

# OHRNET

THE OHR SOMAYACH TORAH MAGAZINE ON THE INTERNET

## PARSHA INSIGHTS

### THE HIDDEN FACE

***“My anger will flare against him on that day and I will forsake them; and I will hide My face from them and they will become prey..He will say on that day ‘Is it not because my God is not in my midst that these evils have come upon me?’” (31:17)***

When tragedy befalls the Jewish People, we may think that Hashem has abandoned us to our enemies. When we are beset by those who wish to destroy us and they seem to be unstoppable while we are powerless, and they slay us from morning till evening, let us remember this verse.

Hashem will never desert us; rather we feel that He has forsaken us because He has ‘hidden His face.’ When Hashem ‘hides His face’ it means that we cannot see Him controlling events. It seems to us that chaos rules. Of course, nothing happens that He does not decree. The decree for every event that has happened this year was sealed last Yom Kippur: “Who will live and who will die...”

And if we look carefully at events, even though we cannot see Hashem’s ‘face,’ we can, at least, discern His ‘back.’ We can see the telltale footprints in the snow of History.

We sometimes feel that we have failed Hashem so totally that there is no way we can find our way back to Him. We should remember that He is always there behind the mask of the world, waiting for us to return through prayer and teshuva (repentance).

### ROOT AND BRANCH

***“Not with you alone do I seal this covenant.... and with whoever is not here” (29:13-14)***

When the Jewish People accepted the Torah at Sinai, they accepted it not

only for themselves, but on behalf of all their descendants till the end of time.

One might ask “What right did they have to obligate me to keep the Torah? If they wanted to keep it, fine! But why should I have to keep it!”

Take a look at a young tree which has yet to grow branches. Every branch which will grow from this tree is part of the tree itself. The branches cannot secede from the tree. If it were not for the tree there would be no branches, and even though the branches have not yet appeared, they are part

“Hashem is always there behind the mask of the world, waiting for us to return...”

of the tree now. Similarly every Jew is a branch of the tree which is the Jewish People. We are all bound by the acceptance of Torah because our potential to exist was already rooted in our forefathers.

Thus, since our forefathers accepted the Torah, it is as though we accepted it ourselves.

There is also a mystical concept that every Jewish soul that would ever live “stood” at Sinai in an incorporeal form and accepted the Torah. So, in reality, each individual was there as well.

### THE SPEED OF THOUGHT

***“For this commandment that I command you today, it is not hidden from you... it is not in Heaven... nor is it over the sea... for it is very near to you, in your mouth and your heart to do it.” (30:11-14)***

The Torah tells us that this commandment is not over the sea; it is in your mouth and your heart to do it.

In other words, one might have thought that it is over the sea.

How is it possible that something as close as the mouth and the heart could ever be confused with being as distant as the heavens or over the sea?

Man consists of two opposing elements, body and soul. If we put our neshama, our soul, in charge of our body we can reach a level greater than the angels. If, on the other hand, we allow our body to dominate our spiritual side we become like animals.

For just as an animal has no taste for wisdom and intellectual discernment, preferring hay, straw and the like, so too a person who centers himself on physicality finds things of the spirit without taste. Thus, man is an amalgam of two elements as disparate as heaven and earth.

This is what the Torah is teaching us here. When a person turns his back on the great worth of the spiritual world, that world is indeed extremely distant from him — literally “in the heavens.” However the Torah tells him that really “it is very near to you.” If you just give the spiritual dominion over the physical, then “it is in your mouth and your heart to do it.”

