



SHEMINI

DON'T BE A GOOD PERSON

Be a G-dly Person. It's a Lot Harder—And Better

PARSHAH OVERVIEW

Shemini

On the eighth day, following the seven days of their inauguration, Aaron and his sons begin to officiate as *Kohanim* (priests): a fire issues forth from G-d to consume the offerings on the altar, and the Divine Presence comes to dwell in the Sanctuary.

Aaron's two elder sons, Nadab and Abihu, offer a "strange fire before G-d, which He commanded them not," and they die before G-d. Aaron is silent in the face of his tragedy. Moses and Aaron subsequently disagree as

to a point of law regarding the offerings, but Moses concedes to Aaron that Aaron is in the right.

G-d commands the kosher laws, identifying the animal species permissible and forbidden for consumption. Land animals may be eaten only if they have split hooves and also chew their cud; fish must have fins and scales; a list of nonkosher birds is given; and a list of kosher insects (four types of locusts) is given.



Do researchers have a right to withhold their discoveries for personal gain?

TEXT 1A

Leviticus 11:34

מִכֹּל הָאֲכָל אֲשֶׁר יֵאָכֵל אֲשֶׁר יָבוֹא עָלָיו
מֵיִם יִטְמָא, וְכֹל מִשְׁקָה אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁתֶּה בְּכֹל
כֵּלֵי יִטְמָא.

All foods that are commonly eaten [are fit to] become contaminated [after] water, or liquids that are commonly drunk in any vessel, come upon it.

TEXT 1B

*Maimonides, Mishneh
Torah, Laws of
Impurities of Food 1:1-2*

כל אוכל המיוחד למאכל אדם, כגון לחם ובשר וענבים וזיתים וכיוצא בהן, מקבל טומאה . . .

[ו]אינו מקבל טומאה עד שיבלל תחילה באחד משבעה משקין, וזהו הנקרא: הכשר, שנאמר:
"וכי יותן מים על זרע" (ויקרא יא, לח).

ואלו הם השבעה משקין שמכשירין את האוכלין לטומאה: המים, והטל, והשמן, והיין,
והחלב, והדם, והדבש.

All food edible to humans, such as bread, meat, grapes, olives, and the like, can become impure. . . .

It does not become impure unless it's first touched by one of the seven liquids. This is called "kosher [for impurity]." As the verse states, "If water is put upon a seed [and afterward the seed is contaminated by impure dead creatures, it is impure]" (Leviticus 11:38).

These are the seven liquids that render edible foods kosher for impurity: water, dew, oil, wine, animal fat, blood, and honey.

Foods that come into contact with water or other liquids (including honey) and become wet are fit to become contaminated if subsequently touched by something impure.



TEXT 2

Mishnah, Uktzin 3:11

תלות דבש, מאימתי מטמאות משום משקה?

בית שמאי אומרים: משיתרחר.

בית הלל אומרים: משירסק.

At what point do honeycombs become susceptible to impurity?

The school of Shamai says when you begin to smoke out the bees.

The school of Hillel says when you break up the honeycomb.

At what point does honey assume a Halachic state of liquid?

BAIT SHAMAI:

Honey becomes a liquid when you begin to smoke out the bees.

BAIT HILLEL:

Honey becomes a liquid when you break up the honeycomb.



QUESTION

Why does the final Mishnah in the Talmud discuss honeycombs and beehives? What can we learn from this?

TEXT 3

Deuteronomy 10:13

לְשַׁמֵּר אֶת מִצְוֹת ה' וְאֵת הַקְּטָוִי אֲשֶׁר
אֲנֹכִי מְצַוֶּה הַיּוֹם, לְטוֹב לָךְ.

To observe all G-d's commandments
and all the edicts that I command you
today, for your good.

