

OHRNET

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PARSHA INSIGHTS

THE “HEEL” GENERATION

“Pinchas...followed the Israelite man and pierced them both, the Israelite man and the woman into her stomach...” (25:7-8)

A few weeks ago, a great and holy Jew passed from this world of illusion to the World of Truth. He was a man noted for his pithy and incisive sayings; a man who was not in the business of being mealy-mouthed when the occasion demanded. Over thirty years ago he commented that having a television was like having a sewer running through the middle of your living room.

I have a sneaking suspicion that television hasn't improved over the past three decades. A TV “Rip Van Winkle” awakening from a half-century snooze in front of a fifties test-card would pass out at what greeted his awakening. He would find it impossible to reconcile that fledgling invention with the permissive and permitted lewdness assaulting his eyes in all its gory Technicolor.

He would not believe what he was seeing on the television.

If, thirty years ago, having a television was like having a sewer run through your living room, today it's like having a full-blown, round-the-clock sewage plant.

Ah, some say, but what about all the redeeming social value of the Great Mezmerizer? The creation of a global village, the arts and music programming, the politics, the sports, all the culture, dee-dah dee-dah. Debauchery dressed up as art. The “global village” — a soap opera of materialism preying on people's fantasies and weaknesses.

We are so inured to immorality, vice and violence in our society that we barely bat an eyelid unless something particularly sordid leaps off the screen and into our homes to assault our jaded sensitivities.

At the beginning of this week's *parsha* is an incident which to our refined twenty-first century sensibilities seems outrageously violent. With one spear, Pinchas justifiably kills a prince of Israel and a princess of Moav who are committing an act of gross depravity. He skewers them through their lower stomachs. How can such violence be condoned by the Torah? Where is the Torah's sensitivity?

I'd like to ask you a question — Where is *our* sensitivity? Is there anything that still shocks us? And even if two consenting adults don't yet have the right to consent to ultimate public intimacy — are we that far away?

Our permissive age has lost all perspective of the impact of immorality. Not just on ourselves. Not just on each other and our families. On the creation itself.

What Man does echoes throughout all space and time. Immorality doesn't just destroy lives. It destroys the world. That's Jewish Ecology. My actions affect nature. My actions echo in the farthest reaches of the cosmos. The era of Noach was filled with perversion to the extent that man started to be intimate with animals. G-d brought a flood to wash away that corruption from the earth.

How can we be so insensitive to what is going on around us?

We are living in a period of history know as the *ikvata d'mashicha* — the

birth-pangs of *mashiach*. We are witnessing a world sinking to a level from which it cannot descend further. Depravity can go just so far before it devours itself; it will rot like a seed until nothing is left.

But from that putrefaction will spring forth a shoot of untainted and untaintable purity.

Ikvata is an Aramaic word. It has the same root as the word for “heel.” Why should the coming of the redemption be connected to the “heel”?

Every generation corresponds to a part of the body. We are the generation of the “heel.” The heel is the lowest and the least sensitive part of the human body. You can stick a needle in the fleshy part of the heel and not even feel pain.

If we really knew what was going on in these last generations, we would literally not be able to stand. G-d in his infinite mercy has given us an insensitivity to events so that we can carry on.

In Israel, we are sitting on a volcano. And life goes on. Almost every day people die in violent and tragic circumstances. And life goes on. We don't feel it. We just carry on.

Very soon, G-d will bring the final curtain down on world history. It will be clear why every little thing had to happen in the way that it happened. We will laugh at what we thought was tragedy. Our mouths will be full with the laughter of recognition.

And then G-d will take our hearts of stone and replace them with hearts of flesh and blood.

Sources:

• Rabbi Elchanon Wasserman and others

Hashem tells Moshe to inform Pinchas that Pinchas will receive Hashem's "covenant of peace" as reward for his bold action — executing Zimri and the Midianite princess Kozbi. Hashem commands Moshe that the people must maintain a state of enmity with the Midianites because they 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 *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. 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. The Parsha concludes with special teachings of the service in the *Beit Hamikdash*.

