

SHABBAT PARSHAT VAYESHEV · 23 KISLEV 5766 · DEC. 24, 2005 · VOL. 13 NO. 9

## PARSHA INSIGHTS

### IN THE LAND OF THE LOTUS-EATERS

*“...their camels bearing spices, balsam and lotus... (37:25)*

**W**e live in an era of tremendous prosperity. In the history of the exile of the Jewish people, rarely has there been a time when we have enjoyed such comfort and stability. The great temptation of affluence and security, of course, is to forget that we are still in exile.

In this week’s Torah portion, the brothers cast Yosef into a pit. When they see a caravan of Yishmaelim approaching they decide to sell Yosef as a slave. The

camels of these Arabs are laden with spices, balsam and lotus. This is unusual. A typical Arab caravan would carry kerosene. (It seems that Arab trading in petroleum is far from a modern occurrence.) Kerosene has a powerful and unpleasant smell. G-d didn’t want Yosef to suffer the fumes of the kerosene, and thus He arranged that he should be spared the bad smell on his journey into exile.

We are much like Yosef being carried into exile surrounded by a pleasant scent. As yet, there has been no ingathering of the Jewish People, no end to our exile. It’s easy to forget that we are living in a gilded cage. Even though G-d lightens the burden of our exile by letting us breathe the sweet smell of spice, we must never imagine that we are breathing the breath of freedom.

## PARSHA OVERVIEW

**Y**aakov settles in the land of Canaan. His favorite son, Yosef, brings him critical reports about his brothers. Yaakov makes Yosef a fine tunic of multi-colored woolen strips. Yosef exacerbates his brothers’ hatred by recounting prophetic dreams of sheaves of wheat bowing to his sheaf, and of the sun, moon and stars bowing to him, signifying that all his family will appoint him king. The brothers indict Yosef and resolve to execute him. When Yosef comes to Shechem, the brothers relent and decide, at Reuven’s instigation, to throw him into a pit instead. Reuven’s intent was to save Yosef. Yehuda persuades the brothers to take Yosef out of the pit and sell him to a caravan of passing Ishmaelites. Reuven returns to find the pit empty and rends his clothes. The brothers soak Yosef’s tunic in goat’s blood and show it to Yaakov, who assumes that Yosef has been devoured by a wild beast. Yaakov is inconsolable. Meanwhile, in Egypt, Yosef has

been sold to Potiphar, Pharaoh’s Chamberlain of the Butchers. In the Parsha’s sub-plot, Yehuda’s son Er dies as punishment for preventing his wife Tamar from becoming pregnant. Onan, Yehuda’s second son, then weds Tamar by levirate marriage. He too is punished in similar circumstances. When Yehuda’s wife dies, Tamar resolves to have children through Yehuda, as this union will found the Davidic line culminating in the *Mashiach*. Meanwhile, Yosef rises to power in the house of his Egyptian master. His extreme beauty attracts the unwanted advances of his master’s wife. Enraged by his rejection, she accuses Yosef of attempting to seduce her, and he is imprisoned. In jail, Yosef successfully predicts the outcome of the dream of Pharaoh’s wine steward, who is reinstated, and the dream of Pharaoh’s baker, who is hanged. In spite of his promise, the wine steward forgets to help Yosef, and Yosef languishes in jail.

## THE MUSICAL WAY BACK TO ISRAEL

Many Jews dream of returning to settle in Eretz Yisrael once they have visited the country and been captivated by its sacred charm. Coming back to stay, however, is a challenge that not too many succeed in meeting.

In this week's Torah portion we read of the return to Eretz Yisrael of the Patriarch Yaakov after being away for 22 years. For Asher and Hannah Blachman the return came much sooner.

Both of these highly-talented musicians were in Israel in 1985 as participants in Ohr Somayach's Jewish Learning Exchange program. Like so many others who enjoy such an experience they began to dream of someday returning to settle here. Their common dream began to come true when they became engaged and

planned to come to Israel soon after getting married. It took a little longer but they finally made it in September of 1987.

Here is how Hannah explained to the Jerusalem Post the couple's reason for making aliyah:

"We're musicians and we wanted to make our living by playing music. But we're also religious and wanted to keep Shabbat. In North America (Asher is from Brooklyn and Hannah from Winnipeg) doing both is not easy. Too much depends on Saturday work. Staying there would have meant changing our professions in order to eat, which we weren't willing to do. So we made *aliya* to keep Shabbat."

