

O H R N E T

SHABBAT PARSHAT VAYIGASH · FOR THE WEEK ENDING 9 TEVET 5760 · DEC. 18, 1999 · VOL. 7 NO. 11

PARSHA INSIGHTS

WITNESSES

“And Yehuda approached him.” (44:18)

Once there was a tramp standing by a traffic light. Suddenly, a big Rolls Royce limousine, about half a block long, pulls up next to him. One of the tinted windows in the back of the limo rolls down with an expensive electronic purr. From inside the car emerges a hand wearing a white silk glove. The hand is waving a crisp \$50 bill, beckoning to the tramp with the money. Like a silent Charlie Chaplin comedy, the tramp does a double take and looks behind him, convinced that the hand must be beckoning to someone else. Then he realizes the \$50 bill is for him. He can't believe his luck. He beams from ear to ear, walks up to the car and takes the money. Just as quietly and mysteriously as it arrived, the Rolls Royce glides away and disappears in the traffic. He stands there gazing after it for a long time.

The next day, the Rolls Royce again draws up next to him. This time, the tramp is somewhat less surprised, but no less grateful. Overjoyed, he again takes the money.

The next day the same thing happens, and the next day, and the next...

After about a month, the Rolls Royce draws up at the lights, but the window doesn't go down. After a few seconds the tramp knocks on the glass, but there is no response. So he knocks harder and harder, but there is no response. As the car pulls away, the tramp shouts: “Where's my fifty dollars! Where's my fifty dollars!”

Gratitude is proportionate to the extent that we understand that we received something that wasn't our due. If we think that something is due us, why should we be grateful?

“And Yehuda approached him.”

The name Jew (Heb. *Yehudi*) comes from the name Yehuda. We are not called Jews by coincidence. In Hebrew, a name defines the very essence of a thing. If the name Yehuda means to thank, that must be the essence of being Jewish. We are the “thankers.” The Hebrew for “to thank” is *l'hodot*. However, there is another meaning to the word *l'hodot*. It can also mean “to admit.” What's the connection between giving thanks and admitting?

To the extent that we admit we received something that we didn't deserve — to that extent will be our gratitude, to that degree we will give thanks.

We are Jews because we thank G-d for everything we have, however big or small. A Jew admits that everything comes from G-d. That is how *Yehuda* — the Jewish People — are able to *approach*, to come close to G-d.

“And Yehuda approached Him.”

The job of the Jewish people in this world is to be quite literally “G-d's witnesses.” (Not to be confused with Brand X who would also like to claim this job as their own.) Our job is to testify by the way we live our lives — and, if necessary, with our lives — that there is a G-d in the world. As it states in the prophetic writings: “*You are My witnesses.*”

So if our job is to be the Witnesses, why are we called the Thankers, or the Admitters?

The foundation of all belief in G-d is to admit that life is one gigantic gift. If a person doesn't feel that he was given anything, he will never look for G-d, he will never look further than his own nose. If I sensitize myself to the gift, I will sensitize myself to the Giver. Atheism is not the root of ingratitude. Ingratitude is the root of atheism.

Source:

• *Sfat Emet, Isaiah 43:10*

I DIDN'T KNOW THAT!

Yosef said to his brothers: “I am Yosef...” (Bereishet 45:3) Yosef said to his brothers: “Draw near to me...I am Yosef your brother whom you sold to Egypt.” (Bereishet 45:3)

At first, Yosef said merely “I am Yosef.” He didn't mention his sale into slavery because Binyamin was listening. Binyamin didn't know about the sale, and Yosef didn't want to embarrass the brothers in front of Binyamin. Then, Yosef told his brothers to “draw near,” and he separated them from Binyamin. Only then, out of Binyamin's earshot, did Yosef say “I am Yosef your brother, whom you sold to Egypt.”

• *Da'at Zekenim m'Ba'alei Hatosefot*

With the discovery of the goblet in Binyamin's sack, the brothers are confused. Yehuda alone steps forward and eloquently but firmly petitions Yosef for Binyamin's release, offering himself instead. As a result of this act of selflessness, Yosef has irrefutable proof that his brothers are different people from the ones who cast him into the pit, and he now reveals his identity. The brothers shrink from him in shame, but Yosef consoles them, telling them that everything has been part of G-d's plan. He sends them back to Yaakov with a message to come and reside in the land of Goshen. Yaakov together with all his family and possessions sets out for Goshen. Hashem communicates with Yaakov in a night vision, telling him not to fear going down to Egypt and its negative spiritual consequences, because it is there that Hashem will establish the Children of Israel as a great nation,

