



תורת חיים Torat Chayim

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בס"ד

Bamidbar

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

Ramban on Our Parshah: Raiders of the Lost Ark?

I've never seen *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, but I've heard it includes a scene in which people open the "Ark of the Covenant" and suffer terrible consequences. Indiana Jones closes his eyes and is spared. The end of our parshah may be the source for the idea that even looking **up** on the Aron, let alone **in** it, is dangerous.

As our parshah explains, the kohanim prepare the Mishkan before the Jews travel. They dismantle the sacred items, covering up the aforementioned Aron, the shulchan, the menorah, and the gold mizbeiach. Elazar, son of Aharon, handles certain holy items himself. And then the Torah warns, "Don't cut off the (Levite) family of Kehat! Let them live and not die when they come to the Holy of Holies. Have Aharon and his sons come assign them to their tasks. *And they shall not come to see when the sacred is swallowed, lest they die.*" (Bamidbar 4:5-20)

On its face, this passage seems to say that the family of Kehat would die if they were to see the Aron. Seeing these holy items during their transition would be harmful; hence the *Raiders of the Lost Ark* scene. But why should seeing these items be dangerous? The list of sacred items includes the shulchan, menorah and gold mizbeiach, which were seen regularly in the Mishkan, and later in the Beit

HaMikdash! Further, a gemara (Yoma 54a) teaches that the entrance to the Holy of Holies was opened when the Jews came for *aliyah laregel* three times a year, and so everyone saw the Aron – and no one perished!

Ramban offers a mystical approach, accentuating Divine *tzniut*. The problem is not in seeing vessels, but rather in sensing Hashem's presence. While the sacred space is intact, shielded by a curtain, Hashem is present. Entering while the preparations are underway would mean invading Hashem's privacy. But once they would dismantle this area, Hashem would depart this plane, going to the spiritual Holy of Holies in the heavens. The "swallowing of the sacred" was Hashem's disappearance from the site. [On the other hand, *aliyah laregel* may be a time when that *tzniut* is formally suspended.]

The objects in the Mishkan, Indiana Jones notwithstanding, do not have the power of life and death. Rather, with this passage our parshah teaches us the importance of recognizing boundaries, and honoring that which is exclusive. There is much to explore in this mystical concept – as Ramban concludes, "the insightful person will understand" – but may we learn to apply this respect for *tzniut* in all of our relationships.

Parshah Riddles for Kids (answers on the back)

Age 4-8: Which is **not** a name for Shavuot in the Torah: A) Atzeret, B) Yom haBikkurim, C) Chag haKatzir, D) Purim?

Age 8-12: On Shavuot, we bring two loaves of bread as a korban. Are they made of: A) Barley B) Wheat or C) Oats?

Age 12+: Shavuot is Opening Day for bringing Bikkurim. What is the deadline at the end of the season?

Journey Through Tanach: Shoftim 5:1-19

In Chapter 4 we saw Devorah guide Barak in an armed rebellion against Canaan, and the text hinted at Divine aid in the victory. We also saw Yael kill the Canaanite general Sisera, but without much detail. Chapter 5 presents a poem credited to Devorah and Barak, expanding on the details of the war as well as teaching important lessons. The main lesson is regarding volunteerism; those who volunteer are the heroes of the story. [Note: The text names both Devorah and Barak as the poets; Radak contends that Devorah was the main composer.]

The poem begins with a general introduction: We were attacked, we volunteered to fight for each other, and then wonders happened. Thank Hashem! Devorah also mentions the presentation of the Torah at Sinai, to teach that when we left Torah we suffered, and when we returned to it we received wonders. (5:1-5)

Devorah then describes the troubles that beset the Jews under Canaan. The Jews fell into idolatry, and Canaanite foes became an ongoing threat until Devorah arose. Then the leaders **volunteered**, bringing the Jews back to loyalty to Hashem. Everyone should sing of this! (5:6-11 accord-

ing to Rashi)

Then, in an odd interlude, Devorah calls upon herself to awaken with prophecy, and upon Barak to go to battle. A gemara (Megillah 14b) explains that Devorah temporarily lost her prophetic ability because she said that the Jews were in trouble until she arose. Now she summons herself to return to prophecy. (5:12)

Devorah then turns to the war, recording the deeds of each tribe. Hashem **volunteered**, coming to our aid, and the tribes of Ephraim, Binyamin, Menasheh, Zevulun, and Yissachar came to fight as well. Reuven remained at a distance, as did Dan and Asher. Naftali came to fight, and Devorah again mentions Zevulun as a fighter. Devorah mentions different sub-families of Menasheh as either fighting or staying home. She does not mention Yehudah and Shimon, who lived in the distant south. (5:13-18)

Then Devorah says that in contrast with some of our tribes, the Canaanite kings **volunteered** to fight; they didn't even want money, just to harm Jews! (5:19)

To be continued...