These words illustrate the enormous potential of man. In one second, he can rise to the heights by bringing Torah into his mouth and his heart, by bringing the furthest thing in the world close to him: In a split second, a thought can trans-

# PARSHA OVERVIEW

## NITZAVIM

On the last day of his life, Moshe gathers together all the people, both young and old, lowly and exalted, men and women in a final initiation. The covenant includes not only those who are present, but even those generations yet unborn. Moshe admonishes the people again to be extremely vigilant against idol worship, because in spite of having witnessed the abominations of Egypt, there will always be the temptation to experiment with foreign philosophies as a pretext for immorality. Moshe describes the desolation of the Land of Israel which will be a result of the failure to heed Hashem's *mitzvos*. Both their descendants and foreigners alike will remark on the singular desolation of the Land and its apparent inability to be sown or to produce crops. The conclusion will be apparent to all — the Jewish People have forsaken the One who protects them, in favor of idols which can do nothing. Moshe promises, however, that the people will eventually repent after both the blessings and the curses have been fulfilled. However assimilated they will have become among the nations, eventually Hashem will bring them back to Eretz Yisrael. Moshe tells the people to remember that the Torah is not a remote impossibility; rather its fulfillment is within the grasp of every Jew. The Parsha concludes with a dramatic choice between life and death. Moshe exhorts the people to choose life.

## VAYELECH

On this, the last day of his life, Moshe goes from tent to tent throughout the camp, bidding farewell to his beloved people, encouraging them to “keep the faith.” Moshe tells them that whether he is among them or not, Hashem is with them, and will vanquish their enemies. Then he summons Yehoshua, and in front of all the people, exhorts him to be strong and courageous as the leader of the Jewish People. In this manner, he strengthens Yehoshua's status as the new leader. Moshe teaches them the *mitzvah* of *Hakhel*: That every seven years on the first day of the intermediate days of Succos, the entire nation, including small children, is to gather together at the Temple to hear the King read from the Book of *Devarim*. The sections that he reads deal with faithfulness to Hashem, the covenant, and reward and punishment. Hashem tells Moshe that his end is near, and he should therefore summon Yehoshua to stand with him in the *Mishkan*, where Hashem will teach Yehoshua. Hashem then tells Moshe and Yehoshua that after entering the Land, the people will be unfaithful to Him, and begin to worship other gods. Hashem will then completely “hide his face,” so that it will seem that the Jewish People are at the mercy of fate, and that they will be hunted by all. Hashem instructs Moshe and Yehoshua to write down a song - *Ha'azinu* – which will serve as a “witness” against the Jewish People when they sin. Moshe records the song in writing and teaches it to Bnei Yisrael. Moshe completes his transcription of the Torah, and instructs the *Levi'im* to place it to the side of the *Aron* (Holy Ark), so that no one will ever write a new Torah Scroll that is different from the original – for there will always be a reference copy.

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## FATHERLY ADVICE

TIDBITS FROM THE ‘ETHICS OF OUR FATHERS’  
TRADITIONALLY STUDIED ON SUMMER SABBATHS

“**BE CAUTIOUS IN YOUR JUDGMENT.**”

• Members of the Great Congregation - Avos 1:1

We conclude this year's series of “Fatherly Advice” with the very first piece of advice given in Pirkei Avos. This directive was not intended for court judges alone. Every one of us is called upon to judge situations in our own lives. Writers must therefore be cautious in judging what to communicate and the

comments received from readers of this and other columns in **Ohrnet** are therefore appreciated. We are also judges in our relationships with family, neighbors and friends. Let us learn not to be hasty in judging them. This is the first item of advice given by our Sagely Fathers because it affects every area of our daily lives.

לע"נ  
ר' שמואל זאב בן ר' שלמה ז"ל  
גלב"ע ג' חוה"מ סוכות תשל"ה  
ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

# PARSHA Q&A ?

## NITZAVIM

1. What is the connection between the verse “*Atem nitzavim*” and the curses in the previous *parsha*?
2. Who are the wood-choppers and water-carriers?
3. Why can Hashem never ‘swap’ the Jewish people for another nation?
4. One who ignores the Torah’s warnings “adds drunkenness to thirst (29:18).” What does this mean?
5. What two cities were destroyed along with S’dom and Amorah?
6. “The hidden things are for Hashem, our G-d, and the revealed things are for us....” What does this mean?
7. According to Rashi, how will the day of the ingathering of the exiles be ‘great and difficult?’
8. Where is the Torah ‘not to be found?’ Where is it to be found?
9. When and where did the Jewish People become culpable for each other’s sins (*areivim zeh lazeh*)?
10. How do the earth and sky remind us to keep the mitzvot?