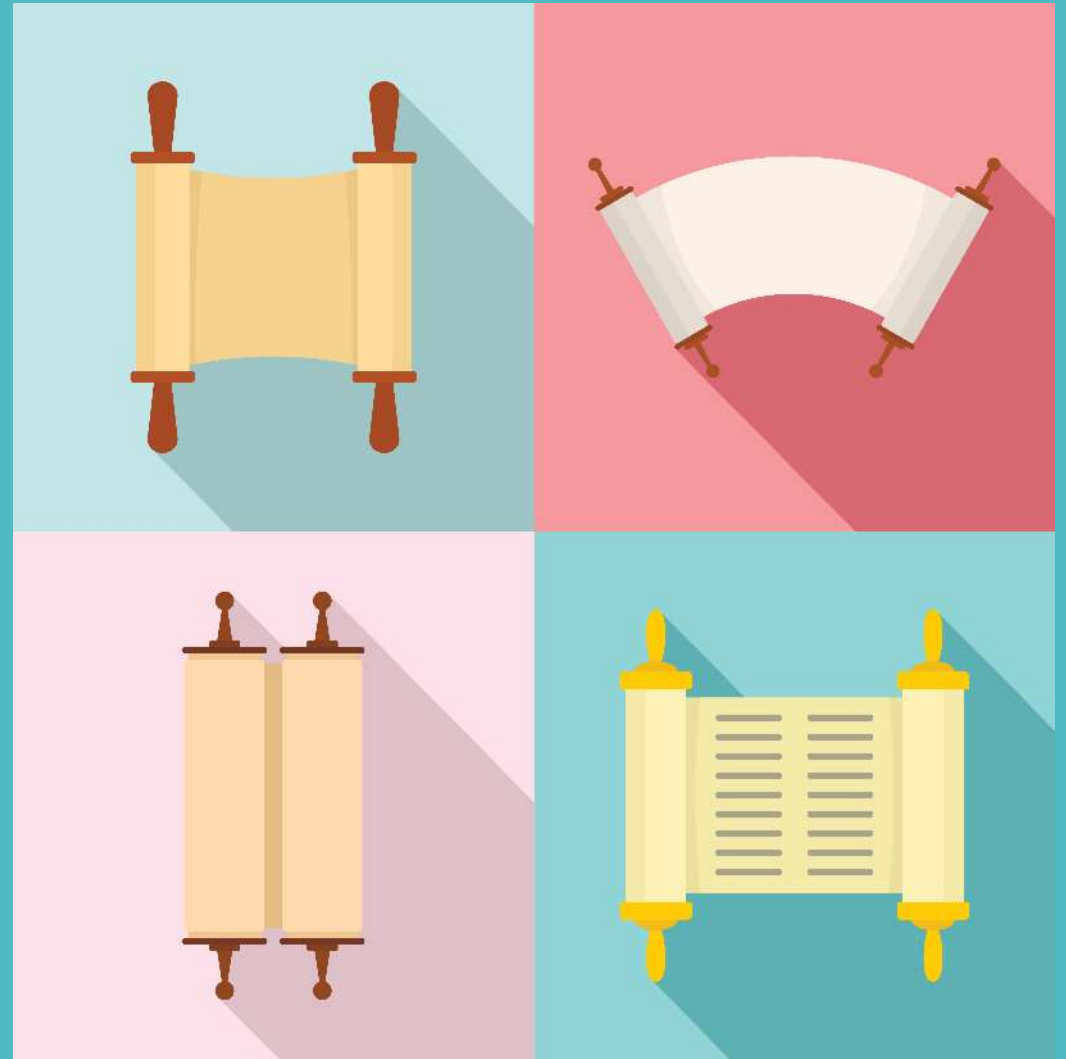
TEXT 4

*Nachmanides,
Deuteronomy, ad loc.*

איננו שואל מעמך דבר שיהיה לצרכו,
אלא לצורךך . . . הכל הוא לטוב לך.

G-d asks nothing of you that is
for His benefit, only for your
benefit. . . . It is all for your good.

Mitzvot are not for
G-d; they are for us.
We benefit from the
discipline and
rewards.