It's motivation such as this that will preserve Israel forever.

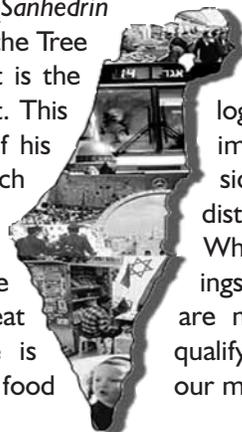
### LOVE OF THE LAND - THE FRUITS

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael

## WHEAT - THE FOOD OF KNOWLEDGE

In the debate among the Talmudic Sages (*Sanhedrin* 70b) as to what exactly was the food of the Tree of Knowledge from which Adam ate, it is the position of Rabbi Yehuda that it was wheat. This is a sharp departure from the positions of his colleagues who identify that tree as one which bore grapes or figs.

The basis of Rabbi Yehuda's compulsion to identify this sinful food as wheat, despite the obvious difficulty of connecting wheat with a tree, is the fact that this tree is described by the Torah as one whose food



imparts knowledge. A baby, he points out, does not have the understanding to say the words "father" and "mother" until it eats wheat. It is logical, therefore, to assume that only food which imparts such understanding in a child could be considered the food which gave man the knowledge to distinguish good from evil.

Wheat was the principal ingredient of the flour offerings in the *Beit Hamikdash*. It, and its subspecies spelt, are mentioned (*Pesachim* 35a) as ingredients which qualify for use in the matzah we eat on Pesach to fulfill our mitzvah.

לע"נ

ח'יה צירל ע"ה בת צבי נ"ו  
ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

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POB 18103, Jerusalem 91180, Israel • Tel: +972-2-581-0315 • Email: info@ohr.edu • www.ohr.edu

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## PARSHA Q&A ?

1. "These are the offspring of Yaakov: Yosef...." Give three reasons why Yosef is considered Yaakov's main offspring.
2. What was praiseworthy about the fact that Yosef's brothers did not speak to him in a friendly manner?
3. How do we see from Yosef's dream about the sun, moon and stars that all dreams contain some untrue element?
4. Who brought Yosef down to Egypt?
5. Where was Reuven when Yosef was sold?
6. In addition to the brothers, who else knew that Yosef was alive?
7. Why didn't G-d reveal prophetically to Yaakov that Yosef was alive?
8. For how long did Yaakov mourn the loss of Yosef?
9. Verse 37:35 states "his father wept." To whom does this refer?
10. Who was Tamar's father?
11. In what merit did Tamar deserve to have kings as her descendants?
12. Why is the word "hand" mentioned four times in connection to the birth of Zerach?
13. Why does the Torah relate the incident with Potiphar's wife immediately after the incident of Yehuda and Tamar?
14. How did Potiphar "see" that G-d was with Yosef?
15. Who in this week's Parsha pretended to be sick?
16. Why were the butler and the baker imprisoned?
17. For how long were the butler and the baker in prison?
18. How did the baker know that Yosef had correctly interpreted the butler's dream?
19. What prompted the butler and baker to tell Yosef their dreams?
20. How was Yosef punished for asking the butler for help?

## PARSHA Q&A!

### Answers to this Week's Questions!

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary unless otherwise stated.

1. 37:2 - (a) Yosef was the son of Rachel, Yaakov's primary wife. (b) Yosef looked like Yaakov. (c) All that befell Yaakov befell Yosef.
2. 37:4 - They did not act hypocritically.
3. 37:10 - The moon represented Rachel. Since she had already died, it was impossible for that element of the dream to come true.
4. 37:28 - A caravan of Midianites.
5. 37:29 - He was attending to Yaakov.
6. 37:33 - Yitzchak.
7. 37:33 - Because the brothers had issued a ban against revealing the truth to Yaakov, and G-d, so to speak, abided by their ban.
8. 37:34 - Twenty-two years.
9. 37:35 - Yitzchak, who wept because of Yaakov's suffering.
10. 38:24 - Shem.
11. 38:26 - In the merit of her modesty.
12. 38:30 - To allude to his descendent, Achan, who sinned with his hand by taking four things from the spoils of Jericho.
13. 39:1 - To teach us that just as Tamar acted with pure motives, so did Potiphar's wife.
14. 39:3 - Yosef mentioned G-d's name frequently in his speech.
15. 39:11 - Potiphar's wife.
16. 40:1 - The butler was imprisoned because a fly was found in the king's goblet, and the baker was imprisoned because a pebble was found in the king's bread.
17. 40:4 - Twelve months.
18. 40:5 - The baker dreamed the interpretation of the butler's dream.
19. 40:6 - Yosef asked them why they looked troubled.
20. 40:23 - He remained in prison an additional two years.

