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PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

Should Joe Biden Join the Rolling Stones?

“It was after the plague...” (26:1)

While Sir Mick Jagger is lithely running up and down the stage at the age of 80, President Joe Biden is tripping over his tongue, let alone his feet. True, it's a lot to do with genes: Jagger's father was a physical education instructor and he looks after himself, and – let's face it – being Joe Biden and running one of the largest countries in the world is somewhat more stressful than running up and down the stage belting out “Jumpin’ Jack Flash.” But age is an obsession in the modern world, as gallons and gallons of Botox and billions of dollars of plastic surgery attest to.

In Hebrew, the word of ‘old’ is *zaken*: *zayn, koof, nun*, which is an acronym for “mi sh’kana chochma,” meaning “the one who has acquired wisdom.” In the secular vernacular, ‘old’ is an unpardonable sin remedied only by extensive plastic surgery.

Rabbi Yaakov Kaminetzky, one of the great sages of the previous generation, was once sitting in an airplane next to the head of the Histadrut, the Israeli Labor Federation. As Reb Yaakov was of advanced age, his children insisted that he travel in Business Class to minimize the rigors of the journey from America to Israel. The rest of his family traveled in Economy.

As soon as the “fasten seat belt” sign went off, one of his grandchildren bounded forward and said, “Zeide, would you like a drink?” Not long afterwards, another grandchild appeared and said, “Zeide, are you comfortable? Would you like another pillow?” This grandchild was followed by another and yet another. This monotonous procession of doting grandchildren did not escape the notice of the head of the Histadrut.

After the fifth grandchild made his exit, the man turned to Reb Yaakov and said, “Forgive me, Rabbi, but may I ask you a question?” “Of course,” replied Reb Yaakov. Said the man: “I couldn't help but notice the tremendous respect your grandchildren give you. I'm lucky if I get a birthday card from my grandchildren. What's your secret? Why is it that your children and grandchildren give you such respect?”

Reb Yaakov replied, “You see, we believe that we are descended from people whose spiritual greatness is almost impossible for us to imagine: Avraham, Yitzchak, Yaakov, Moshe. My *rebbe* (Torah teacher) used to say, without false modesty and in total sincerity that he didn't come to the ankles of his *rebbe*, neither in Torah learning nor in purity of character. If you asked my *rebbe's rebbe* about his *rebbe*, he would have said the same. If you

extrapolate this backwards even a few generations, it becomes very difficult for us to have any idea of the greatness of the Vilna Gaon, who lived only 250 years ago, let alone of the *Avot*, the Patriarchs.

"Ever since that supernal moment when G-d spoke to our ancestors at Sinai, our spiritual journey has been ever downward. And this is why my children give me respect, because they see me as closer to Sinai than they. I am one generation closer to the giving of the Torah!

"You, on the other hand, believe that you share common ancestry with the ape. So why should your children respect you? You are one generation closer to the ape than they are! They see themselves as a step up the ladder of the 'ascent of man.' In their view, it is *you* who should give *them* respect."

"It was after the plague..."

Rashi comments that Hashem commanded a census after the plague, like a shepherd who counts his flock after it has been ravaged by wolves. The plague was a result of the profligacy of the Jewish men with the Midianite women. That census continues down the generations. The fact that we survive against a tide of physicality is because our holy *zeides* and their *zeides* lifted their souls – instead of their faces....

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.

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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.

TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Bava Batra 18-24

A Torah Educational System (1)

Rav said to Rav Shmuel bar Shilat, "Until the age of six, do not accept a student, but from that age on, accept the student and feed him like an ox."

Our *daf* teaches the origins and development of a revolutionary system of establishing schools for Torah study, beginning with young children. Originally, there were limited educational opportunities for Jewish children, depending on the family resources that were available to each child. However, the Sage Yehoshua ben Gamla, who was a *kohen gadol* during the time of the Second Beit Hamikdash, instituted the first "Torah Public School System." He began a movement to enable all Jewish children from any location and any financial means to receive a quality Torah education.