even though they will be dwelling in a land steeped in immorality and corruption. The Torah lists Yaakov's offspring and hints to the birth of Yocheved, Moshe's mother. Seventy souls in total descend to Egypt, where Yosef is reunited with his father after 22 years of separation. He embraces his father and weeps, overflowing with joy. Yosef secures the settlement of his family in Goshen. Yosef takes his father Yaakov and five of the least threatening of his brothers to present before Pharaoh, and Yaakov blesses Pharaoh. Yosef instructs that in return for grain, all the people of Egypt must give everything to Pharaoh, including themselves, as slaves. Yosef then redistributes the population, except for the Egyptian priests who are directly supported by a stipend from Pharaoh. The Children of Israel become settled, and their numbers multiply greatly.

HAFTARAH

ONE PLUS ONE EQUALS ONE

Imagine a twig pulled from both ends. If enough force is applied, the twig will eventually snap in two.

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YEchezkel 37:15 - 28

After the death of King Solomon, Israel split into two kingdoms — that of Yehuda and Binyamin, and that of the other ten tribes whose king was from Ephraim. As each kingdom pulled in its own direction, the two became further and further apart.

G-d tells the Prophet Yechezkel to take two pieces of wood. On one he is to write the words: "For Yehuda and the Children of Israel his associates;" on the other he is to write: "For Yosef the stem of Ephraim and the House of Israel his associates." He is to hold these sticks together in his hand, and G-d will fuse

them into one. He is to tell the Children of Israel that G-d will eventually gather us from amongst the nations and bring us home to Israel. There we will become one nation, with one king, and one G-d.

When the whole nation strives towards the lofty goal of fulfilling G-d's will, petty individual desires get pushed aside. The words "shalom" (peace) and "shalaim" (whole) share the same root letters, indicating that peace is possible only when all the components unite into a cohesive unit. When there is one aim, to serve one G-d with one Torah, then Israel becomes a unified nation.

LOVE OF THE LAND

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

SHILOH

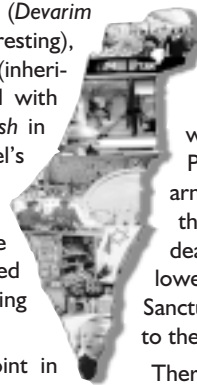
Site of the Mishkan-Sanctuary for 369 years (1258-889 BCE), this location was referred to in the Torah (*Devarim 12:9*) as "menucha" (the place of resting), a forerunner of the "nachalah" (inheritance) which would be achieved with the building of the Beit Hamikdash in Jerusalem. After 14 years of Israel's conquering the land and dividing it among the tribes, the Mishkan was transferred from Gilgal, where it had been temporarily established upon the Jewish People's entering the land.

This was a major turning point in Mishkan history, for here the boards which served as the walls of the Mishkan

during the wandering in the wilderness were replaced by a stone structure covered with skins, a sort of blend between the past and the future.

The kohen gadol, Eli, was in Shiloh when the news arrived that the Philistines had defeated the Israelite army, slain his two sons and captured the Holy Ark (*Shmuel I 4:12-17*). His death as a result of this shock was followed by the destruction of the Shiloh Sanctuary and the transfer of the Mishkan to the city of Nov.

There is today a small Jewish settlement and a Hesder Yeshiva in the Judean site bearing the name of this historic site.



LOVE PEACE AND TRUTH

There were many debates between the schools of Shammai and Hillel on issues that affected marital status, ranging from the minimum value of money that can create *kiddushin* (matrimony) to the sort of woman to whom the mitzvah of *yibum* applies. Despite their differences, the members of Beit Shammai did not hesitate to marry into the families of Beit Hillel, and the Beit Hillel people had no qualms about marrying into the Beit Shammai families. This teaches us, says the *gemara*, that despite their differences, these Sages related to each with affection and friendship in the spirit of the prophetic instruction to (Zecharia 8:19) “Love truth and peace.”

On a practical level, this relationship was possible because if there was a problem in one of the families resulting from the halachic position of the opposing school, the potential suitor would be informed. Thus he would avoid that particular family, leaving them to marry within their own ranks where that problem did not exist thanks to the halachic position of that school.

The application of the above passage from Zecharia is explained by Maharsha in the following manner:

Even though it is impossible for conflicting views to both be the ultimate truth, nevertheless, both are endowed with a dimension of truth from the perspective of their peaceful and loving relationship. This idea is expressed in the *gemara* in Masechta Chagigah (3b) which offers advice on how the student of Torah should view the differences of opinion which he encounters among Torah scholars. No scholar bases his position on the teachings of any source other than the Torah. You must therefore respectfully pay attention to the opinions of both (until you are capable of deciding which position must guide you — Rashi).