- Straw filling the ditch or creating a wall between two courtyards
- Creating a *shituf* (partnership) in a *movuy* by granting a neighbor a share in one's food
- The need for such an arrangement in every sort of *eiruv*
- The four rulings of the Elders of Pumpedita
- Status of wife in *eiruv* arrangements
- What sort of food and how much of it qualify for *eiruv* and *shituf*
- What determines the wholeness of a loaf of bread?
- Giving money to the grocer for a share in the *eiruv*
- When Rabbi Yehuda explains or disagrees in the *mishnayot*
- For what purpose can one make an *eiruv techumim* to allow walking on Shabbat beyond the halachic limit?
- When a mother's *eiruv* helps for her child
- Amount of food needed for *eiruv techumim* and what constitutes a meal
- Three different sets of weights
- Upper and lower courtyards
- Where the *eiruv* of courtyards can be placed

## WHEN MONEY WORKS

In order to finalize a transaction on objects that are not real estate, it is not sufficient to pay money alone. Some symbolic action of acquisition such as pulling the object into the domain of the purchaser is necessary

to finalize the transaction and render retraction impossible.

An analysis of why this is so will help us understand when and why there is an exception to this rule. One of these exceptions deals with meat for the holidays and the other with food for an *eiruv*.

Four times a year there is a great demand for meat: the days preceding Pesach, Shavuot, Rosh Hashana and Shmini Atzeret. If someone gave some money to an animal merchant as payment for even one dinar's worth of meat in an animal worth a thousand dinars, the seller cannot back out of the deal for lack of sufficient customers, and is compelled to slaughter that animal in order to fulfill his obligation resulting from the transaction finalized through money alone.

Rabbi Yochanan explains this in the following way. By Torah law money given in a transaction finalizes it and denies the ability to retract. The Sages, however, were concerned that if the buyer made no effort to pull his acquisition out of the seller's domain, a situation could arise of a fire breaking out in the area of the seller with him making no effort to save the goods which he no longer owns. They therefore decreed that these goods leave his ownership only after the buyer has physically taken them into his custody. Since the Sages were interested in a Jew having greater access to meat before the above-mentioned holidays, they suspended this decree and allowed money to serve as the finalizer of the transaction.

## WHAT THE Sages SAY

"There is always room in the belly for tasty food."

Rabbi Yosef quoting a folk saying as to why we eat more on Shabbat than on weekdays  
Eiruv 82b

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## MATRIARCHS IN PRAYERS

**From: David in PA**

*Dear Rabbi,*

*I have been a subscriber of your publications since October 1999, and finally have a question worthy of public discussion.*

*Our Conservative congregation has floated the idea of adding the Imahot (Matriarchs) to the Amida [silent prayer – Ed.] in the places in which the Avot (Patriarchs) are mentioned. So far, there has been no suggestion of adding the Imahot in other areas where the Avot are mentioned.*

*What are the reasons for the Imahot not having been included originally, and what are the pros and cons of adding them?*

Dear David,

From a technical standpoint it would be inappropriate to use G-d of Sarah, Rivka, Rachel and Leah as there is no such Biblical reference. Furthermore, technically, when the siddur mentions the G-d of Abraham or Isaac it is not simply the possessive form; rather it indicates a Name of G-d, which represents a manner in which the Creator interacts with the world He created — through the characteristics that each of these Forefathers demonstrated. More conceptually speaking, one purpose of prayer is to enable us to access the Divine flow of good into our minds and hearts and to realize the nature of true blessing so that we can recognize it when it comes. The structure of prayer, leading up to the Amida service itself, seeks to draw us out of the physical limitations of the world in which we live and connect us, step by step, to the inner core of our own being, and to the inner courtyard of the Divine Presence. By the time you are standing in silent devotion, if you have done it well and with proper intent, you are spiritually standing in the inner sanctum of the King of Kings.