Many *halachot* regarding this system and the way it should be managed, including the relationship between the teacher and the student, are taught on our *daf*, and are codified in Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deah 245. One example is the above statement of Rav to Rav Shmuel bar Shilat, "to feed the student like an ox". Rashi explains this to mean for the teacher to heartily insist that the student "eat and drink the nourishment of the Torah," similar to how a person puts a yoke upon his ox. Rashi in another place (Ketuvot 50a) explains this phrase slightly differently: "Feed him so much Torah that he will be 'stuffed with it,' in the same way you feed an ox a very large amount of food."

The Maharsha, however, suggests that this intends to convey a different, more gentle approach to educating our youth. He writes: "The teacher should learn with the student tenderly and with great sensitivity, just as one feeds an ox with his hands without any force or coercion. The example of an ox is meant to depict an example where there is total lack of force applied, as opposed to feeding a camel or a calf, in which case the animal is forcefully fed without a sense of compassion (perhaps think of veal nowadays)." Torah should be taught and transmitted to the next generation in a loving manner, which will not only teach, but also demonstrate to the youth, the peaceful and pleasant ways of the Torah.

▪ *Bava Batra 21a*

A Torah Educational System (2)

And Rav also said to Rav Shmuel bar Shilat, "One who studies, studies; and one who doesn't study let him remain there in the yeshiva so that he will be company for his friend."

With this statement, Rav teaches one of the rules and guidelines in place for conducting a Torah educational institution. The reason given for the one who does not study to remain in the yeshiva appears somewhat ambiguous in its meaning, since it does not seem to clearly state who will be the company of whom.

Rashi explains that the one who is not studying but sits there idly does not need to be sent out of the class or yeshiva. Rather, he should be allowed to remain there with the others who are actually studying Torah, and eventually the atmosphere of Torah study will have a positive effect on him. He will be moved to also pay attention to the classes and to join in with the others in their pursuit of understanding the Torah.

The Maharsha, however, offers a different interpretation for this rule. He says that the phrase "so that he will be company for his friend" implies that his remaining there is for the friend's benefit and not for his own benefit. The Maharsha explains that when his friend sees him there, sitting idly, his friend will constantly be reminded how wonderful it is to be learning Torah, unlike the unfortunate person sitting there as "company," and the one who studies will be encouraged even more to be diligent in his Torah endeavors.

▪ *Bava Batra 21a*

TAAMEI HAMITZVOS

Reasons behind the Mitzvos

by Rabbi Shmuel Kraines

"Study improves the quality of the act and completes it, and a mitzvah is more beautiful when performed by someone who understands its significance" (Meiri, Bava Kamma 17a).

THE DAILY OFFERINGS (Part One)

Mitzvah #401; Bamidbar 28:1-8

Hashem introduced the passage of the offerings saying, "My offering that is My bread for My fire...you shall be careful to offer Me in its time." He described the offerings as His meals. When Moshe heard this, he jolted backward in surprise. He exclaimed, "Even if we would offer You all the animals in the world, they would not suffice!" Hashem told him, "I am not asking them to bring Me offerings according to My ability, but rather only according to their ability." Hashem continued, "This is the fiery offering you

shall bring for Hashem: two unblemished lambs or kids in their first year, two a day, a constant olah-offering.” Hashem added that these two animals do not have to be offered at once; instead, “Offer one in the morning and one in the afternoon...” (*Tanchuma*, *Naso* §11). This daily offering is known as the “Tamid” (constant) offering. It is an *olah*, which means that its meat is incinerated on the Altar, which suggests absolute dedication to Hashem. A meal offering and a wine libation accompanied it.

One might ask: What did Hashem mean when He said that He only asks from us according to our ability? Is the ability of an entire nation limited to a daily offering of only two little animals? We may suggest that “according to their ability” means “in human terms.” That is to say, we express our worship of Hashem by offering Him a lamb because that is how one might honor a human king. However, unlike human kings who are often cruelly demanding on their subjects, Hashem demands very little from us. Thus, *Midrash Tanchuma* observes: There are ten kinds of pure animals, of which only three are domesticated and readily available – the cow, the goat, and the sheep – and it is only from these that Hashem requested offerings.

