

# OHRNET

SHABBAT PARSHAT VAYESHEV-CHANUKAH · 25 KISLEV 5767 · DEC. 16, 2006 · VOL. 14 NO. 9

## PARSHA INSIGHTS

### THE SECRET OF LIFE

*"...And she said, 'Please identify whose are this seal, this wrap and this staff!' " (38:25)*

The great philosopher lay on his deathbed. Scores of his closest disciples stood in a reverent hush that stretched from the foot of his bed to the door. The silence of the devout and the devoted filled the room. Then, the leading disciple bent forward with great veneration, and whispered in the master's ear,

*"O great master! Before you depart this world, share with us the secret of life!"*

With obvious difficulty, the philosopher heaved a few shallow breaths and, barely audibly, the following words parted his lips;

*"Life... Life... is... Life is... a river."*

With awe, the master's cherished utterance was passed from disciple to disciple, "Life is a river... Life is a river... Life is a river..." until it reached the end of the chamber. There, the least initiated of the disciples thought for a few seconds and said, "Life is a river? What does that mean?"

The second-least disciple did not know. Nor did the third, so the question was passed back hurriedly toward the bed, "What does that mean? ... Life is a river. What does that mean?" until the question was whispered into the ears of the master himself.

With the final threads of life unweaving, the philosopher breathed his last:

*"Okay, so it's not a river."*

Studying philosophy doesn't teach you the secret of life; the secret of life is to be found in something much closer to home.

Most of the time we slide from one wish fulfillment to another: We're hungry, so we pop a morsel of food into our mouths without thinking why we are eating; we're bored, so

we make a joke or we flip on the TV or the radio. Much, if not most, of the time, we allow our instincts to drive us with hardly a second thought.

One of the great Torah Sages of the previous generation, Rav Yerucham Levovitz, once wrote, "I have found that I am not in control of my actions; rather I am ruled by a foreign body, namely physical drives... I am therefore taking upon myself to go against my instinctive wants five times a day."

We may not be on the level of Rav Yerucham, but if even once a day we would think about why we are eating we could discover the secret of life.

Through small, oft-repeated actions that battle our lower instincts, we can make ourselves more spiritual. Even in seemingly insignificant areas of our lives, these small moments of discipline eventually mould our personalities; we start to think about why we are doing things, what we are here for – we become aware of G-d.

In this week's Torah portion, after being falsely accused of adultery, Tamar is led out to be executed. As she passes Yehuda, the father of her unborn child, she says, "Please identify..." Rashi explains that she was not asking him just to recognize the pledges that identified him as the child's father, but also to recognize his Creator and not let three innocent lives be lost, hers and that of their unborn twins.

Tamar's plea was to Yehuda's moral core: "Let the truth overcome the devastating embarrassment of admitting that you are the father-to-be!"

Real awareness of our Creator comes only through a great test. Can we sacrifice our own vested interests for a higher principle? And being able to pass that test starts with passing a test as small as turning down a third bowl of cholent. This is the true doorway to consciousness of G-d.

And that's no mere philosophy.

• Sources: Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe, and a story heard from Mordechai Weissman

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## 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 prison.

## ISRAEL *Forever*

### MANY IN THE HANDS OF THE FEW

**C**hanukah, which begins this Shabbat, is a heart-warming reminder of two miracles. One is the victory of the few Hasmoneans over the many Greeks who attempted to suppress their religious freedom. The other is the miracle of a one-day supply of uncontaminated olive oil burning for eight nights when the victorious Jews were finally able to light their menorah in the *Beit Hamikdash* once again.

There is a mystical connection between these two miracles. The light of the menorah symbolizes the spiritual mission of the Jewish people. The Hasmoneans real-

ized that their victory was not achieved through mere military power or strategy but rather because of the Heavenly assistance they received to succeed in their battle to regain their ability to carry out their Divine mission of bringing light to the world through their service of G-d.

As the descendants of those heroes, the people of Israel must also realize that only by rededicating themselves to this spiritual mission will we be able to once again overcome the superior forces ranged against us and secure Israel forever.