TEXT 5A

Deuteronomy 6:24

וַיְצַוֵּנוּ ה' לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת כָּל הַחֻקִּים
הָאֵלֶּה לְיִרְאַה אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ, לְטוֹב
לָנוּ כָּל הַיָּמִים, לְחַיֵּיתָנוּ כְּהַיּוֹם הַזֶּה.

G-d commanded us to observe all these laws, to revere G-d, for our perpetual good, and to live on this day.

TEXT 5B

*Rabbi Bachya ben
Asher ibn Halawa,
Deuteronomy, ad loc.*

והנה נתבאר בכאן בפירוש שכר העולם
הבא, והוא סיום התשובה וחתימתה
לשאלת הבנים לדורות, למען יאמינו
וישכילו וידעו כי יש במעשה המצות
גמול ושכר גופני ונפשיי.

גופני - הוא שאמר לתת לנו את הארץ,
שהיא כוללת כל טובת העולם הזה
ושלוותו, בהיותה ארץ זבת חלב ודבש.

נפשיי - הוא שאמר: "לטוב לנו כל
הימים" . . .

והנה זה עיקר גדול, תזכור אותו תמיד.

This is a clear statement that a reward awaits us in the afterlife. This answers with finality the question that has bothered young people for generations. Now they can believe, understand, and know that observance of G-d's commandments is rewarding for both body and soul.

The physical reward is the promise of the Holy Land, which includes all the benefits of life in this world. It also includes the promise of serenity and prosperity, for it is a land that flows with milk and honey.

The spiritual reward is implied by the words "for our perpetual good." . . .

This is an important principle; remember it always.



We receive rewards
for the *mitzvot* we do
in this world and in
the world to come.

TEXT 6A

*Midrash, Bereshit
Rabah 44:1*

וכי מה איכפת לו להקדוש ברוך הוא בין
שוחט מן הצוואר לשוחט מן העורף?
הא, לא ניתנו המצוות אלא לצרף בהם
את הבריות.

Why would G-d care if we slaughter
from the neck or from the nape?
Rather, the commandments were only
given to us to refine us.

TEXT 6B

*Nachmanides,
Deuteronomy 22:6*

בכל אחד, טעם ותועלת ותיקון
לאדם, מלבד שכרן מאת המצווה
בהן יתברך . . . שאין התועלת
במצוות להקדוש ברוך הוא בעצמו
יתעלה, אבל התועלת באדם עצמו.
למנוע ממנו נזק, או אמונה רעה, או
מדה מגונה, או לזכור הניסים
ונפלאות הבורא יתברך,
ולדעת את ה'.

וזהו "לצרף בהן", שיהיו ככסף
צרוף. כי הצורף הכסף - אין
מעשהו בלא טעם, אבל להוציא
ממנו כל סיג. וכן המצוות - להוציא
מליבנו כל אמונה רעה, ולהודיענו
האמת, ולזכרו תמיד . . .

Each commandment has a reason and purpose that rectifies our human nature in addition to the reward that we receive from He Who commanded it. . . . The commandments are not intended to benefit G-d; rather, they are intended to benefit us. They shield us from toxicity, caustic beliefs, and shameful traits. They also help us remember G-d's wondrous miracles and know G-d.

Observing *mitzvot* is like refining silver. One who refines silver does not act without purpose. The purpose is to extract all impure base metals from the silver. Similarly, G-d's commandments uproot negative beliefs from our hearts, teach us the truth, and empower us to remember it always. . . .



TEXT 6B

*Nachmanides,
Deuteronomy 22:6*

והביא ראיה מן השוחט מן הצוואר
והעורף לומר שכולם לנו, ולא להקדוש
ברוך הוא. לפי שלא ייתכן לומר
בשחיטה שיהא בה תועלת וכבוד לבורא
יתברך בצוואר יותר מהעורף או
הניחור. אלא לנו הם, להדריכנו
בנתיבות הרחמים גם בעת השחיטה.