Elsewhere, the Sages ask the question about the world not containing enough animals in a slightly different manner: Does Hashem *eat*?! Even angels do not eat, nor did Moshe eat all the time he spent in Heaven! The Sages explain that Hashem *regards* the offering as His food. Thus, in the above-cited verse that introduces the offerings, Hashem said that the offerings are “for My fire.” That is to say, when we place it on the fire on the Altar, He regards the consumption of the fire as His own consumption (*Shir HaShirim Zutta* 1:15; Buber ed.). The *Zohar* (Vol. 1 pg. 164a) adds that offerings are a spiritual food that sustains Hashem’s world, and in this sense, He Himself “consumes” the offerings. It emerges that Hashem does not actually eat the offering but only *regards* it as if He has eaten it. This is in line with *Sefer HaChinuch*’s explanation of the offerings, that Hashem does not derive satisfaction from the nutrients of the offered animals but rather from our act of service. The essence of the offering is the message it means to convey, be it a message of worship, gratitude, praise, pardon, request, or tribute.

Next week we continue this major topic in Part Two.

COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

KIDDUSH LEVANAH (PART 7)

UNDER THE LIGHT OF THE SILVERY MOON

“My walk on the moon lasted three days. My walk with G-d will last forever.”
Charles Duke – Lunar Module Pilot, Apollo 16

Kiddush Levanah then continues with the following sentence, one that is repeated three times: “Just as I dance toward you but cannot touch you, may none of my enemies be able to touch me for evil.”

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch explains this as meaning that just as we cannot touch the moon and change its trajectory in any way, so too our enemies cannot change Hashem’s course of history. Despite the seemingly dismal dimensions of Jewish history, everything that happens to the Jewish nation and to world history is Divinely ordained.

Rabbi Eliyahu Meir Bloch (1895-1955) was one of the heads of the Telshe Yeshiva in Lithuania prior to and during the Holocaust. In 1941 he traveled to the United States on a fundraising mission for the Yeshiva. While there, the German army invaded Lithuania, and most of the faculty and the student body were liquidated by the Nazis, including his wife and family. Rather, than sink into despair, Rabbi Bloch reestablished the Yeshiva in Cleveland, Ohio. The Yeshiva subsequently relocated to Wickliffe, where it continues to flourish today. When explaining the verses in the First Book of Shmuel (20:21-22), he would say, "There is a tremendous lesson being taught here. When a Jew is forced to flee, it is not because his enemy is chasing him. Rather, Hashem uses the enemy to ensure that the Jew goes where Hashem wants him to be. A Jew never runs from an enemy. Rather, he runs to a place that Hashem has destined for him."

As Rabbi Yaakov Emden wrote some three hundred years ago (Siddur Beit Yaakov, Sulam Beit Keil), "When we contemplate our situation in the history of the world, we realize that we are a nation exiled, like scattered sheep. After all the thousands of years of hardship that have befallen us, there is no nation as oppressed as ours. Our enemies are numerous. With hatred and jealousy, they have raised their heads to uproot and destroy us. Even so, they have been unable to fulfill their plans. The most powerful of nations have risen against us and long ago fallen, their memory forgotten like a passing shadow, but we who cling to Hashem survive today. Despite all the torments of our exile, we have not forsaken even one letter of the written Torah, and the words of our Sages still stand strong. They have been impervious to the hand of time. What could the clever philosophers possibly say to explain this? That it is a coincidence?

"By my life, I swear that this is a greater miracle than those Hashem performed for our forefathers in Egypt, in the desert and in the Land of Israel. The longer the exile lasts, the more the miracle becomes obvious and Hashem's might is revealed. Everything that we undergo today was already foreseen by the prophets, who bemoaned the terrible length of the exile long before it began. From all their words, not one has fallen aside. He who would dispute this, his words are like smoke and the passing clouds."

There have been so many moments in Jewish history where one could mistakenly think that we have been abandoned by our Father in Heaven. It is not true. Whatever we experience has been decreed upon us and proves that Hashem is orchestrating every single detail of our existence.

As Winston Churchill, the mythical wartime leader of Great Britain declared, "You have enemies? Good. That means you have stood up for something, sometime in your life."

We stand up for Hashem. We are His ambassadors in this world and we are the everlasting proof of His Divine blueprint. A blueprint that no individual and no nation can ever realign.

To be continued...

