

O H R N E T

SHABBAT PARSHAT TOLDOT • FOR THE WEEK ENDING 4 KISLEV 5760 • NOV. 13, 1999 • VOL. 7 NO. 6

PARSHA INSIGHTS

THE SEVENTH WELL

*"Yitzchak's servants came and reported to him regarding the well they had dug, saying, 'We found water!' And he called it Shiva (Seven)..." (Bereishet 26:32)"*

Of the three patriarchs of the Jewish People, Yitzchak must be the most enigmatic. The Torah depicts Yitzchak in a passive role: Things are done to him rather than him doing things. In his youth, he is brought up by his father Avraham as an offering. In his old age, he is tricked by his son Yaakov into giving him the blessing of the firstborn. He is the only patriarch who never leaves the Land of Israel. Practically the only time that Torah describes him in an active role is when he digs wells. What is the significance of digging wells?

Most of the time, we live in a world of unreality, unaware, negligently or willfully, of what life is really

about. We live on a superficial plane. Once in a while, reality confronts us. A birth. A death. A narrow escape. Yom Kippur. Something happens to rouse us from our sleepwalking.

Inside of all of us there is a place of serenity, of truth. The seventh well. A place that we don't make contact with very often; a place which is the deepest well of our being. The seventh well. Just like Shabbat is the seventh day, the deepest root of time, so inside us all is the seventh well, the deepest root of the soul.

Avraham's tent was open to the world. He was the master of going out to people and bringing them close to G-d. The master of outreach. Yitzchak was the master of in-reach. He plumbed the depths of the soul, paving the way for all who would follow.

Source:  
• Rabbi Menachem Nissel

PARSHA OVERVIEW

After 20 years of marriage, Yitzchak's prayers are answered and Rivka conceives twins. The pregnancy is extremely painful. Hashem reveals to Rivka that the suffering is a microcosmic prelude to the world-wide conflict that will rage between the two great nations descended from these twins — Rome and Israel. Esav is born, and then Yaakov holding on to Esav's heel. They grow, and Esav becomes a hunter, a man of the physical world, whereas Yaakov sits in the tents of Torah developing his soul. On the day of their grandfather Avraham's funeral, Yaakov is cooking lentils, the traditional mourner's meal. Esav rushes in, ravenous from a hard day's hunting, and sells his birthright (and its concomitant spiritual responsibilities) for a bowl of lentils, demonstrating his unworthiness for the position of firstborn. A famine strikes Canaan and Yitzchak thinks to escape to Egypt; but Hashem tells him that because he was bound as a sacrifice, he has become holy and must remain in the Holy

Land. He relocates to Gerar in the land of the Plishtim, where, to protect Rivka, he has to say she is his sister. The Plishtim grow jealous of Yitzchak when he becomes immensely wealthy, and Avimelech the king asks him to leave. Yitzchak re-digs three wells dug by his father, prophetically alluding to the three future Temples. Avimelech, seeing that Yitzchak is blessed by G-d, makes a treaty with him. When Yitzchak senses his end approaching, he summons Esav to give him his blessings. Rivka, acting on a prophetic command that the blessings must go to Yaakov, arranges for Yaakov to impersonate Esav and receive the blessings. When Esav in frustration reveals to his father that Yaakov has bought the birthright, Yitzchak realizes that the birthright has been bestowed correctly on Yaakov and confirms the blessings he has given Yaakov. Esav vows to kill Yaakov, so Rivka sends Yaakov to her brother Lavan where he may find a suitable wife.

THE DEAL

Yaakov's destiny has been formed. His descendants must uphold the entire Torah — all 613 *mitzvot*. They must live their lives as G-d's holy nation, subjugating their own will to that of their Creator. This is an opportunity to reach the most sublime spiritual heights, but opportunity is always accompanied by responsibility. "Become my holy nation," says G-d, "and all of the reward of this world and the next world will be yours; deviate from this path and I will 'turn away My face' from you."

The prophet Malachi relates this message to the Jewish people. It is precisely because G-d loves you that He has given you this deal. Opportunity and responsibility — there are great rewards for you to earn but only if you answer to your calling.

JUST WORDS?

The Torah is replete with lessons about the power of speech. Indeed, many of the *mitzvot* are performed solely by speaking. For example, the Torah commands a person to make a declaration of thanks when bringing the first fruits to the Temple. This declaration is a separate *mitzvah* with equal status to the actual "action-*mitzvah*" of bringing the fruit to the Temple. We tend to think that actions speak louder than words, but in reality the mouth is the loudspeaker of the mind. The mouth expresses a person's deepest thoughts and feelings. Therefore, words are often just as powerful as actions. The prophet Malachi warns parents and community leaders that a few derisive words about the Temple service pollute the minds of the young and impressionable.