On a metaphysical level both the opinions of Beit Hillel and Beit Shammai are considered as truth. The *gemara* (Eruvin 13b) tells us that after three years of debate between the two schools, a voice from Heaven announced: “The words of both are the words of the Living G-d, but the halacha is like Beit Hillel.”

• Yevamot 14b

COW-HERDER AND SHEPHERD

A major debate raged between the schools of Hillel and Shammai over the issue of “*tzarat habat*” — if a man died childless and left behind two widows, one of whom was the daughter of the surviving brother, who is supposed to perform *yibum* by marrying one of them. The position of Beit Hillel, based on a *gezeirah shavah* deduction, was

that just as *yibum* cannot be performed with his daughter, who is forbidden to him, so too *yibum* cannot be performed with the other widow and she is free to marry anyone else. Beit Shammai’s position was that the second widow is unaffected by the fact that she shared her first husband with his niece; thus, the surviving brother may perform *yibum* by marrying her, and she is not free to marry outside the family unless he releases her through *chalitzah*.

Yonatan ben Hirkinus was a brilliant member of the Shammai school who had 300 arguments to support its position. Rabbi Akiva and two other leading Sages visited his brother, Rabbi Dossa ben Hirkinus, to investigate rumors that he had ruled like Shammai against the prevailing ruling of the main body of the Sages who held like Hillel. Rabbi Dossa told them that, despite all of Yonatan’s arguments, he could testify with certainty that the Prophet Chaggai had ruled that a “*tzarat habat*” was forbidden, exactly as Hillel later did. Yonatan accosted Rabbi Akiva on his way out of his brother’s home and logically challenged his Beit Hillel position on this issue. When the latter failed to refute his challenge and clung to the tradition going back to the prophets, Yonatan chided him by saying: “You are the Akiva whose reputation as a scholar is known throughout the world? How fortunate are you that you have reached such fame without even reaching the level of a cow-herder!” Rabbi Akiva’s response was, “Even the level of a shepherd!”

This enigmatic dialogue is thus explained by Maharsha:

Yonatan’s mention of a cow-herder was a reference to one of the earlier prophets, Amos, who described himself as such (Amos 7:14). This was intended as a putdown of his brother’s claim that the Beit Hillel’s view had a tradition all the way back to the Prophet Chaggai, for Chaggai was one of the last prophets. “You do not have a tradition going back to an early prophet like the cow-herder Amos,” Yonatan argued, “and even if you did, you could not rely on it because the Midrash (*Vayikra Rabbah*) says that Amos had difficulty with his speech.” Rabbi Akiva’s response was that the information received from a prophet, even one with speech difficulty, was reliable, and that the position of Beit Hillel went back to the earliest prophet, the shepherd Moshe, who also had a speech difficulty, and from whom the *gezeirah shavah* was originally received.

• Yevamot 16a

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PARSHA Q&A ?

1. What threatening words did Yehuda say to Yosef?
2. Why did Yehuda say his missing brother died?
3. Why was Yehuda the one to plead for Binyamin?
4. What do we learn from Yosef telling his brothers "Go up to my father"?
5. What two things did the brothers see that helped prove that he was really Yosef?
6. Why did Binyamin weep on Yosef's neck?
7. Why did Yosef send old wine to Yaakov?
8. What did Yosef mean when he said "Don't dispute on the way?"
9. What happened to Yaakov when he realized Yosef was alive?
10. Why did G-d tell Yaakov, "Don't fear going down to Egypt?"
11. "I will bring you up" from Egypt. To what did this allude?
12. What happened to the property that Yaakov acquired in Padan Aram?
13. Who was the mother of Shaul ben HaCanaanit?
14. When listing Yaakov's children, the verse refers to Rachel as "Rachel, wife of Yaakov." Leah, Bilhah and Zilpah are not referred to as Yaakov's wives. Why?
15. Yosef harnessed his own chariot instead of letting a servant do it. Why?
16. Why were shepherds abhorrent to the Egyptians?
17. Why did Yosef pick the weakest brothers to stand before Pharaoh?
18. What blessing did Yaakov give Pharaoh when he left his presence?
19. Yosef resettled the land of Egypt, moving the people from city to city. What were his two motives for this?
20. Whose fields were not bought by Yosef?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