והביאו ראיה אחרת: או מה איכפת לו
בין אוכל טהורות - והם המאכלים
המותרים, לאוכל טמאות - והם
המאכלים האסורים, שאמרה בהם
התורה: "טמאים המה לכם" (ויקרא יא,
כח)? ורמז שהוא להיותנו נקיי הנפש,
חכמים, משכילי האמת. ואמרם: "אם
חכמת - חכמת לך" (משלי ט, יב) . . .

Our sages offer the mitzvah of *shechitah*—slaughtering—as proof. Slaughtering from the neck doesn’t produce greater glory or benefit to G-d than slaughtering from the nape. Rather, the purpose is to habituate us to the path of compassion even as we slaughter.

Here is another example. Does G-d really care if we eat kosher food that the Torah calls pure or unkosher food that the Torah says is “impure for you” (Leviticus 11:28)? Rather, it is to render us pure of soul, wise of mind, and perceptive of the truth. Thus, the passage states, “If you are wise, it is to your benefit” (Proverbs 9:12). . . .



TEXT 6B

*Nachmanides,
Deuteronomy 22:6*

אם כן, כולם לתועלתנו בלבד . . . הנה
ביארו שאפילו הלולב והסוכה והתפילין
שצוה בהן שיהו לאות על ידך ולזכרון
בין עיניך, כי ביד חזקה הוציאך ה'
ממצרים - אינן לכבוד ה' יתברך, אבל
לרחם על נפשותינו . . .

והכוונה בכולם לטוב לנו, ולא לו יתברך
ויתעלה. אבל כל מה שנצטוונו - שיהיו
בריותיו צרופות ומזוקקות, בלא סיגי
מהשבות רעות ומידות מגונות.

As it is true of these two commandments,
so is it true of all the commandments. . . .
Shaking the *lulav*, sitting in the *sukkah*,
and laying *tefilin*—which is a sign and
reminder that G-d extracted us from
Egypt—are not for G-d's glory. They are
Him being compassionate toward us. . . .

It is all intended for our good, not for G-d's
good. The purpose of every mitzvah is to
refine and cleanse us of all negative
thoughts and shameful traits.

TEXT 6C

*Rabbi Tzvi Ashkenazi,
Responsa Chacham
Tzvi, Chapter 26*

וכשצריך על ערי הנכרים,
נצטוונו להניח רוח אחת בלי
מצור לכל מי שירצה להמלט על
נפשו . . . ואף בבעלי חיים,
בלתי מדברים נצטוונו על צערם
. . . "אותו ואת בנו לא תשחטו
ביום אחד" (ויקרא כב, כח),
ומצות שילוח הקן . . . ואף
בצמחים נצטוונו: "לא תשחית
את עצה" (דברים כ, יט).

וכל זה אינו . . . אלא בעבורנו,
אנחנו הפועלים, לקנות בנפשנו
דעות אמיתיות ומידות טובות
וישרות, לזכותנו לטוב לנו.

Also, when a Jewish army lays siege to a non-Jewish city, we are commanded to leave one side of the city exposed for any citizen that wishes to escape. . . . We are even commanded to avoid causing pain to animals that cannot speak. . . . “Do not slaughter an animal and its son on the same day” (Leviticus 22:28). Similarly, the commandment to send away the mother [before removing eggs or chicks from the nest]. Even with respect to vegetation, we are instructed, “Do not destroy its trees [wantonly]” (Deuteronomy 20:19).

All this is . . . for us, the servants, to implant true beliefs and good and proper traits in our souls, to refine us for our benefit.

The laws that G-d has commanded us serve to discipline and refine our character.



TEXT 7A

*Rabbi David Arfa, "The
Kosher Honey Story,"
www.oukosher.org*

Honeybees are divided into three groups, called castes: these are the single queen bee, several hundred male drones, and thousands of female worker bees.

The queen bee is the mother of all bees and keeps at her task with dogged consistency. She will lay about fifteen hundred eggs a day, each spring and summer.