## VAYELECH

1. Moshe said, “I am 120 years old today. I am no longer able to go out and come in....” How do we know that this does NOT refer to physical inability?
2. Which of Moshe’s statements to Yehoshua was later contradicted by Hashem’s command?
3. Why does the Torah (31:10) refer to the Succos of the eighth year as though it occurred during the *Shemita* year?
4. Why does the Torah command that babies be brought to hear the Torah being read?
5. What does it mean that Hashem ‘hides His face’ from the Jewish People?
6. What function does the song *Ha’azinu* serve?
7. Which verse promises that the Torah will never be totally forgotten from the Jewish People?
8. What is the difference of opinion regarding the placing of the Torah scroll which Moshe gave the Levi’im?
9. On the day of Moshe’s death, he didn’t gather the people by blowing trumpets as he normally would have. Why not?
10. Moshe said “For I know that after my death you will act corruptly...(31:29),” but, in fact, this didn’t occur until after Yehoshua’s death. What does this teach us?

## BONUS QUESTION?

A covenant was made between Hashem and “those standing here with us today — in front of Hashem, our G-d — and those **NOT** here with us today (i.e., future generations).” How can future generations be obligated by a covenant which they never entered into?

## I DIDN'T KNOW THAT!

The first letters of the words “*Mi Ya’aleh Lanu Hashamaimah*” — *who will go up to the heavens for us?* — spell ‘mila’ (circumcision). The last letters spell Hashem’s name. *Bris Mila* prepares a person for his heavenly climb towards G-dliness.

• *Ba’al Haturim (30:12)*

## HAFTORAH: YISHAYAHU 61:10-63:9

In this last of the seven Haftorahs of Consolation, the prophet Isaiah describes how just as the land will seem to bloom and flourish in the time of the *Mashiach* without any prior cultivation, so too Hashem will redeem his people and shower them with kindness without any prior action on their part, and without them deserving it. Rather, Hashem will bestow His kindness through His infinite generosity.

The Targum Yonason translates “For Zion’s sake, I will not be silent” to mean that there will never be peace in the world while the Jewish People are scattered in exile.

In the final days, Hashem will come “stained with blood from the battle with Esau/Edom/Rome and its spiritual heir” to liberate His people and reveal that He has been with them in every exile, frustrating the designs of those who wished to obliterate them.

## ONLY HAPPINESS IS A TWO-WAY STREET

*“I will rejoice intensely with Hashem, my soul shall exult with my G-d.” (61:10)*

Our Sages teach us that “a person is obligated to make a blessing on adversity just as he makes a blessing on good.” (*Berachos 54*) However, this is only when the misfortune happens to *oneself*, but if one’s neighbor is beset by tragic events, it is forbidden to rejoice. In fact, a person is obligated to empathize with the pain of his neighbor.

This is the intention of this verse: “*I will rejoice intensely with Hashem...*” When I perceive Hashem through the aspect of His Mercy, when He blesses me with an abundance of revealed good, then I can both rejoice and give others cause to rejoice with me.

However, when I perceive G-d through the aspect of His Judgment, “*my soul shall exult with my G-d.*” When affliction befalls me *only I am allowed to exult*, for “*a person is obligated to make a blessing on adversity just as he makes a blessing on good.*” But when misfortune befalls others, then not only am I forbidden to exult, I must seek out every way to empathize with them in their loss.

• *Avodas Yisrael in Mayana shel Torah*

## WEEKLY DAF

### NIDDAH 67 -73

#### RAISING THE I.Q.

“What should a man do to become wise in Torah?” asked the Jews of Alexandria of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chanina.