1. 44:18 - He threatened that Yosef would be stricken with leprosy, like Pharaoh when he took Sarah from Avraham; alternatively, Yehuda threatened to kill Yosef and Pharaoh.
2. 44:20 - Yehuda feared that if he said his missing brother was alive, Yosef would demand to see him.
3. 44:32 - He was the one who took "soul" responsibility for him.
4. 45:9 - We learn that *Eretz Yisrael* is higher than all other lands.
5. 45:12 - He was circumcised like they were, and he spoke *Lashon Hakodesh*.
6. 45:14 - Binyamin wept for the destruction of *Mishkan Shilo* built in Yosef's territory.
7. 45:23 - Elderly people appreciate old wine.
8. 45:24 - He warned that if they engage in halachic disputes, they might not be alert to possible travel dangers.
9. 45:27 - His *ruach hakodesh* (prophetic spirit) returned.
10. 46:3 - Because Yaakov was grieved to leave Eretz Canaan.
11. 46:4 - That Yaakov would be buried in Eretz Canaan.
12. 46:6 - He traded it for Esav's portion in the Cave of Machpelah.
13. 46:10 - *Dina bat Yaakov*.
14. 46:19 - Rachel was regarded as the mainstay of the family.
15. 46:29 - Yosef wanted to hasten to honor his father.
16. 46:34 - Because the Egyptians worshipped sheep.
17. 47:2 - So Pharaoh wouldn't see their strength and draft them.
18. 47:10 - That the waters of the Nile should rise to greet Pharaoh.
19. 47:21 - In order to remind them that they no longer owned the land, and to help his family by removing the stigma of being strangers.
20. 47:22 - The Egyptian priests'.

KASHA! (KASHA MEANS "QUESTION")

These weekly Torah portions recount the tragic story of Yosef and his brothers. Here is my question. If Yaakov was indeed a *tzaddik* (righteous person) and *navi* (prophet), why then did he not understand his sons' evil designs on Yosef, nor did he know that his sons lied about Yosef's death. Wouldn't a *tzaddik* and *navi* discern the truth in these critical matters? • [Yechiel <jew4truth@aol.com>](mailto:Yechiel<jew4truth@aol.com>)

Answer:

The Midrash says that the prophecy, or *ruach hakodeh*, that Yaakov had, was temporarily (22 years) suspended from him, when Yosef was sold.

• *Midrash Tanchuma, Miketz 6.*

Do you have a KASHA? Write to kasha@ohr.org.il with your questions on any Parsha!

Y2K Day

Eliahu Leiba from Israel
<elياهو.לויבא@טלראד.קו.יל> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

As we approach the Year 2000, many — especially in the computer field — will be asked by their management to provide round the clock support during the transition from December 31, 1999 to January 1, 2000. This transition occurs Friday night, on Shabbat. In many companies, an argument will be presented to the employees that their support is a matter of “pikuach nefesh” (life and death). Some employees will be told that the software they are knowledgeable about provides a vital service either in Israel or abroad (e.g. telecommunications, infrastructure, aircraft monitoring systems, water supply, etc.). Much pressure will be placed on the employee in an attempt to convince them to work that Shabbat. Please provide a general checklist of halachic criterion as to what constitutes pikuach nefesh with respect to requiring desecration of Shabbat. This would enable your readership to respond in a respectful and intelligent way when told, “We would like you to work on Shabbat, since if your software breaks, so and so can happen and it is a matter of life and death.”

Dear Eliahu Leiba,

It is a commandment to break Shabbat in any and every manner for “pikuach nefesh” — saving a life. Even in a case of a shadow of a doubt of a doubt. Example: A building falls, but chances are it was empty; and even if someone was inside, chances are he’s already dead; and so on. Even so, we must dig out the rubble, even on Shabbat, in order to possibly save the life of someone who may be buried underneath.

If someone has the chance to save a life, but refrains from doing so because he fears breaking Shabbat, he is called a murderer. Certainly, then, if a person’s services are needed to prevent possible loss of life, he is indeed required to work even on Shabbat.

But what constitutes a life-threaten-

ing risk in regard to the so-called Y2K bug? Is your job one that requires your presence at the turn of the “millennium?” And if so, are there ways to do your job just as well while minimizing the Shabbat desecration (for example, writing “macros” before Shabbat which minimize the amount of buttons that need pushing)? This is a complex issue with many factors. If you think your job requires your presence the night of Dec. 31, there’s still time left to consult a rabbi who is a qualified halachic authority. The rabbi, after consulting technical experts in the field, will decide each case based on its own individual merits.

It’s interesting to note that, besides being the millenium on the Christian calendar, this year is a millenium of sorts from a Jewish perspective too. This past Tisha B’av marked 1930 years that Jews have been living in the shadow of the destruction of the Second Temple. Add to this the 70 years of Babylonian exile between the First and Second Temples, and you get exactly 2000 years that the Jewish nation has lived without a Holy Temple.