She is groomed for the role, having been chosen as a young, promising, but altogether average larva by her assistants, the legion of drone bees, and fed a secret potion known as royal jelly, a special super-rich superfood, as we might call it, produced in the heads of worker/nurse bees. . . .

Drones, true to their name, don't do much, but wait for the chance to mate with the queen. Only one drone in a thousand will live to do so.



TEXT 7A

*Rabbi David Arfa, “The
Kosher Honey Story,”
www.oukosher.org*

The worker bees do more than coddling the queen. They are the rank and file workers of the hive, doing the lion’s share of daily colonial chores, including feeding the drones and growing brood, keeping the hive’s temperature steady, and preparing the hive’s food source: pollen-rich ‘beebread,’ and, to our fortune, that liquid gold itself: honey. . . .

For all its hard work, the worker bee, in the six to eight weeks of her life, and having flown a total of 1.5 times the circumference of the earth in her travels—ends up producing a mere twelfth of a teaspoon of honey.

In fact, all those twelfth-teaspoons add up to a lot of honey. In New York and New Jersey combined, there are about 70,000 bee colonies, producing over three million pounds of honey, at a value of nearly 2 million dollars, per the 2018 USDA Honey Report. Honey production in the entire United States last year totaled at over 150 million pounds of honey, at a value of over 330 million dollars.

TEXT 7B

“Honey Bee Life Span,”
www.orkin.com

A honeybee colony is an organized society of three adult castes: queens, workers, and drones. Each caste has certain responsibilities for the preservation of their hive. Queens, who are responsible for producing and laying eggs, live for an average of two to three years, but have been known to live five years. . . .

Queens produce unfertilized eggs that hatch into drones or male honeybees. The main purpose of a drone is to mate with the queen, and their life span relates directly to this task. If a mature drone successfully mates with a queen, he will die soon after the mating flight. If he is unsuccessful in the mating flight, the drone will be ejected from his hive at the end of the active summer season and will eventually die of cold or starvation.



The bee's altruistic life purpose teaches us how our service to G-d should look. Our fulfillment of the *mitzvot* should be for G-d's benefit, not for our own.

TEXT 8A

Midrash, Devarim
Rabah 1:6

אמר רבי יהודה בן רבי סימון בשם רבי לוי: מה
הדבורה הזאת, כל מה שהיא מסגלת - מסגלת
לבעליה, כך כל מה שישראל מסגלין מצוות ומעשים
טובים - הם מסגלים לאביהם שבשמים.

Rabbi Yehudah, the son of Rabbi Simon, said in the name of Rabbi Levi, “We are like the honeybee. As the honeybee works only to benefit its queen, so do the Jewish people perform all the commandments and good deeds only for the benefit of their Father in Heaven.”

TEXT 8B

*Rabbi Shneur Zalman
of Liadi, Likutei Torah,
Devarim, pp. 28d–29a*

תכלית המכוון בבריאת האדם
אינו בשביל האדם עצמו לבד,
אף שבאמת עלייתו נפלאה
מאד. עם כל זה, לא זו לבד
הוא תכלית המכוון, כי אם
לכבודו יתברך, ולהיות ישמח
ה' במעשיו . . .

והוא ענין התענוג עליון,
שעשוע המלך בעצמותו,
מקיום התורה והמצוות.

We cannot be our own ultimate purpose. Despite the wondrous benefits we derive from the commandments, we don't do them for ourselves. We do them for G-d's glory, so that G-d can rejoice with His handiwork. . . .

When we study the Torah and observe the commandments, G-d experiences a supernal delight, a celestial pleasure within Himself.



TEXT 8B

*Rabbi Shneur Zalman
of Liadi, Likutei Torah,
Devarim, pp. 28d–29a*

ומכל מקום, להאדם מגיע
שכר טוב לאין קץ. וכמאמר
רבותינו זכרונם לברכה: "יפה
שעה אחת של קורת רוח
בעולם הבא מכל חיי העולם
הזה" (אבות ד, יז). אך עם כל
זה, זהו בחינת טפל לגבי
שעשוע המלך בעצמותו.

