



תורת חיים Torat Chayim

Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner, Eitz Chayim of Dogwood Park

בס"ד

Ki Tisa

22 Adar Rishon, 5784 / Mar. 2, 2024

Vol. 1 Num. 21

This issue of Torat Chayim is dedicated to the soldiers of the IDF, the hostages, and the wounded.

Ramban on Our Parshah: Holy Money?

Is holiness **inherent**, or do **actions** define what is holy?

The question arises in our parshah, which opens with the mitzvah of contributing half a shekel toward the community's sacrificial needs each year. The Torah says men of military age are to donate "half a shekel, of the holy shekel. (Shemot 30:13)" What makes a shekel holy?

The Zohar (Bereishit pg. 33b) declares that the holiness of the shekel is **inherent**: "The scales stand upon it, and are balanced. What scales? Scales of justice." Without venturing into this mystical idea, we see that the Zohar describes the shekel as embodying something sacred.

The Rambam (Moreh haNevuchim 3:8) made a similar claim regarding the holiness of the Hebrew language, which has been termed *lashon hakodesh*, "the holy tongue", since the days of the Mishnah. [See Mishnah Sotah 7:2.] Rambam explained that Hebrew is **inherently** holy, as it lacks words for that which we are meant to conceal, such as bathroom-related terminology and conjugal language. Similarly, Rabbi Yehudah HaLevi identified elevated properties of the Hebrew language (Kuzari 2:67-68).

On the other hand, Ramban (Shemot 30:13) argued that entities are holy only when used for a sacred purpose. The

holiness of the shekel arrives with its use for sacred mitzvot. "Because the weights of *arachin* and redemption of the firstborn are with that coin, and those are holy, and so all of the *shekalim* of the Mishkan and all set amounts of silver mentioned in the Torah, the text calls it 'the holy shekel.'"

The same is true for Hebrew. Ramban rejected Rambam's idea as incorrect and unnecessary. He pointed to a Hebrew word for conjugal relations. Further, he argued that limiting Hebrew vocabulary would render the language **clean**, but not **holy**. Rather, the holiness of Hebrew lies in the way it is used. The fact that Hashem communicates to us in Hebrew establishes Hebrew as **holy**. Hashem's Names are Hebrew, and the names of the holiest human beings are Hebrew. [Ramban does not address the curious etymology of Moshe's name.]

This debate should inspire us to explore our own holiness. Hashem placed within our bodies a pure neshamah – but is that enough to make us holy? Perhaps yes, according to the Rambam. But the Ramban would disagree; like the shekel and the Hebrew language, we are holy when we make good on the promise of that neshamah and dedicate it for holy purpose.

Parshah Riddles for Kids (answers on the back)

Age 4-8: Who was in charge of creating the Mishkan? A) Korach B) Betzalel C) Master Po

Age 8-12: Where did the Jews find gold to use for the Eigel (Calf)? A) Earrings B) Coins C) Noserings

Age 12+: According to Rashi, why do Hashem's 13 Attributes of Mercy begin with "Hashem" twice?

Journey Through Tanach: Yehoshua, Perek 20

Chapter 20 begins the final stage of distributing Eretz Yisrael, establishing important national sites. In this chapter Yehoshua designates *arei miklat*, cities of refuge for people who kill by accident. This mitzvah was discussed repeatedly in the Torah; see Shemot 21:13, Bamidbar 35, Devarim 4:41-43 and Devarim 19:1-10. Now the Jews are ready for implementation, which Hashem instructs at the start of the chapter. (20:1-2)

Hashem provides a summary of the rules, expanding somewhat on the Torah's presentation. We learn that on arrival in the city the accidental murderer reports what happened to the city's elders, prior to his trial. The city's protection from the relatives of the victim begins with that arrival, despite the fact that no court has yet ruled that the murder was accidental. The accidental murderer remains there until the kohen gadol passes away. (20:3-6)

The Jews set aside three cities west of the Yarden: Kedesh in the north, Shechem in the central region, and Kiryat Arba/Chevron further south. Yehoshua also records the three cities that Moshe established on the eastern side

of the Yarden in Devarim 4: Betzer in the south, Ramot in the central region, and Golan in the north. (20:7-9)

Sefer HaChinuch (410) notes three benefits of the *ir miklat* system:

- Punishing the accidental murderer with exile;
- Protecting the accidental murderer from reprisal
- Protecting the victim's relatives from the trauma of seeing the accidental murderer. [It has also been noted that the *ir miklat* spares the accidental murderer from seeing the victim's relatives.]

Why was this mitzvah delayed until after the conquest? Rabbi Chaim Dov Rabinovitz (*Daat Sofrim*) suggests that war could desensitize the Jews to bloodshed. Now, separation of the *arei miklat* would act as a proclamation regarding the serious prohibition against harming others, the fate that would befall even someone who did so accidentally, and our responsibility to prevent violent revenge.