“Let him spend much time studying and little time in business,” was the sage’s reply.

“But many have done so,” they persisted, “and have not succeeded.”

“Then let him pray to the one to whom wisdom belongs.”

Why, asks the Talmud, did he first mention the need for much study if, in the end, everything depends on prayer?

Rabbi Yehoshua taught the people of Alexandria that success in acquiring wisdom can only be achieved through a combination of study and prayer, and that one without the other is insufficient.

Maharsha points out that the wisdom referred to here is not the knowledge of Torah but the intelligence of the one studying Torah. The intelligence level of a person, say our Sages (*Niddah 16b*), is pre-determined, for at the moment of conception an angel brings the seminal drop before Hashem and asks whether a wise man or a fool will be formed from it. Is man forever limited to this degree of pre-destined intelligence, asked the

Alexandrians, or is he capable of breaking the barriers of this Heavenly decree?

Rabbi Yehoshua’s response was that man can break the intelligence barrier by a combination of hard work and the Heavenly help gained through prayer and the merit of Torah study. One without the other will leave him with the level of intelligence decreed at conception. Together they can make him a more intelligent person.

• *Niddah 70b*

#### SIYUM OF TENTH CYCLE OF DAF HAYOMI

How appropriate it is that our concluding item in the “Weekly Daf” should deal with the subject of becoming wise in Torah. It is the joy of acquiring such wisdom which is the cause for tens of thousands of Jews throughout the world this week to celebrate the completion of the tenth cycle of Daf Hayomi.

When one completes a single *mesechta*, let alone the entire Shas, he makes a *siyum* which is celebrated with a festive meal which the Shulchan Aruch (*Yoreh Deah 246:26*) defines as a “*seudas mitzvah*.” The source for this practice is the

Sage Abaye (*Mesechta Shabbos 119a*) who declared that when he saw one of his disciples complete a *mesechta* he made a festive meal for all of his disciples.

One reason for this *simcha*, says the Gaon of Vilna, is the explanation given by the Sages (*Bava Basra 121b*) for the Fifteenth of Av being such a special day of joy. It was on that date that the cutting of wood for use on the *Beis Hamidkash* altar was completed for the year. Reaching the climax of a *mitzvah* is a cause for joy, and so is reaching the climax of a *mesechta*.

Maharsha, however, suggests another source. The *Midrash* states that we learn from the feast which King Solomon made for his entire court upon being blessed with the extraordinary wisdom he had requested in his nocturnal dialogue with Hashem (*Melachim I 3:15*), that we should also make a feast when completing the study of the Torah. This is the source for our celebration on *Simchas Torah* when we complete the reading of the entire Torah, and for our celebration of the *siyum* of a *mesechta*. Just as Solomon understood that there could be no greater cause for joy than the gift of wisdom, so do we celebrate the acquisition of wisdom which comes from a year’s reading of weekly portions of the Torah and which results from the completion of a *mesechta*.

To all participating in this great Siyum Hashas of Daf Hayomi we wish a hearty “Mazal Tov” with best wishes to complete the cycle again and again.

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#### PARSHA INSIGHTS

port him from languishing in shadow to basking in great light; to being elevated to the loftiest heights. Surely — “it is not hidden from you.”

#### RESTING IN THE HEART

“And Moshe went and spoke these words to all Yisrael” (31:1)

Why doesn’t the Torah tell us where Moshe went?

In every Jew throughout the ages, there is a little spark of Moshe Rabbeinu. That’s where Moshe went. That was his resting place. Thus the end of the verse: “And Moshe went (and spoke these words) to all Yisrael.”

Maybe that is one of the reasons that

no one knows where Moshe is buried, because Moshe’s final resting place is in the heart of every Jew.

#### BEST BEHAVIOR

“At the end of seven years... you shall read this Torah before all Israel... the men, the women and the small children” (31:10-12)

How often do we see people who are very far from religion, when faced with educating their children, suddenly becoming much more religious!