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

Synonyms in the Hebrew Language

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

Performance Platforms

When I was a young child, we used to refer to the Kohanim engaged in Birkat Kohanim as going up “to duchan” or “duchening.” Because of that usage, I always thought that duchan was a verb in Yiddish that referred to the act of “blessing” other people. But as Rabbi Eliyahu HaBachur already points out in Sefer Tishbi, the word duchan is actually a noun that refers to the “platform” upon which the Kohanim stood when reciting the Priestly Blessings. In this essay, we look at a whole slew of words in Hebrew – both Biblical Hebrew and Rabbinic Hebrew – that are used in reference to “platforms.” These words include kan, duchan, bimah, basis and itztaba.

Before we discuss the word duchan, I’d like to begin with the word kan (sometimes vocalized as keim), which refers to the “base,” “foundation,” “platform,” “stand,” or “pedestal” upon which something stands. For example, this term is used in the Bible when referring to the base of the kiyor (“water basin”) in the Tabernacle. It can also be used in a more abstract sense to refer to a person’s professional post (meaning, his job – on which his livelihood stands), as when Joseph foretold that the Pharaoh will reinstate his jailed butler, Joseph said: “He will return you on your kan [stand/post/position]” (Gen. 40:13), which is precisely what happened (Gen. 41:13).

Now we can start talking about the word duchan. That word does not appear at all in the Bible, but makes its first appearances in Mishnaic Hebrew, occurring thrice in the Mishnah. In the Babylonian Talmud, the term duchan also assumed an additional meaning in reference to the place upon which Kohanim stood when blessing the Jewish People (even outside of the Temple). For example, Rabbi Yose said about himself that he never went against what his colleagues told him, adding that even if they would tell him to go up to the duchan to recite the Priestly Blessings, he would do so, despite knowing that he is not a Kohen (Shabbat 118b). Other examples of the word duchan appearing when discussing the Priestly Blessings include: the warning that a Kohen should not add his own personal blessings to the recitation of the Priestly Blessings (Rosh HaShanah 28b), the rule that a Kohen may not ascend the duchan while wearing shoes (Rosh HaShanah 31b, Sotah 40a), the assertion that a Kohen who fails to ascend the duchan to bless the people has violated three positive commandments (Sotah 38b, Menachot 44a), and the story of a young Rabbi Tarfon ascending the duchan with his uncle and hearing the Kohen Gadol recite Hashem's ineffable name in the Temple (Kiddushin 71a). It is pretty clear that the Yiddish verb duchenen derives from the noun duchan in the sense of the post from which Kohanim blessed the people.

What is the etymological basis for the word duchan? Rabbi Tzvi Hirsch Ferber (Kerem Tzvi to Num. 6:23) offers another two ways of understanding the etymology of duchan. Firstly, he suggests parsing duchan as a portmanteau of the Greek prefix du- (“double”) and the Biblical Hebrew kan (“base”). In doing so, he explains that the term duchan refers to the reality that an elevated platform might be double as wide as the stairs at its base that lead it up to it, hence it literally means “double base.” Alternatively, he explains the word duchan as related to the Biblical Hebrew root DALET-(VAV)-KAF, which refers to the verb of “smashing/flattening.” This makes sense because the duchan platform would

typically be a small area, which means that those standing there might have to squish together for there to be enough room for everyone.

Following this second explanation, we can compare the sense development of the root DALET-(VAV)-KAF to similar developments in the derivatives of the Proto-Indo-European root *plat-* that originally referred to the act of “spreading/flattening.” That root eventually yielded nouns that refer to a flat surface, like the English words *flat* (via the interchangeability of *f* and *p*), *place* (which derives from the Greek work *platus*), *platy*, *plaza*, *plate*, *plateau*, and more. The same PIE root is also the etymon of the Rabbinic Hebrew term *platya* (“street/highway”), as well as the Modern Hebrew word *plata* (“flat surface for heating foods”). All of these words refer to flat surfaces or platforms of sorts, and are derived from the root that refers to the act of making something flat. The same could be true in Hebrew, whereby the word for *duchan* – which is a flat surface – might be derived from the verb used in reference to “flattening” things. A similar point is made by Rabbi Ernest Klein.

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Contributing authors, editors and production team: Rabbi Nota Schiller – Rosh HaYeshiva,
Rabbi Yitzchak Breitowitz - Rav of Kehillos Ohr Somayach, Avi Kaufman, Rabbi Reuven Chaim
Klein, Rabbi Reuven Lauffer, Rabbi Yaakov Meyers, Mrs. Rosalie Moriah, Rabbi Moshe
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