## LOVE OF THE LAND - THE PLACES

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

### MODI'IN – FORTRESS OF THE HASMONEANS

**T**he modern city of Modi'in founded in 1994 and the religious community of Modi'in Ilit (Kiryat Sefer) nearby recall one of the miracles of Chanukah now being celebrated by Jews throughout the world.

As we say in the special prayer of that day, "It was in the days of Matityahu, son of Yochanan the Kohen



Gadol, the Hasmonean, and his sons" that the miracle of "the mighty and numerous Greek forces" bent on forcing assimilation were overcome by "the weak and few".

Mount Modi'in was the place where the Hasmoneans rallied their outnumbered forces and with the help of Heaven achieved victory over their oppressors.

## 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.

לע"נ

מרת חיה שרה בת ר' מרדכי ע"ה

ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

A digest of the topics covered in the seven weekly pages of the Talmud studied in the course of the worldwide Daf Yomi cycle along with an insight from them

- Adding time to *Shemitta* year, to the Yom Kippur fast and to Shabbat
- The virtual fast of Erev Yom Kippur
- Which element of the *Yovel* year is indispensable to its status
- The meaning of freedom
- When fruits are no longer forbidden *orlah*
- Taking root and growing before *Shemitta* begins
- The day or month that is like a year
- In which month was the world created and in which will be the ultimate redemption
- Historic events that took place on Rosh Hashana
- Dates and nature of the Great Deluge
- What determines the tithing schedule for different species
- The constant tithe and the changing one
- How long a year for the maker of a vow
- The exact determination of the Sages
- Which substances are considered evenly distributed upon being mixed
- The unique status of the etrog
- The mystery of the etrog picked by Rabbi Akiva
- The danger of playing both ends against the middle
- *Shemitta* in regard to etrog and other fruits

## WHO PICKED THE VEGETABLE?

One cannot tithe any agricultural produce by taking what was produced in one year as a *ma'aser* tithe on what was produced in another year.

What determines the start of the year depends on the type of produce. In regard to vegetables it depends on when they were picked. We are therefore taught in a *beraita* that if one picked a vegetable before sundown on the day before Rosh Hashana and another after sundown he cannot tithe one on another because they are considered products of two different years.

The obvious difficulty in the case here presented is

that after sundown it is already the eve of Rosh Hashana when it is forbidden to pick vegetables because of the holiday restrictions on such labor.

Although this problem is not raised in the Babylonian Talmud, it is discussed in the Jerusalem Talmud where a very simple solution is offered. The picking of the vegetable mentioned here was done by a non-Jew at his own initiative.

Tosefot refers us to this explanation and its source. We must assume that the compilers of the Babylonian Talmud simply assumed that any student of Talmud would arrive at this solution on his own so that there was no need to mention it.

## WHAT THE Sages SAY

“One who sees the fruit trees in bloom during the month of Nissan should make a blessing to the ‘One Who left nothing out in His world and created good things and good trees for people to enjoy’.”

• Rabbi Yehuda - Rosh Hashana 11a

חנה אשכנזי  
Happy Chanukah to all our readers

## CHANUKAH TIME

**From: Alex in Toronto**

*Dear Rabbi,*

*I understand that Chanukah is in the winter months because that's when the world is darkest and Chanukah is about bringing light into the darkness. Are there other, more text-based reasons for Chanukah occurring when it does?*

Dear Alex,

Surely, the fact that Chanukah, called the Festival of Lights (*chag urim*), occurs in the winter is not coincidental. The physical world mirrors the spiritual one, and the forces at work in the spiritual realm that resulted in the victory of the Maccabees over their oppressors were played out in the physical world as well, bringing the light of inspiration and redemption to the Jews in their darkest hour.

Still, the simple reason why we observe the days of Chanukah at this time is because that is when the miraculous events actually took place. Thus our Sages taught, "What is Chanukah? Beginning with the 25th of Kislev, eight days of Chanukah are observed...For when the Greeks entered the Sanctuary they defiled all the oils, and when the Hasmoneans prevailed and vanquished them they found only one jar of oil with the seal of the High Priest, enough to burn one day — but a miracle occurred and it burnt for eight days. A year later the Rabbis designated these days as a holiday for praise and thanksgiving" (Shabbat 21).

