

## O H R N E T

SHABBAT PARSHAT VAYEITZEI · FOR THE WEEK ENDING 11 KISLEV 5760 · NOV. 20, 1999 · VOL. 7 NO. 7

## PARSHA INSIGHTS

It's All  
For The Best!*"And it was in the morning, that behold it was Leah!" (29:25)*

The king was unhappy with his Prime Minister. Every time there was a problem in the country, whether it was a minor hiccup or a major disaster, the Prime Minister would say, "It's all for the best!" The king would cringe before the Prime Minister's irrepressible optimism, and scowl. One day things came to a head. The king was out hunting. An ill-aimed sword wielded by one of his courtiers sliced off the king's little finger. As the king shrieked and howled in pain, the Prime Minister chirped, "It's all for the best!" The king was livid. "Take him and throw him in the dungeons!" ordered the king. "I can't stand his infernal cheerfulness one moment longer!"

The days past, and the months too. The Prime Minister languished in jail for a year. And then two. It looked like he would finish up his days with nothing to console him save his irrepressible optimism.

It just so happened that one day the king went out on a hunting party with his court. Unbeknownst to them, a dangerous tribe of pigmy cannibals had invaded the king's northern border — exactly where the hunting party found themselves. It was all over in a few seconds. The trap sprung and the entire hunting party was trussed up in

a gigantic net that the pygmies had strung across the forest path. One by one they were extracted from the net and interred in the pygmy stockade. The following morning they were all destined to be a five-star pygmy cannibal breakfast.

Day broke, and one by one the luckless courtiers were led to the pot. The pygmies, of course, saved the greatest delicacy for desert. Finally it was the turn of the king. They led him from the stockade out into the unforgiving glare of the morning sun. They tied his legs together. Just when they were about to tie his hands together, one of the pygmies let out a squeal of alarm. The king had no pinkie. Where his little finger was supposed to be was...nothing. Now, everyone knows that in *hilchot* Pygmy, only a perfect and whole human maybe eaten. Someone who has even the slightest physical blemish is invalid.

Unceremoniously, the pigmies sent the king back to his palace. He immediately rushed to the prison and ordered the release of the prime minister. Telling him of his miraculous escape, the king begged forgiveness from his prime minister. But all the prime minister would say was "It's all for the best!" The king looked at the prime minister with great remorse and said, "I just took away two years of your life — how can you say it's all for the best?!" "If I hadn't been in prison," replied the prime minister, "I'd have been out hunting with you!"

When Rachel saw her sister Leah standing under the wedding canopy with Yaakov, her intended husband, she must have felt like her life was coming to an end. And yet she was silent. She must have thought that Yaakov would never marry her, after her betrayal of his confidence. He would probably resign himself to marriage with Leah and accept it as Divine Providence. Besides, it was highly unlikely that Yaakov would marry two sisters. And yet she was silent.

But Yaakov did marry her. And they had two children, Yosef and Binyamin.

Every stone in the *ephod* (breastplate) of the *kohen gadol* represented one of the tribes of Israel. The stone of Binyamin was called "*yashpneh*." These same Hebrew letters also spell "*yesh neh*." There is a mouth, a mouth closed in silence.

Esther was also from the tribe of Binyamin. She saved the Jewish People by silence. By not revealing her Jewishness to King Achashverosh, she was able to thwart Haman's plan of genocide.

Esther didn't get her power of silence from nowhere. It came from Rachel. When Rachel stood and watched the *chupah* of her sister in silence, she planted a power into her offspring which would eventually save the entire Jewish People.

"It's all for the best!"

Source:  
*It's All For The Best* - Story heard from  
Rabbi Eliezer Shore

## PARSHA OVERVIEW

Fleeing from Esav, Yaakov leaves Be'er Sheva and sets out for Charan, the home of his mother's family. After a 14 year stint in the Academy of Shem and Ever, he resumes his journey and comes to Mount Moriah, the place where his father Yitzchak was brought as an offering, and the future site of the *Beit Hamikdash*. He sleeps there and dreams of angels going up and down a ladder between Heaven and earth. Hashem promises him the Land of Israel, that he will found a great nation and that he will enjoy Divine protection. Yaakov wakes and vows to build an altar there and tithes all that he will receive. Then he travels to Charan and meets his cousin Rachel at the well. He arranges with her father, Lavan, to work seven years for her hand in marriage, but Lavan fools Yaakov, substituting Rachel's older sister, Leah. Yaakov commits himself to work another seven years in order to also marry Rachel. Leah bears four sons —