FOOD FIGHT

AnonymousTeacher@yahoo.com
wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

I am a teacher in the [withheld] school system, and I have a rule in my class that my students may not eat. If I do catch a student eating, may I take away the food—without returning it, or is this stealing?

Dear Anonymous Teacher,

Best would be to obtain permission from the parents for food confiscation. Otherwise, it would be an improper punishment. To punish with food confiscation, without such explicit permission, is a negative means to train a student.

Sources:

- Igrot Moshe II, 103

SEA BURIAL

Alter B. Raubvogel from Cincinnati, OH
<alterbentzion@juno.com>

Dear Rabbi,

Hi! A few of us were discussing the recent Egypt Air crash, and the question arose: Is there a Jewish concept of burial at sea? Is there an obligation to retrieve and bury the remains of someone who has died in a shipwreck or plane crash at sea, G-d forbid? May we only have “healthy” problems! And may your staff of rabbis be eternally blessed for the service you provide to your people.

Dear Alter B. Raubvogel,

The Jewish concept of burial is only in the earth. There’s no “burial at sea.” If someone died at sea, there would be an obligation to try to find him and bury him, if possible.

Sources:

- See Beit Yosef, Yoreh Deah 375:7

PEACE

Ramona Freedman
<moneoli@hotmail.com> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

I am wondering where it is written that the notion of internal peace is like a peaceful home.

Dear Ramona Friedman,

In Eichah Rabba there is an interesting parable which perhaps alludes to internal peace vis-a-vis a peaceful home. A king was in a rage, and walked out angrily from his palace. When he was outside [and calmed down], he kissed the wall of his palace and said, “Let there be peace inside my palace; peace inside my kingdom house. Peace inside my dear home. Let there be peace from now on; let there be peace...”

Sources:

- Eichah Rabba, Petichta 25

If I Were a Rich Man...

Hi. My name is Richie Tockar. I appreciate your comments and answer to my question that I sent to "Ask the Rabbi." I will cherish your words. I think your info is a wonderful facility — and I look forward to further contact. Thanks for the help and sincere effort you have made. I will be contributing by making donations to your worthy cause. I am 12 years old, not earning money as yet, but will save my pocket money and then give to *tzedakah*. Regards.

• Richie Tockar <tockar@ozemail.com.au>

Re: Testing G-d (Ohrnet Vayeitze):

Regarding your comment that one is allowed to "test" G-d in the matter of *tzedakah* (charity) and giving tithes. I am try-

ing to set aside *ma'aser* (a tenth) of my money. When I do so, and forward it to an actual worthy cause like a fund that feeds the poor on Shabbos or Pesach, I have noticed what I considered to be positive reactions, although I never asked for them. In one case, I sealed the envelope and got a phone call about a job (I freelance.)

• Name@Withheld

Re: Tekoa (Ohrnet Vayeshev):

In a recent "Love of the Land" you wrote about the city of Tekoa. Another fact regarding Tekoa is that King David's teacher, Eira Hayairi, was from this city. (*Chagiga 2b*)

• Name@Withheld

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE STORY

Giving People the Benefit of the Doubt

Judge your friends favorably, even when they seem to wrong you, and you can turn a sad situation into an...

AMUSEMENT PARK

I was at an amusement park, and I saw a friend whom I hadn't seen in a few years. I became excited and I went over

to her and said hi. She gave me a questioning look and said "Hi." I became quite angry and annoyed. Who was she to pretend she doesn't know me? Afterward I went over to her and asked her name. I found out she wasn't my friend, but someone who looked just like her!

• S.K. <email@withheld>

YIDDLE RIDDLE

With everyone focused on the "Year 2000" computer bug, not much attention is being given to the "Year 2100" Prayer Book bug. The year 2100 marks a change which will make almost every current English siddur (Jewish Prayer Book) outdated, and require that they be changed. What is the "Year 2100" Prayer Book bug?

Answer Next Week...

RECOMMENDED READING LIST**RAMBAN**

44:19 Yehuda's Diplomacy
45:16 Egyptian Reaction to Yosef's Brothers
45:26 Yaakov's Disbelief
45:27 The Lifetime Secret
46:15 Hidden Miracles
46:29 Who Cried?
47:9 Yaakov's Age

47:18 The Seven Lean Years

SFORNO

45:16 Pharaoh's Invitation
46:3 The Advantage of Exile

OHR HACHAIM HAKADOSH

45:26 Why Yosef Didn't Tell Yaakov
46:4 The *Shechina* in Mitzrayim