HAFTARA

“Divrei Yirmiyahu” is the first haftara of the “Three-of-Affliction” trilogy read between 17 Tammuz and 9 Av. It contains Jeremiah's ominous vision of Israel's ruin and first exile at the hand of Babylon's King Nebuchadnezzar.

Yirmiyahu's vision of a menacing, almond-wood rod indicates that the

time of Israel's punishment is ripening, like the hasty ripening of an almond. His vision of a cauldron with its north lip a-boil warns of Israel's northern neighbor, Babylon, wielding that rod. If they repent, however, G-d will remember their “youthful kindness” when, as a fledgling nation, they forsook a familiar Egypt and like a starry-eyed bride followed G-d into a frightening wasteland.

YIRMIYAHU 1:1 - 23

Books of Moses contain untold layers of meaning, many of them hinted through oddities of spelling and grammar, so too, the book of Yirmiyahu reaches beyond the normal bounds of expression due to Yirmiyahu's lofty grasp, above that of most other prophets.

The Sages sum up the Book of Yirmiyahu as “entirely destruction.” Even in English, a “jeremiah” is any predictor of gloom and doom. Why, indeed, did G-d specifically invest such a great prophet, one of the very greatest, with the vision of Israel's destruction and exile?

“All G-d does is for the good,” say our Sages. Perhaps Yirmiyahu's exalted perception was the very reason he was chosen to bring word of the exile: From his lofty vantage point, he — like no other in his generation — could perceive the joy hidden in the tears.

SUPER VISION

In his introduction to the Book of Yirmiyahu, Malbim notes that this book contains more “irregularities” in spelling and grammar than any other book of Tanach. This, explains Malbim, is due to the exalted nature of Yirmiyahu's vision, which can almost be compared to that of Moshe's. Just as the Five

I DIDN'T KNOW THAT!

Moshe's prayer for G-d to appoint a leader in his stead (*Numbers 27:16-17*) contains exactly 28 words, corresponding to the 28 years which that leader, Yehoshua, led the people. Thus, in connection with Yehoshua's conquering the Land, the verse states (*Deuteronomy 8:18*) that G-d grants *koach*-power (*koach* = 28) to prosper in the Land.

• *Ba'al Haturim*

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PULLING STRINGS

A man gives a woman the value of a *pruta*, the minimum required for making *kiddushin*, but he makes this *kiddushin* conditional on his interceding on her behalf with the authorities; if he subsequently fulfills his condition by speaking to the authorities regarding her indebtedness to them, the *kiddushin* is valid.

This ruling of the *mishna* does not seem to offer us any new information, asks Tosefot, and should be challenged in the same manner as is an earlier *mishna* (*Kiddushin 60b*) as to why it is necessary to repeat the simple principle that a fulfilled condition validates *kiddushin*. Tosefot answers that we might have otherwise assumed that the woman can claim that she was not satisfied with the way he interceded on her behalf.

Rambam (*Laws of Marriage 5:19*) adds a couple of words to the description of the man's fulfillment of his condition: The man spoke to the authorities, he writes, and they gave her a break and did not press their claim.

This is understood by one of the commentaries (*Korban Netanel* on the *Rosh*) as a paraphrase of the Tosefta cited by Rosh which states that he fulfills his condition by "speaking to the authorities *in the manner of interceders*." The intent of the Tosefta and Rambam is to communicate that if the man who made this condition only succeeded in gaining for the woman a deferment of payment, it is considered a fulfillment; the woman cannot contest the *kiddushin* by claiming that she consented to it only because she expected him to achieve total cancellation of her debt. He was required only to "speak in the manner of interceders," and this he certainly did.

Beit Yosef, in his commentary on the Tur Even Haezer (38:12), understood the Rosh as citing the Tosefta as a challenge to the approach of Tosefot, and variations of these approaches appear in the Beit Chadash on Tur (*ibid.*), Tosefot Yom Tov on the *mishna*, and Rashash.