Rashi, commenting on the verse above, says that the reason small children should be brought to hear the Torah read at the time of *Hakhel*, is to

“cause reward to those who bring them.” This implies that the reason for the children coming has nothing to do with the influence that it might have on them, but rather on those who bring them.

By wanting to set a good example to their children, the parents themselves will become more careful in their observance of mitzvos, and be sure to come to hear the King read the Torah at *Hakhel*.

Sources:

- *Root And Branch* - Rabbeinu Bachya
- *The Speed Of Thought* - Ohel Yoel
- *Resting In The Heart* - Mayana shel Torah
- *Best Behavior* - Rabbi Michael Schoen



# ASK the RABBI

## GUARDIAN ANGELS

**Adam Auton from London**  
<ai06@dial.pipex.com> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,  
What does Judaism say about guardian angels?

**Jane Hewitt <swimmer@twave.net>**  
wrote:

Dear Rabbi,  
Could you please give me a literal definition of the word angel as it was written & meant in ancient Hebrew? Does it mean the same thing in Hebrew as it does in English? It seems that the Old Testament angels were like us in appearance. Could you give me a Jewish definition of angel? Thank you very much for any help.

Dear Adam Auton and Jane Hewitt,

The Hebrew word for “angel” is “malach.” The word “malach” is related to the word “melacha,” which means “task.” Hence, a malach is an agent or vehicle which accomplishes a task. The English word “angel” comes from the Greek word “angelos” meaning “messenger” or “agent.”

Therefore, a “malach” can be a wind, a person, or a purely spiritual force. The angels such as those who spoke to Abraham and Jacob were purely spiritual forces which appeared in human form.

Our Sages state that when you perform a commandment you create an angel that accompanies you. Maimonides explains that this refers to the spiritual and intellectual concepts that influence the person as a result of performing the commandments.

According to Maimonides, the degree of Divine Providence you experience is directly proportional to your attachment to God, and therefore the commandments which create that attachment are the true “guardian angels” of a person.

Sources:

- Tehillim 104, Commentary by Rabbi Avraham Chaim Feuer
- Zohar, Raiya Mehemna Parashat Shelach & Tractate Avodah Zarah 17a
- Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Laws of Mezuzah, 6:13
- Maimonides, Guide for the Perplexed, Section 3

## BLESSED ART

**Brenda Kaldenbach <kalden@xs4all.nl>**  
from Holland wrote:

Dear Rabbi,  
Why are we commanded to make our ritual objects beautiful? I am a Jewish graphic designer and illustrator, and I am specialized in making ketubot [marriage contract document]. I help thus to make ritual objects beautiful. I know that one is supposed to make ritual objects beautiful, but I want to understand why. I know that it is a part of Jewish tradition, to make a nice table for Shabbat, for example, but also when I pass this on to my children I want to explain to them why it is done.

Dear Brenda Kaldenbach,

Someone who fulfills a commandment has done what Hashem demands of him. However, because of our great desire to go beyond that which is demanded of us the possibility exists to enhance each mitzvah by beautifying it beyond the letter of the Law. Therefore, the Torah tells us that we should perform the commandments in a beautiful manner.

Here’s an analogy. Let’s say a wife tells her husband she wants a gold necklace for her birthday. The husband is faced with many possibilities: Did she mean a nine karat gold necklace that costs \$18? Or a twenty-two karat, diamond-encrusted necklace for \$18,000? Or something in between!

The answer is: If the husband just wants to “do his duty” he only needs to buy the \$18 necklace. If, however, he wants to show his wife how dear she is to him, and how much he loves her, he will buy the most beautiful necklace he can afford.

## CHAIR PERSONS

**Rachel from New York City**  
<rfeiner@jmct.com> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,  
Is their any ‘real’ reason that we lift the bride and groom up on chairs at their wedding or is it just something we do for fun? A friend asked me and I thought it was for fun, but wanted to make sure. Thanks!