Yes, it is true that we also receive boundless reward [in the World to Come]. As our sages said, “A single moment of delight in the World to Come is greater than all the pleasures of this world” (*Ethics of the Fathers* 4:17). Nevertheless, this is secondary to giving G-d the supernal delight that He experiences within Himself.

G-d derives immense pleasure from our *mitzvot*. However, the reason why He gave us the *mitzvot* was not for His personal benefit; it was for ours.





We return the favor by
setting aside our own
benefit and making
G-d's pleasure a priority.

TEXT 9

*The Rebbe, Rabbi
Menachem Mendel
Schneerson, Likutei
Sichot 22, p. 52*

דאס איז אויך דער רמז אין דעם, וואס די משניות
שלפני זה ריידן וועגן "כוורת דבורים" און "חלות
דבש" - ווייל די עבודה פון אידן אין דעם אופן פון
לשמה איז אנגעדייטעט אין דעם וואס אידן זיינען
צוגעגליכן געווארן צו "דבורים".

This is also why the final Mishnah discusses
beehives and honeycombs. It is because the
imperative to serve G-d for the sake of G-d is
taught to us by the comparison of the Jewish
people to bees.

ANSWER

Just as bees completely devote themselves to their queen, we must do *mitzvot* to benefit G-d. Despite human nature, which is self-focused, and despite the incalculable benefits we derive from Jewishness, our sole purpose in serving G-d must be for G-d's sake. To give Him pleasure, not to give us benefits.

TEXT 10

*Maimonides, Mishneh
Torah, Laws of
Teshuvah 10:2*

הַעוֹבֵד מֵאַהֲבָה, עוֹסֵק בַּתּוֹרָה וּבַמִּצְוֹת וְהוֹלֵךְ בְּנִתְיָבוֹת
הַחֲכָמָה לֹא מִפְּנֵי דָבָר בְּעוֹלָם, וְלֹא מִפְּנֵי יִרְאַת הָרָעָה,
וְלֹא כְּדֵי לִירֹשׁ הַטּוֹבָה - אֲלֵא עוֹשֶׂה הָאֱמֶת מִפְּנֵי לְשֵׁהוּא
אֱמֶת, וְסוֹף הַטּוֹבָה לָבוֹא בְּגִלְגָּלָהּ.

One who serves [G-d] out of love occupies themselves in the Torah and the *mitzvot* and walks in the paths of wisdom for no ulterior motive: not because of fear that evil will occur, nor in order to acquire benefit. Rather, they do what's true because it's true, and ultimately, good will come because of it.

TEXT 11

*The Rebbe, Rabbi
Menachem Mendel
Schneerson, Likutei
Sichot 33, p. 91*

כאשר העבודה מאהבה היא באופן ש"עושה את האמת
מפני שהוא אמת" . . . אין מבוקש אחר בעבודתו . . . כי
אם . . . להיותו ציווי ורצון ה', שקיום ציווי ה' הוא אמת
מצד עצמו.

When a Jew serves G-d out of love in such a way that they “do what’s true because it’s true,” . . . there is no ulterior motive to their service. . . . Their only thought animating their service is their desire to fulfill G-d’s will because it’s true—for following G-d’s command is the objective truth.

Do what's right simply
because it is
objectively right. Not
for any other reasons.



KEY POINTS

1. G-d derives immeasurable pleasure every time we do a mitzvah.
2. He did not give us the *mitzvot* for the sake of His pleasure. He gave them to us for our benefit.
3. We derive many benefits from doing *mitzvot*: tangible benefits, moral benefits, and spiritual benefits.
4. As G-d set aside His benefits and gave us *mitzvot* for the sake of benefitting us, so do we. We serve G-d for G-d's sake—to give Him the immense pleasurable delight that He derives from us.

KEY POINTS

5. A deeper level is to do what's right simply because it's objectively right.
6. We do receive the benefits, but they are not our motivation. We do it for G-d, not for us.