I DIDN'T KNOW THAT!

"Do not descend to Egypt; dwell in the land that I shall indicate to you." (26:2)

Yitzchak was born in *Eretz Yisrael* and was never allowed to leave. The *gematria* (numerical value) of Yitzchak's name (208) hints to this, as it has the same numerical value as the name *ben-tzion* — son of Zion.

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LOVE OF THE LAND

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

EILAT

This, the name of the most southerly settlement in Israel, appears several times in *Tanach*. It is mentioned (*Devarim 2:8*) as one of the stations of Israel's journey from Egypt to *Eretz Yisrael*. It appears again as a geographical designation for the adjoining port of Etzion Gever where King Solomon's navy carried on commerce with a neighboring country (*Melachim I*



9:26) and again in connection with King Yehoshafat's ill-fated attempt to send ships to Ophir for gold (*Melachim I 22:49*).

Modern Eilat serves as the country's Red Sea port and has developed into a town with permanent residents. Its main claim to fame, however, is as a popular tourist attraction both for Israelis and visitors from abroad.

ר' יחזקאל שרגא בן ר' משה יוסף זצ"ל

לע"נ  
ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

## PROOF AND REPROOF

When Rabbi Elazar read this Torah passage he wept: "And Yosef said to his brothers, 'I am Yosef; does my father yet live?' And his brothers could not answer him for they were terrified before him." (*Bereishet 45:3*)

If such is the reproof of flesh and blood, mused the sage, what shall be when we are faced with Hashem's reproof?

Rabbi Elazar's tears reflected his appreciation of man's futility to defend himself against the charges to be presented by Hashem in the hereafter. The proof of this futility is the embarrassed silence with which Yosef's brothers greeted the revelation of his identity, and the reproof which accompanied it.

But where was there reproof in Yosef's words? All he said was "I am Yosef; does my father still live?"

The answer may be found in a brilliant commentary of Beit Halevi on a midrash with a similar message. When Yosef's brothers, prior to his revelation, pleaded with the Egyptian potentate to have mercy and release Binyamin from captivity, they based their case on the anguish that his imprisonment would cause their aged father. Yosef showed them the hypocrisy in their plea by following his revelation of "I am Yosef" with the question "does my father yet live;" by this he meant to remind them of the anguish they caused their father Yaakov by selling his son Yosef into slavery. "Does my father yet live after all the pain you caused him?" asks Yosef, thus exposing the insincerity of their earlier expressions of concern for Yaakov.

The Hebrew word for reproof is "*tochacha*," whose root means "proof." The proof of guilt is showing the inconsistency of the defendant's argument. If Yosef could silence his brothers with such a demonstration, says Rabbi Elazar, how shall we be able to defend ourselves when our Omniscient Creator reproves us and proves that all our excuses are absurd? The man who claims he did not give charity for lack of funds will be shown his expense account for luxuries. One who did not study Torah for an alleged lack of time will be shown how much time he spent on frivolous pursuits. The proof will be the reproof.

• *Chagiga 4b*

## THE 101ST TIME

"Then you shall return," says the Prophet Malachi in his vision of the hereafter, "and see the difference between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves Hashem and one who does not serve Him." (*Malachi 3:18*)

"Is this not redundant?" asked Ben Hei Hei (a sage who was a convert to Judaism and adopted as his name the letter which

was added to the names of history's first converts, Avraham and Sarah). "After all, one who is righteous serves Hashem and one who is wicked does not!"

The last part of the passage, explained the Sage Hillel, which refers to one who serves and one who does not, deals only with the righteous. But even in that category there is a difference between one who studies his Torah subject 100 times and one who does so 101 times.

"For failing to study just one more time," wondered Ben Hei Hei, "he is called one who does not serve Hashem!"

To explain his point, Hillel drew upon a comparison to the fee charged by donkey drivers who transport goods for people. They charge a *zuz* for transporting a distance of ten *parsah*, but if you ask them to go eleven *parsah* they will charge the disproportionate amount of two *zuz*.

Maharsha explains that ten *parsah* is the distance normally covered in one day by a donkey driver walking behind his loaded animal, so that this is a labor to which he is accustomed. If someone wishes him to cover an extra *parsah* in that same amount of time, he is requiring a special effort for which the fee must be doubled. In similar fashion, one who studies Torah to what he deems the limit of his ability may be considered a righteous Jew, but only one who pushes himself beyond that imagined limit and puts in that 101st time is considered one who truly serves Hashem and deserving of a special reward.