• *Kiddushin 63a*

PATRILINEAL JEWISHNESS A MODERN MYTH

In a case where one of the parties is not marriageable according to Jewish Law, says the *mishna*, the child born of their union has the status of the mother; *i.e.*, a Jewish father and a non-Jewish mother — the child is considered a non-Jew.

What is the source for this rule? Rabbi Yochanan, in the name of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai, based it on the following passages in the Torah:

"You shall not intermarry with them [the non-Jews]; you shall not give your daughter to his son in marriage nor shall you take his daughter as a wife for your son. For — he [the non-Jewish father] — shall turn away your [grand]son from Me and they will serve other gods, and Hashem's anger shall be kindled against you, and you will be quickly destroyed." (*Deuteronomy 7:3-4*)

Intermarriage is prohibited for both a Jewish boy and girl. The consequence of a grandchild being turned away from his Jewish faith is, however, mentioned only in regard to the non-Jewish father but not in regard to the non-Jewish mother. The conclusion is that the child of a Jewish mother and a non-Jewish father is considered Jewish, and the danger of his being diverted from his faith is *relevant*; while the child of a Jewish father and a non-Jewish mother is considered non-Jewish, and the consequence of his being diverted from the Jewish faith is *irrelevant*.

• *Kiddushin 66b*

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PARSHA Q&A ?

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 long 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 all 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 “Hashem 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?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week’s Questions!

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

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 Hashem, 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.

STAR STRUCK

From: R.G.

Dear Rabbi,

What is the purpose of the vast solar system, and all the stars and planets beyond? If the Jews are supposed to teach the world about G-d, does it extend to other planets? Why are we the only people with the Torah — maybe there really are more with access to it on other planets; shouldn't we know if there are? And where in the seven days of creation are the other planets mentioned — it appears to center around the earth, sun and moon?

Dear R.G.,

Radak (Rabbi David Kimchi) writes that the stars exert influence on earthly events, even upon the growing grass. This fits with the Talmudic teaching that “every single blade of grass below has a constellation above that strikes it and says ‘grow.’” This means that the heavenly bodies affect the earth — either by spiritual channels, or by the exertion of natural forces such as gravitation or radiation, or by some combination thereof.

The Prophet Yeshaya (Isaiah) tells us another reason for the vast universe: It's there for us to look at. Simply looking into the night sky can bring a person to long for connection to godliness.

“Raise your eyes aloft!” says Yeshaya, “And realize who created these!” By staring into the vast heavens, a universe so immense that it defies imagination, a person can achieve Awe of G-d.

It can bring humility, too, as King David describes his feelings: “When I see Your Heavens, Your handiwork, the moon and stars which You have established...What is a human that you should remember him? A Man, that your should be mindful of him?”

You ask, “Is there life in outer space?”

Relatively little regarding other worlds is mentioned in classical Jewish thought. Rabbi Chasdai Crescas (14th century) writes that nothing in the Torah outlook precludes the existence of life on other worlds. The verse “Your Kingdom is one which encompasses all worlds...” (*Psalms 145:13*) implies the existence of more than one world. According to the Talmud there are at least

18,000. The existence of these other worlds and the fact that they rely on Divine Providence make it reasonable to think that life might exist there.

The Sefer Habrit states that extraterrestrial creatures exist but that they have no free will. He adds that we shouldn't expect creatures from another world to resemble earthly life, any more than sea creatures resemble land animals.

Now you might ask what possible purpose could there be for the existence of “Martians” who possess no free will. This problem prompted Rabbi Yosef Albo (author of *Sefer Ikkarim*) to view such existences as illogical.

However, a possible purpose for their existence can be found in the work *Tikunei Zohar*, which states that in the future each *tzaddik* (righteous person) will rule over a star and have an entire world to himself. This world, with its entire population, would serve to enhance the *tzaddik's* spiritual growth.

That said, I must admit my own amusement at much of today's interest in the question “Is there life in outer space?” Am I just a provincial terrestriano-snob, or is the better question not “who cares?”