There are other sources that are understood as textual allusion to Chanukah as well.

The word Chanukah, meaning dedication, intimates a holiday on the 25th since "*chanu*" suggests rest or respite and the letters for "*ka(h)*" — *kaf* and *hey* — have a numerical equivalent of 25. Also, the 25th word in the Torah is "*or*" — light. Furthermore, the 25th place of encampment in the journeying of the Children of Israel in the wilderness was Hasmonah — a suggested reference to the Hasmoneans victory on the 25th.

The Midrash says that on the 25th of the month of Kislev the work of the Tabernacle was concluded but it was not inaugurated until the 1st of Nissan. Kislev

therefore missed the inauguration that it was entitled to because of the Tabernacle having been completed therein. G-d therefore said, I will make restitution to Kislev in the time of the Hasmoneans when the Maccabees will reinstate the Sanctuary (Yalkut Melachim 184).

In fact, a precursor to the significance promised to this day as a day of inauguration occurred when the Jews returned from the Babylonian Exile. After having begun to rebuild the Temple, their work was interrupted for twenty-two years because of enemy intrigue and opposition. When their work of rebuilding was resumed, they erected the foundation of the Sanctuary on the 24th of Kislev. During the night of the 25th, they celebrated the inauguration.

Parshat Emor of the Torah lists all of the festivals of the year starting with Shabbat and concluding with Succot. The account of the festivals is followed by the commandment to maintain an Eternal Light in the Sanctuary. It has been suggested that the mentioning of the festivals concluding with Succot in proximity with the Eternal Light hints to a future day when a festival of kindling light would follow the Torah holiday of Succot.

There is a similar allusion to Chanukah in Parshat Beha'alotcha based on the fact that the passages describing the dedication of the altar are directly followed by a passage about the golden menorah. Ramban relates a Midrash that when the tribes each brought offerings for the dedication of the altar the tribe of Levi had not been included. G-d told Moses: "Speak to Aaron and tell him that one day there will be another inauguration involving the kindling of lights. Through your sons I will perform miracles and bring deliverance to Israel. This will be called by their name, the Chanukah of the Hasmoneans."

Furthermore, the Midrash continues, G-d told Moses to relay to Aaron: "You are destined for something greater than the inauguration of the altar. The altar offerings are only brought while the Sanctuary stands. The lights of Chanukah, however, will burn forever. Even after the Temple will be destroyed, the light that will be kindled by your offspring the Hasmoneans will continue to shine through the long and bitter darkness of destruction and exile until they ignite the sparks of the final redemption.

## ONE MAN'S GENEROSITY

The residents of the southern city of Sderot have been subjected to a relentless attack of Kassam rockets from Arab terrorists in Gaza. One thousand of them enjoyed a respite from running to their shelters thanks to the inspired generosity of a newcomer to Israel.

Arkady Gaydamak, a billionaire Russian immigrant, empathized with the plight of these Sderot residents and provided them with a week's vacation in a hotel in Eilat.

This was not the first time this generous benefactor came to the rescue of his threatened fellow citizens.

When terrorist missiles drove residents of the northern communities from their homes during the recent Second Lebanese War, it was Gaydamak who set up a tent city to house them in a safer locale.

While many people are thankful to Arkady for his generous help, some people in the government have expressed resentment at his initiative of treading on what they consider their turf.

It is hoped, however, that both government and individuals will follow in the footsteps of this new star on the horizon of philanthropy.

## WHAT'S THE RIGHT THING TO DO?

REAL-LIFE QUESTIONS OF SOCIAL AND BUSINESS ETHICS

## A NEIGHBOR'S CONFLICT

**Question:** The child of a new neighbor has applied to our local Day School for admission for the coming semester. Since I have a daughter in this school I have been asked by the principal to provide them with some information about the family which will help them decide on whether to accept the girl. I have only positive things to report about the family, but I am reluctant to promote a friendship between my daughter and this girl whose religious background is not quite up to our standard. What is the right thing to do?