So powerful is this experience meant to be, that the Talmud relates that the early righteous people would

prepare for this process for an hour, remain in this state of inner connectedness (in prayer) for an hour, and it would require an additional hour to come down off that spiritual peak. In fact the linguistic root of *Tefilla* (prayer) is *p'til* which means thread — the thread of connection. In that context, each one of the Avot (Forefathers) represents a connection to the Creator through a different aspect of self. The loving-kindness of Abraham, the moral discipline and courage of Isaac, the perfect synthesis which is the truth of Jacob, all represent different facets of our ability to form a relationship with G-d when we cultivate those aspects of ourselves and acknowledge their source. “*HeAvot Hen Hen HaMerkava*” — the Forefathers represent the chariot, the vehicle through which G-d’s presence and the ability to relate to that Presence became possible in the world.

The Foremothers Sara, Rivka, Rachel, and Leah represent the capacity to take these ideas out of the realm of the theoretical and to make them actual — to actualize them — in our finite world. Through the lives they led they forged a path of integration between the material and the spiritual. It is their example that taught us how to make a tent into a sanctuary in which all of the mundane is infused with transcendence. It is their inner vision that allowed our Divinely-inspired mission to be illuminated and to take hold in the next generation. In prayer, we are trying to create that same flow so that we can access that same energy our Forefathers did before us. Only when our prayer is done does the work of the Foremothers begin. The job of making these concepts live, and integrating them into our everyday life, is what we do for the rest of the day after we have prayed. In the Amida we ask G-d to help us and grant us some of that same flow of spirit that rested on Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; while the ability to respond and actualize, that which is done after the prayer is finished, has its roots in Sarah, Rivka, Rachel and Leah and is totally up to us.

*Source: Written by Mrs. Debbie Greenblatt — Ohr.edu would like to add that Mrs. Greenblatt is a well-known lecturer for the Gateways Organization and has a popular class for women on this and similar subjects if your synagogue is interested.*

## THE MISTAKEN CODE OF HONOR

**Question:** As the principal of a school with a strict policy forbidding substance use, I am sometimes faced with the dilemma of a pupil caught violating the rules but refusing to identify the seller because of the “code of honor” in those circles which treats a “squealer” as the greatest villain. What is the right thing to do?

**Answer:** There is no question that the right thing for the pupil to do is to cooperate with you in getting to the source of this plague which can have such a disastrous impact on the lives of so many of the victims.

The right thing for you to do is to enlighten your

obstinate pupil who suffers from a conflict of values. Revealing the identity of a drug merchant, he must be made to understand, is not a violation of the “eleventh commandment” legislated in the world of substance abuse. An analogy must be made to a killer lurking in ambush of innocent victims. Would the pupil have any reservations about revealing his identity, even if it was his best friend who had sworn him to secrecy?

It is vital to impress upon your tight-lipped pupil how many lives have been ruined by drug merchants, and that the one who sold the stuff to him is indeed a killer who must be exposed before he does more harm.

## THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY \_\_\_\_\_

### THE STRANGE DANCE

The Torah discussion between Rabbi Meir Simcha Hacoen — the rav of the Latvian community of Dvinsk and author of the “Ohr Somayach” — and one of his disciples was interrupted by the arrival of a young couple. The rav invited them into his private chamber while the disciple waited outside.

After a while the sound of singing and dancing came from the rav’s room, arousing the curiosity of his disciple who rushed to peek through the keyhole. To his surprise he saw the rav and the couple singing and dancing around the table.

After the rav came out of his room and bade the cou-

ple farewell he explained to his disciple what had transpired.

“Don’t be surprised,” he told him, “why I spent so much time with that couple. Their parents are the most respected people of the community and dear friends of mine. For some silly reason the husband came to me the other day asking for a divorce. I asked him to bring his wife to me, and when they arrived I spent a long time convincing the young man to abandon his idea of divorce. When I finally succeeded I decided to put the final touch on domestic peace by dancing around the table with them.”

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