• *Chagiga 9b*

## THE OTHER SIDE OF THE STORY

### Giving People the Benefit of the Doubt

*When someone acts in a surprising way, don't...*

### FLIP YOUR WIG

A new couple started coming to our *shul* (synagogue). After some time, they appeared to become more observant. The wife began to dress more and more modestly, and her husband began to wear a black hat and *gartel* (prayer belt) on Shabbat. After about a year and a brief trip to Israel, the wife began wearing a *sheitel* (wig worn by observant Jewish women) in keeping with the halacha requiring married women to cover their hair.

One Saturday night, my husband and I were at the mall and I saw the wife emerging from the movie theater; she wore slacks and her hair was uncovered. I kept the matter to myself, not even mentioning it to my husband, who was right beside me (but perhaps didn't notice). But I was concerned: Was she pretending to be something she was not?

Some months later, in the hallway of the *shul* amongst a crowd of people, I overheard her saying to someone, "Have you ever met my twin sister?"

• *Submitted by an Ohrnet reader via the Internet*

## PARSHA Q&A ?

1. Why was it important that Yitzchak look like Avraham?
2. Why does the Torah stress that Rivka was Betuel's daughter and Lavan's sister?
3. What are the two differences between Tamar's pregnancy and Rivka's pregnancy?
4. Why was Esav named Esav?
5. Who gave Yaakov his name?
6. How did Esav deceive his father?
7. Why was Esav faint when he returned from the field?
8. Why are lentils a food for mourners?
9. What was the birthright that Yaakov bought from Esav?
10. Why was Yitzchak not permitted to go to Egypt?
11. Why did the Philistines plug up the wells?
12. Why did Yitzchak lose his sight? (three reasons)
13. At what age should one anticipate his own death?
14. Why did Rivka ask Yaakov to bring *two* kid goats?
15. Why did Esav leave his special garments with Rivka?
16. What fragrance did Yitzchak detect on Yaakov's garments?
17. What was the "fat of the land" promised to Esav?
18. When will Esav be freed from subjugation to Yaakov?
19. What inspired Esav to marry the daughter of Yishmael?
20. Knowing that Machalat was Yishmael's daughter, it's self-evident that she was the sister of Nevayot. Why, then, does the Torah state that Esav married "Yishmael's daughter, the sister of Nevayot?"

## PARSHA Q&A!

### Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

1. 25:19 - So everyone would agree that Avraham was indeed his father.
2. 25:20 - To praise her, that even though her family was evil she was righteous.
3. 25:24 - Rivka gave birth at full term to two children, one righteous and one wicked. Tamar gave birth after seven months to two righteous children.
4. 25:25 - He was born fully developed. The name Esav is based on the Hebrew word for "made."
5. 25:26 - Hashem.
6. 25:27 - Esav deceived Yitzchak by asking questions that suggested that he was very strict in *mitzvah* observance.
7. 25:29 - From having murdered.
8. 25:30 - They are round like a wheel and mourning is like a revolving wheel that eventually touches everyone.
9. 25:31 - The right to bring sacrifices.
10. 26:2 - Through the *akeida* he had attained the status of a *korban* and was forbidden to leave *Eretz Canaan*.
11. 26:15 - They felt that either marauders would attack to capture the wells, or if attacking for other reasons, they would use the wells as a water supply.
12. 27:1 - a) From the smoke of the incense offered by Esav's wives to their idols; b) From the angel's tears which fell into Yitzchak's eyes at the time of the *akeida*; c) In order for Yaakov to receive the blessings.
13. 27:2 - When he reaches five years from the age his parents were when they passed away, until five years after.
14. 27:9 - One for Yitzchak and the other to offer as a *korban Pesach*.
15. 27:15 - He suspected that his wives might steal them.
16. 27:27 - The scent of *Gan Eden*.
17. 27:36 - Italy.
18. 27:40 - When the Jewish People transgress the Torah.
19. 28:7 - Seeing that his father despised his current wives, he resolved to take a wife from his father's family.
20. 28:9 - To indicate that Yishmael died between her betrothal and her wedding, and that it was Nevayot who gave his sister in marriage to Esav. Knowing the date of Yishmael's death, we can determine the date of Esav's marriage and thus Yaakov's age, 63, at the time of his flight from Esav.

## KASHA! (KASHA MEANS "QUESTION")

"He (Yitzchak) said: 'The voice is Yaakov's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esav.' And he didn't recognize him, because his hands were hairy, like Esav's hands." (Bereishet 27:22-23)

**H**ow could Yitzchak be fooled by Yaakov's hairy hands? Didn't Yitzchak recognize that it was Yaakov based on his voice?