Reuven, Shimon, Levi and Yehuda — the first Tribes of Israel. Rachel is barren, and in an attempt to give Yaakov children, she gives her handmaiden Bilhah to Yaakov as a wife. Bilhah bears Dan and Naftali. Leah also gives Yaakov her handmaiden Zilpah, who bears Gad and Asher. Leah then bears Yissachar, Zevulun, and a daughter, Dina. Hashem finally blesses Rachel with a son, Yosef. Yaakov decides to leave Lavan, but Lavan, aware of the wealth Yaakov has made for him, is reluctant to let him go, and concludes a contract of employment with him. Lavan tries unsuccessfully to swindle Yaakov, but Yaakov becomes extremely wealthy. Six years later, Yaakov, aware that Lavan has become resentful of his wealth, flees with his family. Lavan pursues them but is warned by Hashem not to harm them. Yaakov and Lavan agree to a covenant and Lavan returns home. Yaakov continues on his way to face his brother Esav.

## HAFTARAH

### NO GLAMOUR

For a nation with a history rich with miracles, many Biblical events seem to lack one ingredi-

ent: Glamour. Where was the knight in shining armor in the episode of Yaakov's marriage? Yaakov was made to work 14 years in order to marry his chosen partner, Rachel. Where was the mighty warrior in the story of the Exodus? Moshe, although the greatest prophet who ever lived, was far from being a mighty warrior or charismatic leader. It is to these humble beginnings that the prophet Hoshea refers to the Jewish people. Sometimes we may have to work hard like Yaakov and other times we may witness miracles akin to those of the Exodus, but there are no guarantees of victory. Our leaders have not been given supernatural powers which can be used at our whim. If through our haughtiness we forget G-d and follow our desires, then our nation will become weak enough to be driven away by the wind. However, the gates

of repentance are always open no matter how far we have strayed. If we return to G-d completely then we will merit His special protection.

### JUST DO IT?

*"And now they sin more and make for themselves molten images...they slaughter men and kiss calves" (Hoshea 13:2)*

Adam was placed above the animal kingdom when he was given free will, the ability to rise above animalistic instinct. When "just do it" becomes the byword of society, then humanity has lost its spiritual essence. This is what Hoshea tells Israel: "They slaughter men and kiss calves" — they have sacrificed their most noble human quality in their worship of animal instinct.

# OHRNET

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לע"נ  
ר' דוד בן ר' שמואל רפאל ז"ל  
ח' כסלו תשנ"ה  
ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

I am a Rabbi at a *yeshiva* (Talmudic academy) in Jerusalem. Our *yeshiva davens* (prays the morning service) on Shabbat at 7:45. I like to pray earlier, so I would often attend a sunrise service at around 6:25. Then I would come to my *yeshiva's* service in time for the Torah reading.

I was told that someone overheard a student saying, "Why do I have to come on time if Rabbi G. always comes late?"

*An Ohrnet reader, Jerusalem*

## I DIDN'T KNOW THAT!

**"And Lavan gathered all the people of the place and made a feast (lit. drinking repast)." (Bereishet 29:22)**

Lavan wanted Yaakov to get intoxicated so that he could more easily fool him into marrying Leah. That's why he made a festive meal which included alcoholic beverages. But when Yaakov married Rachel, Lavan made no feast at all.

• *Da'at Zekeinim Miba'alei Hatosafot*

## LOVE OF THE LAND

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

### HAR HAZETIM - MOUNT OF OLIVES

This famous mountain, referred to in the Talmud as *Har Hamishcha* (Mount of Oil), was where the Red Heifer was slaughtered and burned so that its ashes could be used in purifying Jews who had become ritually impure through contact with the dead. Ironically, it is today most identified with the dead because its slope east of the Temple Mount contains the oldest Jewish cemetery in the world.



It is on this mountain where the Redeemer's feet shall stand, says the Prophet Zechariah (14:1-4) in his vision of the climactic battle which will take place at the end of days when all the nations gather to make war against Jerusalem, and "Har Hazeitim shall be split along the middle by a great valley running from east to west."

