouring the sun. To the Czechoslovakians, they meant that ice giants, bitter enemies of the sun, were conquering it. To the Romans, they meant that the sun was poisoned and dying.

To the Jews, solar eclipses meant that the moon was passing between the sun and the earth, thereby blocking the sun's light.

Notwithstanding the physical explanation of a solar eclipse, there is also spiritual significance to it: At the time when the sun is eclipsed, it is an unfavorable period for the world. A parable: This can be compared to a human king who made a feast for his subjects, and placed a lantern before them. When he grew angry with them, he told his servant, "Take away the lantern from before them, and place them in darkness!" (*Talmud Bavli, Succah 29a*)

The king is G-d, the King of Kings; the people at the table are ourselves;

the lantern is the sun. The moon obscuring the sun is the king's servant who takes away the lantern. Although eclipses can be described in entirely natural terms and occur at set intervals, they nevertheless indicate that the period is one of Divine retribution for various sins.

So, a solar eclipse signifies a harsh period. But an eclipse does not mean that the sun has been extinguished (contrary to what everyone else in the world thought)! The servant did not extinguish the lantern; he merely prevented it from illuminating the king's subjects. The sun shines as merrily as ever during an eclipse, even if we cannot perceive its light.

Many eras in history have been dark for us. But during these times, we should remember that G-d's light has not been extinguished; it is merely in a state of *hester panim*, hiddenness. The sun is not extinguished during an eclipse, nor does it move away; it is merely concealed. And just as the sunlight always emerges from its eclipse, so too are all situations of *hester panim* only temporary, destined to be followed by the light of G-d's redemption.

Even during the darkness of a solar eclipse, all is not entirely in gloom. The sun is four hundred times further away from us than the moon, but it is also four hundred times larger than the moon (secular scientists call this a "grand coincidence"). This means that from our perspective the moon precisely covers the sun. The result of this is that while the sun is essentially obscured, shafts of sunlight may appear around the edge of the moon as they shine through the mountains on its surface (these can damage the retina, and it is therefore dangerous to look at a solar eclipse with anything less than a welder's mask). We can also perceive the glimmer of burning gases in the sun's outer

atmosphere. Admittedly, the light presented by these sources is minimal, but it is certainly detectable.

When Yosef's brothers sold him to a passing caravan, we are taught that G-d arranged matters such that the merchants would be carrying sweet-smelling spices instead of their usual foul cargo. Now, this would appear to be of little comfort to Yosef. He had just been betrayed by his brothers and sold to heathens as a slave. What was the consolation in his prison quarters having a nice smell?

The answer is that precisely because this was the lowest point of Yosef's life, G-d wanted to show that He was still with him. He did not want Yosef to fall into despair, so He sent him a small sign to reassure him. This minor but significant gesture strengthened Yosef's spirits during his long ordeal.

Such is the message of the shafts of light, which we perceive during the darkness of a solar eclipse. They are literally "rays of hope," and they remind us that even during the dark periods of life, we are to look for those small signs that tell us that G-d is still with us.

Sources

- Aruch LeNer and Iyun Yaakov to Succah 29a
- Beit Elokim to Perek Shirah
- Rabbi Chaim Shmulevitz in Sichot Mussar

ADDENDA

ECLIPSES: PHYSICS OR METAPHYSICS?

The Talmud (*Succah 29a*) refers to eclipses of the sun and the moon as unfavorable periods for the world. It further states that solar eclipses occur for four different reasons: 1) If a Torah scholar is buried without being adequately eulogized; 2) If a betrothed girl is raped and nobody responds to her

cries; 3) Homosexuality, and 4) Two brothers being killed at the same time.

The question is clear: Many ancient peoples believed that eclipses were unpredictable events. But we know that they follow a set pattern and can be calculated in advance. Did the Talmudic Sages not know this? How can eclipses be a punishment for sins if they occur at predictable times? Two basic approaches are taken to explain the Talmud.

The first approach states that the Talmud certainly knew that eclipses are physical and predictable events. Rabbi Yaakov Ettlinger (*Aruch LeNer ad loc.*) notes that the Talmud clearly understood solar eclipses to be caused by the moon obscuring the sun, as is clear from the parable that it uses. He also points out that the Talmud uses the seemingly superfluous wording, “at the time when the sun is eclipsed, it is an unfavorable period,” when it could have simply said “when the sun is eclipsed.” The word *z’man*, “time,” is related to the word “*zamen*,” prepared. (Every time it appears in Tanach, it is written only in reference to pre-appointed times.) Thus, the usage of this word shows that eclipses were known to be pre-arranged and predictable events.

However, this does not present a contradiction to their being portenders of sin. Rabbi Ettlinger and the Lyun Yaakov explain that during eclipses, G-d exacts retribution for certain sins. Certain periods are set aside for Divine justice to be meted out, and these are indicated in the physical universe by eclipses.

A different approach is taken by Rabbi Yonasan Eybeschitz (*Ya’arot Devash 2:12*). He explains the Talmud’s term *likuy ha-chamah*, literally “the striking of the sun,” to be referring not to solar eclipses but to sunspots. These are cool dark patches on the face of the sun (often larger than the Earth), caused by magnetic storms. These being events of unknown occurrence, he explains them to be a sign of G-d’s displeasure. Indeed, sunspots send vast amounts of charged protons into our atmosphere, and several studies have tentatively shown corresponding variations in animal populations and incidence of disease among people. Rabbi Eybeschitz states that people of earlier times were more sensitive to such aberrations of the sunlight. Although sunspots and solar storm disturbances occur in an approximately eleven-year cycle, this can vary from seven to sixteen years.

PUBLIC DOMAIN

Comments, quibbles and reactions concerning previous “Ohrnet” features

Ohrnet Express:

Thank you so much for answering my question submitted to “Ask the Rabbi.”

I really appreciated the time you took for the explanation. I didn’t expect really to ever see an answer, or I figured I might get an answer in months! Wow, I was amazed at how fast I got an answer!

• Donna <Puffins@aol.com>

Re: Preying Plants (Ohrnet Shoftim):

A serious concern that one may have eating carnivorous plants is the likely possibility that there may be insects (half-digested or otherwise) within the cavities and folds of the plant or on its surface. So before tossing that pitcher plant salad careful inspection is in order.

• Elyahu Lee, Bayport, NY
<EResearch@worldnet.att.net>

YIDDLE RIDDLE

Eliyahu Shiffman <sarash1@netvision.net.il> wrote with this riddle:

“I am a *levi*. There is one thing I have never witnessed in my entire adult life, and I never will either. *Yisraelim* sometimes see it, so do *kohanim*, but me and my fellow *levi'im*? Never! What is it?”

Answer next week...