Answer: Esav knew that Yaakov might try to imitate him in order to get the blessings, and assumed that Yaakov would try to imitate his voice as well. So, in an attempt to preempt this possibility, Esav arranged with his father that Esav would imitate Yaakov's voice when receiving the blessings. Yaakov foresaw this, and therefore used his regular voice.

• Beit Halevi

DO YOU HAVE A KASHA? WRITE TO KASHA@OHR.ORG.IL WITH YOUR QUESTIONS ON ANY PARSHA!

## G-D'S LITTLE JOKE

Name@Withheld from Beckville, Texas wrote:

*Dear Rabbi,*

*Sometimes I feel like G-d put me down here as a joke. How can I fight this hopeless feeling?*

Dear Name@Withheld,

G-d is totally Benevolent. When He creates something, it is always with a positive purpose in mind.

The Talmud states that although plants and animals were created en masse, the human being was created alone in order to teach us that each person as an individual is vital to the world. We are created "in the image of G-d," meaning that we have an infinite soul, a moral capacity, and free will. If you are challenged by life, you have also been given the power and strength to overcome the challenge.

Everyone has failures and sometimes feels hopeless. But we are also given the power to recoup our strength and to carry on. I suggest reading an excellent book by Dr. Abraham Twersky, called "Let Us Make Man."

It might help you to know that your feelings are not uncommon. All great people have struggled with the riddle of existence, and everyone feels down at times.

## FRUM, AIN'T IT?

Yonasan Shapiro <shapie@juno.com> wrote:

*Dear Rabbi,*

*What is the definition of "frum" and what determines if you ain't "frum?"*

Dear Yonasan Shapiro,

*Frum* is a Yiddish word. It originally meant "pious." In Europe, when all Jews were Torah-observant, "frum" meant one who was exceptionally religious and righteous.

Today, when so many Jews are not Torah-observant, "frum" has come to mean anyone who believes in the Torah and is observant of its laws.

## BAD MOUTH

Xandra from Florence, Vermont <chai@together.net> wrote:

*Dear Rabbi,*

*What is my obligation if I walk into or through a room where five people are engaged in lashon hara (derogatory speech) about another worker who is temporarily absent?*

Dear Xandra,

It is a Torah prohibition to listen to derogatory speech. Therefore, if you have no business in the room at the time, then it is a *mitzvah* to leave. And joining the group or expressing interest in what is being said is prohibited. If you need to be in the room for some reason, then you have to try to listen to as little as possible, and try not to accept any of it as fact.

Certain leniencies apply to listening without the intent of accepting. Mainly, if you think some benefit may come out of it for you — for example, they are speaking about someone whom you are considering for a business partner — or, alternatively, if by listening you think that you will be able to rectify some wrong, then it may be permitted to listen. Here too, you're only allowed to *suspect* that the information might be true in order to protect yourself, but you're not allowed to believe it as fact.

*Source: Sefer Chafetz Chaim, Hilchot Lashon Hara, Klaf 6*

## PUBLIC DOMAIN

Comments, quibbles and reactions concerning previous "Ohrnet" features

Re: Goodyear (Ohrnet Lech Lecha):

In a recent edition, you wrote about the year 5760. I wanted to add something my grandfather, Rabbi Harold Konovitch, said about the year 5760. He foresees this year as a wonderful one for Jewish people. Why? Because when you add up the digits of the year, 5+7+6+0, what do you get? 18! *Chai! Life!*

• <Levys118@aol.com>

Re: Correction (Ohrnet Rosh Hashana):

Sisera was the leader of the Canaanite army based in Hazor,

not Assyrian, as you wrote.

• *Yitzhak Weiss* <rweiss@ozemail.com.au>

Re: Rabbi Tatz's Classes

([www.ohrnet.org/audio/ra/tatz/index.htm](http://www.ohrnet.org/audio/ra/tatz/index.htm)):

To Ohr Somayach for putting Rabbi Tatz's Torah classes on the web, I'd like to thank you — his lectures are literally changing my life. Thank you again — you have a share in each person's *Olam Haba* (eternal reward) created by the personal impact of these lectures which you disseminate. *Ya'asher Koach!*

• <Imloachshav@aol.com>

## YIDDLE RIDDLE

In which weekly *Parsha* (Torah portion) is the number of verses equal to the numerical value of the last word of the *parsha*? Answer Next Week...

• *Riddle submitted by Mike Marmor, Toronto* <mike.marmor@reuters.com>