The 613 Mitzvot: #21 - Speaking of Yetziat Mitzrayim

In Shemot 13:8, Moshe instructed the Jews, "And you shall tell your child on that day: Because of this, Hashem acted for me when we left Egypt." As explained by Sefer HaChinuch in Mitzvah 21, the mitzvah of *sippur yetziat mitzrayim* [retelling the account of leaving Egypt] is a two-part mitzvah: (1) To talk about the events of our departure from Egypt, and (2) To thank Hashem for engineering that miracle. The Torah says we should do this while eating the korban pesach; in the absence of a korban, we do this at our Pesach Seder.

Rabbi Yechezkel Landau (Tzlach to Berachot 12b) noted that there is a separate mitzvah of mentioning our departure from Egypt on a daily basis; the Talmud even discusses the possibility that such a mitzvah might apply nightly as well. Nonetheless, this on-going mitzvah is not included in the standard count of the 613 mitzvot. Rabbi Landau suggested that this omission may be because the verse regarding the daily memorial is worded, "So that you will remember," but does not command, "You shall remember."

Israel's Chief Rabbis: Watching Bullfights, Rabbi Ovadia Yosef

Rav Ovadia Yosef was born in Baghdad in 1920; four years later, his family moved to Israel. While working in a store, he studied under Syrian sage Rav Ezra Atiyeh. He was ordained by Rav Ben Zion Uziel at the age of 20. Beginning in 1945, he served on rabbinic courts.

In 1947, at Rav Uziel's request, Rav Ovadia moved to Cairo as Chief Rabbi. He returned to Israel in 1950, becoming a judge in Petah Tikvah, and then Jerusalem; in 1965, Rav Ovadia joined Israel's Supreme Rabbinical Court. In 1954 Rav Ovadia won the Rav Kook Prize for Torah literature, and in 1970 he received the Israel Prize. He became Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv in 1968, and then Sephardic Chief Rabbi of the State of Israel in 1973. Rav Ovadia Yosef passed away in 2013.

Rav Ovadia was asked about attending bullfights, and he prohibited it unequivocally as something which is "in total opposition to the spirit of our sacred Torah. It is the culture of cruel sinners whom the portion of Yaakov must not emulate."

Here are some of his points, which are found in *Yechaveh Daat* 3:66:

- Yevamot 79a teaches that Jews have three traits: bashfulness, mercy and generosity.
- There is a biblical prohibition against causing pain to

animals, as demonstrated in the command to remove burdens from animals when they are sprawled beneath them. (Bava Metzia 31a, 32b).

- We override certain prohibitions to save an animal that has fallen into a ditch on Shabbat (Shabbat 128b), which we would not do for other significant halachic purposes.
- We are not allowed to eat until we provide food for our animals (Berachot 40a).
- The Talmud says that Rabbi Yehudah HaNassi suffered physical pain which was relieved only when he was merciful toward rodents (Bava Metzia 85a).
- According to Rabbi Chaim ibn Attar (Ohr haChaim to Vayikra 17:11), one may kill an animal only for consumption and similar uses.
- Rabbi Yechezkel Landau (Noda b'Yehudah II Yoreh Deah 10) prohibited hunting for sport.

Rav Ovadia concluded that "one who enters an arena to watch bullfights, paying the entrance fee, is a colleague of destructive people and an accessory to sin." He went on to cite numerous concurring authorities.

[Note that in the same responsum, Rav Ovadia is much more positive regarding visiting zoos and nature conservation areas. See, too, Yabia Omer 4:Orach Chaim 20.]

Upcoming Learning!

All classes are open to men and women and free of charge, unless otherwise noted

5:45 PM Shabbat March 2

Are Embryos Minors? Halachah and the Alabama Decision, with Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner, at Eitz Chayim

8:30 AM to 9:15 AM Sunday March 3

Fourteen Centuries: Rav Sherira Gaon, with Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner, in the lobby at Eitz Chayim

SPECIAL TIME: 7:00-7:45 PM Monday March 4 at Eitz Chayim and on ZOOM at <http://tiny.cc/medhal>
Halachah in Healthcare Settings: Davening for Patients with Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

8:00 PM Monday March 4 at Anshei Shalom

Guest Speaker Rabbi Asher Resnick: Maintaining Trust During a Crisis

8:15-9:00 PM Tuesday March 5

Gemara Makkot with Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner, for men, at 693 Knollwood

Age 4-8 B: Betzalel
Age 8-12 A: Earrings
Age 12+ C: To teach that Hashem is merciful before and after a person sins; see Rashi Shemot 34:6

Answers to Parshah Riddles

Torat Chayim does not include the Name of Hashem but should be disposed of respectfully, such as in paper recycling.
To dedicate an issue of *Torat Chayim*, go to <https://eitzchayim.shulcloud.com/form/toratchayim.html>