Dear Rachel,

You’re right, it is fun! However, I think — as in most lighthearted things that we do — there’s an element of seriousness to it. A bride and groom are like a king and queen. Just as a king and queen are transported everywhere, likewise we lift up the bride and groom and rejoice with them.

## YIDDLE RIDDLE

**Last week we asked:** “We all know that you must nullify chametz prior to Pesach at a time when it is still permissible to derive benefit from it, because when the chametz becomes totally prohibited, the Torah withdraws a person’s ownership of it. At that stage, a person no longer has the power to nullify it.

Under what circumstances would a person be able to make an effective statement of nullification during Pesach, which will enable him to avoid transgressing the strict prohibition on owning chametz?

**Answer:** The person has some “Kosher for Passover” flour which became mixed with water during Pesach. Before the mixture becomes chametz, he can nullify it in order to avoid transgressing the prohibition of owning chametz.

Sources:

- Orach Chaim 444:8

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# PARSHA Q&A!

## Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

### NITZAVIM

1. 29:12 - The Jewish People asked, "Who can survive such curses?" Moshe comforted them, saying, "You've done a lot to anger Hashem, and yet — 'atem nitzavim' — Hashem didn't destroy you ... you're still standing before Him."
2. 29:10 - Canaanites who joined the Jewish People under false pretenses.
3. 29:12 - Because Hashem swore to their ancestors that He would never do so.
4. 29:18 - He causes Hashem to reckon his unintentional sins alongside his intentional ones, punishing him for all.
5. 29:22 - Admah and Tsevoyim.
6. 29:28 - There is collective culpability only for 'open' sins, but not for 'hidden' ones.
7. 30:3 - It will be as if Hashem needs to take each individual by the hand and lead him out of exile.

8. 30:12-15 - The Torah is not found in heaven nor across the ocean. Rather, it is "...very close to you, in your mouth and in your heart to do it."
9. 30:28 - When they crossed the Jordan and accepted the oath on Mt. Eval and Mt. Grizim.
10. 30:19 - The earth and heavenly bodies — although receiving neither reward nor punishment — always 'obey' Hashem's will. How much more should we — who stand to receive reward or punishment — obey Hashem.

### VAYELECH

1. 31:2 - Because verse 34:7 says "His (Moshe's) eye never dimmed, and his (youthful) moisture never departed."
2. 31:7 - Moshe told Yehoshua to share his leadership with the Elders. Hashem later commanded Yehoshua

to rule alone.

3. 31:10 - Because the halachos of the seventh year (*Shemita*) still apply to the harvest.
4. 31:12 - To give reward to those who bring them.
5. 31:17 - He ignores their distress.
6. 31:21 - It warns what will befall the Jewish People if they abandon Torah.
7. 31:21 - "...For it (the Torah) will not be forgotten from the mouth of their offspring...."
8. 31:26 - Whether it was placed outside but adjacent to the Ark, or inside, next to the Tablets.
9. 31:28 - Blowing the trumpets was an expression of Moshe's dominion, and "There is no dominion on the day of death." (Koheles 8)
10. 31:29 - That a person's student is as dear to him as himself — As long as Yehoshua was alive, it was as though Moshe himself were alive.

## BONUS ANSWER!

The souls of all future generations — although not physically "**here with us today**" — exist nevertheless "**in front of Hashem, our G-d**." These yet unborn souls entered the covenant, along with the rest of the Jewish People.

• Kli Yakar

## RECOMMENDED READING LIST

### RAMBAN

- 29:18 Refusing the Covenant  
29:28 Accidental Sins  
31:1 Bidding Farewell  
31:2 Loss of Knowledge

### SFORNO

- 29:18 Denying the Curse  
30:6 Cleaving to Hashem  
30:9-10 Our Own Merit  
31:18 Hiding of Hashem

### SEFER HACHINUCH

- 612 The Gathering  
613 Writing a Sefer Torah??

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