

INSIGHTS from the SEDRA

Insights from the Sedra is a project of the Scholar's Kollel of Great Neck. It aims to provide several questions and answers about the Sedra, culled from various commentaries, including the following: Baal Haturim, Darash Moshe, Vedibarta Bam by Rabbi Moshe Bogomilsky, Torah Treasures by Dov Furer, Wellsprings of Torah by Alexander Friedman, and Kol Dodi by Rabbi Dovid Feinstein, Great Torah Lights by Rabbi Yitzchak Meir Goodman, Something To Say by Rabbi Dovid Goldwasser, The Vilna Gaon, Growth Through Torah by Zelig Pliskin and The Call of the Torah.

ואת שעיר החטאת דרש דרש משה

“And regarding the goat sin offering, Moshe thoroughly inquired... (10:16)

These two words, דרש דרש are the exact halfway mark of the Torah. We are therefore taught that the entire Torah revolves around constant inquiry – דרישה. These words show us that no matter how much someone has inquired, he has still not advanced beyond the halfway point of Torah knowledge. This feeling must be the legacy of each member of *Bnei Yisrael*. And this legacy guarantees that one who learns Torah will think of Torah day and night. (R' Teitelbaum of Uhel)

ופרסה איננו מפריס טמא הוא לכם...ופרסה לא יפריס טמא הוא לכם...ופרסה לא הפריסה

“But its hoof is not split, is unclean to you...and its hoof will not be split is unclean to you...and its hoof was not split...” (11:4-6)

We are struck by a curious anomaly. The sign of impurity of the absence of cleft hoofs is mentioned three times in three consecutive verses. In the first verse, it is written in the present tense, in the second verse in the future, and in the third, in the past. In a figurative sense, the Torah is teaching us that before passing a negative judgment on a person, we must take into account not only his present status, but also his past and his future. We must not be quick to condemn a man with an impeccable past, for his misstep of today. And even if both his past and present are not flawless, we must think of his future, of his potential for doing good. Only after determining that his past, present, and future equally bear the marks of *tumah*, uncleanness, can we characterize him as *tameh hu*, “he is unclean.” (Rabbi Yisrael Salanter)

The *Midrash (Midrash Rabbah 13:5)* states that each one of these animals – camel, hyrax and hare - mentioned in these verses, each lacking a split hoof, alludes to one of the countries in which the Jews were exiled. The *gamal* – camel, whose verse is in the present tense refers to Babylon. The *shafan* – hyrax, whose verse uses the future tense refers to Media/Persia. The *arnevet* – hare, whose verse is in past tense refers to Greece.

Based on this, the unique phrases can now be explained. Babylon was an empire that lasted a short while – without much of a past or future. Therefore, the phrase used regarding the camel is in the present tense. The Persian Empire will last until the end of days (*Avodah Zarah 2*); therefore, the future tense is used regarding the hyrax. The Greek Empire was an ancient empire, but once it was destroyed it never was rebuilt. Therefore, regarding the hare, the past tense is used.

(Ta'amah D'Kra)

ואת החסידה

“The stork...” (11:19)

Rashi explains why the stork called “*chasidah*” – “kindly one” – because it deals kindly with its fellow creatures in regard to food.

According to the *Ramban*, birds labeled as unclean have been so categorized because of their cruelty. But why should the stork, which deals kindly with its fellow creatures be categorized as unclean? It is because it is kind only to others of its species but will never give food to a creature not of its own kind. This teaches us that when giving food to the needy, we must make no distinction between friend and stranger. (*Chidushei HaRim*)

וכל כלי חרש אשר יפל מהם אל תוכו כל אשר בתוכו יטמא

“Any earthenware utensil into whose interior one of them will fall, everything in it shall become contaminated...” (11:33)

An earthenware vessel can be rendered *tamei*, ritually contaminated, only from its inside. However, even if it is touched on the outside, it cannot be rendered impure because it has no value in and of itself. The vessel is only valuable as a container for the objects *within* it; its sole worth is a receptacle for something else. Metal utensils, on the other hand, have value in themselves and can therefore become unclean on the outside also.

Man, being made of dust, is like an earthenware vessel. His worth lies not in the outer vessel, but in the human qualities developed within. (*Kotzker Rebbe*)

כל הולך על גחון

“All that crawls on the stomach...” (11:42)

The *Talmud* (*Kiddushin* 30a) notes that the *vav* in the word גחון is the middle letter of the Torah. The *Sfas Emes* makes the following observation based on this statement. When a person has learned half of the Torah, he has a natural tendency to praise himself for his accomplishments. The *Talmud* therefore reminds him that the midpoint of the Torah is in the verse that refers to *all that crawls on the stomach*, emphasizing that man is to remain humble at all times, no matter how great his scholarship. (*Torah Anthology*)

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