**Answer:** You are to be complimented for your discretion in regard to who are your daughter's social influences. You may be guilty, however, of being a bit hasty in judging

your neighbor's daughter. Religious standards, whether in manner of dress or observance of *mitzvot*, are invariably shaped by the community in which one lives and the school one attends. Your question indicates that you reside in a community with high religious standards and that your daughter attends a school with such standards. Experience has shown that families joining a community such as yours seek to conform to a higher standard for themselves and their children and succeed in doing so.

Tell the principal the positive aspects of the family as you see them and present accepting the girl as a challenge to the school and your community to enable this family to grow.

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# LOVE of the LAND

VOLUME ONE - THE GLADSTONE EDITION

GREAT CHANUKAH  
GIFT!

## The First Chanukah Light in Bergen-Belsen

RABBI MENDEL WEINBACH

Chanukah came to Bergen Belsen. It was time to kindle the Chanukah lights. A jug of oil was not to be found, no candle was in sight, and a Chanukia belonged to the distant past. Instead, a wooden clog, the shoe of one of the inmates, became a Chanukia, strings pulled from a concentration camp uniform, a wick, and the black camp shoe polish, pure oil.

Not far from the heaps of bodies, the living skeletons assembled to participate in the kindling of the Chanukah lights.

The Rabbi of Bluzhov lit the first light and chanted the first two blessings in his pleasant voice, and the festive melody was filled with sorrow and pain. When he was about to recite the third blessing, he stopped, turned his head, and looked around as if he were searching for something.

But immediately, he turned his face back to the quivering small lights and in a strong, reassuring, comforting voice, chanted the third blessing: “Blessed are Thou, O L-rd, our G-d, King of the Universe, who has kept us alive, and has preserved us, and enabled us to reach this season.”

Among the people present at the kindling of the light was a Mr. Zamietchkowski, one of the leaders of the Warsaw Bund. He was a clever, sincere person with a passion for discussing matters of religion, faith and truth. Even here in camp at Bergen Belsen, his passion for discussion did not abate. He never missed an opportunity to engage in such conversation.

As soon as the Rabbi of Bluzhov had finished the ceremony of kindling the lights, Zamiechkowski elbowed his way to the Rabbi and said, “Spira, you are a clever and honest person. I can understand your need to light Chanukah candles in these wretched times. I can even understand the historical note of the second blessing, “Who wrought miracles for our Fathers in days of old, at this season.” But the fact that you recited the third blessing is beyond me. How could you thank G-d and

say “Blessed art Thou, O L-rd, our G-d, King of the Universe, who has kept us alive, and hast preserved us, and enabled us to reach this season”? How could you say it when hundreds of dead Jewish bodies are literally lying within the shadows of the Chanukah lights, when thousands of living Jewish skeletons are walking around in camp, and millions more are being massacred? For this you are thankful to G-d? For this you praise the L-rd? This you call “keeping us alive?”

“Zamietchkowski, you are a hundred percent right,” answered the Rabbi. “When I reached the third blessing, I also hesitated and asked myself, what should I do with this blessing? I turned my head in order to ask the Rabbi of Zaner and other distinguished Rabbis who were standing near me if indeed I might recite the blessing. But just as I was turning my head, I noticed that behind me a throng was standing, a large crowd of living Jews, their faces expressing faith, devotion, and deliberation as they were listening to the rite of the kindling of the Chanukah lights. I said to myself, if G-d has such a nation that at times like these, when during the lighting of the Chanukah lights they see in front of them the heaps of bodies of their beloved fathers, brothers, and sons, and death is looking from every corner, if despite all that, they stand in throngs and with devotion listening to the Chanukah blessing “Who performed miracles for our Fathers in days of old, at this season”; indeed I was blessed to see such a people with so much faith and fervor, then I am under a special obligation to recite the third blessing.”

Some years after the liberation, the Rabbi of Bluzhov received regards from Mr. Zamietchkowski. Zamietchkowski asked the son of the Skabiner Rabbi to tell Israel Spira, the Rabbi of Bluzhov, that the answer he gave him that dark Chanukah night in Bergen Belsen had stayed with him ever since, and was a constant source of inspiration during hard and troubled times.

• *From Chassidic Tales of the Holocaust by Yaffa Eliach*