The 613 Mitzvot: #32 - Melachah on Shabbat, Part 2

We have said that Shemot 20:10 prohibits *melachah*, meaning the tasks performed in the Mishkan. However, the *amora Rabbah* contended that the laws of *muktzeh* are also biblical, based on Shemot 16:5 and 20:10. (Pesachim 47b)

In practice, almost all authorities view *muktzeh* as rabbinic (see Shabbat 123b), but Rashi (Beitzah 2b *l'taameih*) resurrects this idea of a biblical root. [See also Sheiltot Beshalach 47, Tosafot Eruvin 38b *amar Rabbah* and Rashba Beitzah 2a *Rabbah l'taameih*.] Commentators resolve Rashi's idiosyncratic position in three ways:

- Rashi doesn't mean it's actually biblical; he considers *muktzeh* an *asmachta*, meaning that the concept behind this rabbinic law is reflected in the biblical text (Pnei Yehoshua Shabbat 44a);
- **The most serious form** of *muktzeh*, such as items created on Shabbat, as biblical (Pnei Yehoshua Beitzah 2a);
- **Eating *muktzeh*** is biblically prohibited, but handling it is rabbinic. (Chatam Sofer, Introduction to Beitzah)

We rule that *muktzeh* is rabbinic, but Rabbi Yechiel Michel Epstein (Aruch haShulchan Orach Chaim 308:4-5) argued that it also fulfills a biblical mandate of *shabbaton*, protecting the character of the day as one when we halt our weekday activities.

Israel's Chief Rabbis: Standing for the Dibrot, Rav Shalom Messas

Born to Rav Mimoun and Rachel Messas in Morocco, Rav Shalom Messas was a dedicated student from a young age. He continued his family's long rabbinic tradition, directing the Talmud Torah of Meknes for some 2,000 students, then founding Yeshivat Keter Torah in Meknes, then becoming Chief Rabbi of Casablanca, and finally Chief Rabbi of Morocco. In 1978, Rav Ovadia Yosef and Rav Shlomo Goren brought Rav Messas to Israel to become the Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem; Rav Messas served in this role until his passing in 2003.

Rav Messas was influential beyond the Sephardic world, working closely with Ashkenazi leaders like Rav Eliezer Waldenberg and Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv. Chabad Lubavitch credits him with enabling their early success in Casablanca. Rav Messas produced many students, who occupy leading positions around Israel today.

In 1985, Rav Messas was asked about the custom of standing when we read the Aseret haDibrot (Ten Commandments). On one hand, it's an ancient practice. On the other hand, the Rambam and others opposed it, lest heretical people say that this part of the Torah is more authoritative than the rest of the Torah. In modern times, Rav Ovadia Yosef weighed in against the custom. But Rav Messas defended it, first in *Shemesh uMagen* 1:Orach

Chaim 57 and again in *Shemesh uMagen* 3:Orach Chaim 48.

Rav Messas pointed out that the custom of standing was widespread in Morocco, and it reflected the Torah's description of the Jews as standing when they heard the Aseret haDibrot (Shemot 19:17, 20:15). He also argued that standing is a valuable way to introduce much-needed reverence for the words of Hashem. Third, he noted the view that the entire Torah is included in the Aseret haDibrot; this is brought by the Moroccan sage Rav Chaim ibn Attar (Ohr haChaim Shemot 20:1).

As far as the Rambam's concern for heretical claims that the Aseret haDibrot are the only authoritative part of the Torah, Rav Messas replied sharply. First, sitting for the Aseret haDibrot will not rehabilitate people who promote this heresy. Second, the heresies of today are far worse; they refuse to recognize Divine authorship for *any* part of the Torah, whether the Aseret haDibrot or any other verse. So the Rambam's concern is no longer relevant.

Rav Messas concluded that given the powerful pedigree for this custom, and the benefit of increasing reverence for the presentation of the Torah at Sinai, we should continue to stand.

Upcoming Learning!

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

8:20 PM Shabbat June 8

Pirkei Avot: Must We Suffer to Learn Torah?, with Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner, at Eitz Chayim

8:30 AM to 9:15 AM Sunday June 9

Fourteen Centuries: From Gaonim to Rishonim, with Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner, in the lobby at Eitz Chayim

There is no **Halachah in Healthcare Settings** shiur this week

The Men's **Gemara Makkot** shiur will meet at the Torczyner home (719 Wildwood) at 2 AM on Shavuot night

See our flyers for Tikun Leil Shavuot, and for Youth Programs on the first afternoon of Shavuot!

5:00 PM Thursday June 13 "**Boaz: Hero or Villain?**" for Collegiates and Young Adults, at the Torczyner home, 719 Wildwood

7:15 PM Thursday June 13 "**Rav Zilberstein, Agnon and a Story of Masorah**" at ECDP

Age 12+ The 25th of Kislev, which is Chanukah; see Mishnah Bikkurim 1:6 and Chagga! 2:19
Age 8-12 B: Wheat
Age 4-8 D: Purim

Answers to Parshah Riddles

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