You see, there's a lot of interest — and hope — in finding the existence of other life forms; and I wonder if a lot of this doesn't stem from a desire to eliminate human responsibility: The smaller the fraction that we are of the universe, the less important our actions seem in the overall picture. What's murder, for example, if earth-life is just one of dozens, or jillions, of life-forms?

Your last question is “Why are the planets not mentioned in the Biblical account of creation?” The answer is that they are mentioned. The Hebrew word “*cochav*” means planet as well as star; so the planets are mentioned in the verse which says that G-d made the “*cochavim*.” (*Bereishet 1:16*) Furthermore, all heavenly and earthly creations are summed up with the verse “The Heavens and the Earth and all their array (meaning everything within them) were finished.” (*Ibid. 2:1*)

Sources:

- *Yeshaya 40:26*
- *Radak, Ibid.*
- *Rambam; Yesodei Hatorah 2:2*
- *Yitav Panim 1: 167*
- *Psalms 8*
- *The Aryeh Kaplan Reader*

YIDDLE RIDDLE

Last week, Saul Behr wrote with the following riddle:

Psalm 100, “*Mizmor l’Todah*” (A psalm of thanks), is part of the daily *p’sukei d’zimrah* prayer. It corresponds to the *korban todah* (thanksgiving offering) brought in the Holy Temple. This psalm is omitted, however, on the day before Yom Kippur, since the *korban-todah* offering could not be eaten that night, as Yom Kippur is a 24-hour fast day. (Similarly, this psalm is omitted during Pesach, as the offering consisted in part of *chametz*-leavening).

My question is: Why, then, do we say “*Mizmor l’Todah*” on the day before Tisha B’Av, and on Tisha B’Av itself, being that Tisha B’Av is a fast day just like Yom kippur?

Saul Behr answers: Because, if we could bring a sacrifice to the Temple, there would not be a fast day of Tisha B’Av, which commemorates the destruction of the Temple. Therefore, it’s not Tisha B’Av that’s preventing us from bringing the *korban*; it’s the lack of a Temple (which is also what causes Tisha B’Av) — and that’s exactly the reason why we say “*Mizmor l’Todah*”, instead of bringing the *korban*!

Gotta riddle? Send it to ohr@ohr.edu

PUBLIC DOMAIN

Comments, quibbles and reactions concerning previous “Ohrnet” features

Re: Road Apples (Ohrnet Chukat):

I want to add to your answer of not getting too worried about the future and overpopulation: Before the millenium celebrations last year, some journalist bothered to look up what predictions people had made in December 1899 and how accurate they were. He discovered that the thing people predicted to be the most difficult problem facing mankind was the removal and disposal of ever increasing amounts of manure on city streets as more and more horse-

drawn carriages were plying the streets yearly. Less than 15 years later, the “horseless carriage” (automobile) changed all that. I agree, let’s worry about making today better.

• Carmel Dancziger

Re: Ask the Rabbi (Ohrnet Chukat):

I enjoy a lot all these questions and all your answers. Thank you.

• Luis Henrique de Freitas Padua, Netherlands

KASHA! (KASHA MEANS “QUESTION”)

How would you answer this question on the Parsha?

JRS asked the following “Kasha”:

Dear Rabbi,
Regarding the inheritance of Tzlofchad’s daughters, the verse says, “And Moshe brought their judgement (*mishpataN*) before G-d.” In this verse, the letter “noon” of the word *mishpatan* is written bigger than the other letters. Why?

Dear JRS,

While I haven’t seen an explanation for this, allow me

to offer my own thought:

We know that each Hebrew letter corresponds to a number; *noon* corresponds to 50. The large *noon* could be a reminder to Moshe of the “*noon shaarei bina*” — “the fifty gates of understanding” — which are only attainable through Divine assistance.

Why does Moshe get this reminder now? Rashi explains that Moshe was being punished here: Because he had told the Jews that he would answer all their hard legal questions — a statement which may have been misunderstood to mean that he “had all the answers” — he was suddenly stumped by the daughters of Tzlofchad and needed to ask G-d for the answer.

Do you have a KASHA? Write to kasha@ohr.edu with your questions on any Parsha!