## YIDDLE RIDDLE

### Last week we asked:

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

### Answer:

*Parshat Vayetzei*. The number of verses in *Parshat Vayetzei* is 148, which equals the numerical value of its last word, "machanaim."

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

## RECOMMENDED READING LIST

### RAMBAN

28:12 Yaakov's Dream  
29:2 Three Flocks  
30:2 Yaakov's Anger  
31:19 The *Terafim*

### SFORNO

28:12-13 Yaakov's Dream  
29:6 A Proper Guest  
29:11 Why Yaakov Cried  
31:32 Yaakov's Curse  
32:1 A Father's Blessing

## SACRIFICES MADE IN HEAVEN

One of the “Seven Heavens,” says Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish, is called “Zevul,” and it contains the Heavenly counterpart of Jerusalem and the *Beit Hamikdash*. There, too, is an altar upon which the *Malach* (angel) Michael offers a daily sacrifice.

The obvious question which arises is what does he offer on this altar, as there are no animals in Heaven? In his footnotes (and this appears in parenthesis in the Ein Yaakov) the Bach adds this question to the text, as well as an answer. The answer is also found in a Tosefot in *Mesechta Menachot* (110a). Tosefot cites conflicting midrashim as to the nature of these sacrifices. One states that the *Malach* offers the souls of the *tzaddikim* (righteous) upon this altar, and another states that the sacrifices are of fire in animal form.

It is the first midrash above, the one regarding the souls of the righteous, which appears in the aforementioned Bach and Ein Yaakov. And this answer is presented by Tosefot as an explanation of the prayer we say three times a day: “Accept willingly,” we ask of Hashem, “Your people Israel and hearken to their prayer; return the sacred service to Your sanctuary and the fire offerings of Israel accept with favor.” How can we ask Hashem to accept the fire offerings of Israel when there is no *Beit Hamikdash* today in which to offer sacrifices? According to the midrash, the phrase “*ishei Yisrael*” does not translate as the “fire offerings of Israel” but rather the “men of Israel” — the *tzaddikim* whose souls are offered before Hashem.

Tosefot notes, however, that there is another opinion which translates these words literally as sacrifices, and views them as an extension of the request that Hashem return the sacred service to His sanctuary. Our prayer thus is that Hashem restore our ability to offer actual sacrifices. The Tur (*Orach Chaim* 187) presents a third opinion: We ask Hashem to accept our prayers which we offer in place of sacrifices.

The Mishna Berura (*Orach Chaim* 120) quotes the opinion of the Turei Zahav as favoring the first approach, about the souls of *tzaddikim*, and also quotes the Gaon of Vilna as expressing a preference for the second one, that it is a request for the return of the sacrificial service here on earth.

• Chagiga 12b

## BETWEEN ANGEL AND ANIMAL

Six things have been said about Man, say our Sages; in three of them he is similar to the *malachim* (angels) and in three he is like an animal.

People are like the *malachim* in that they have intelligence, they walk upright and they speak the Holy Tongue of Hebrew. People are like animals in that they eat and drink, they multiply, and they expel wastes from their bodies.

The midrash (*Bereishet Rabbah* 8) adds one more comparison to each. Men see like the *malachim* and perish like animals. Why are these comparisons not listed by our gemara?

The comparison of sight does not present such a problem because an animal has the power of sight as well. But why is the comparison of man and animal regarding death ignored?

Two answers are found in the commentaries. Rif suggests that the *gemara* is referring to the initial creation of Man, before Adam ate from the Tree of Knowledge and brought death to the world. Iyun Yaakov explains that although both man and animal have limited existence in this world, the cause of their respective deaths is not the same. Man dies as a result of his sins, while the animal dies because Hashem has so programmed its existence.

• Chagiga 16a

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## PARSHA Q&A ?

1. When Yaakov traveled to Charan, the Torah stresses that he departed from Be'er Sheva. Why?
2. On the night of his dream, Yaakov did something he hadn't done in 14 years. What?
3. Hashem compressed the entire Land of Israel underneath the sleeping Yaakov. What did this symbolize?
4. Yaakov said "I will return with *shalom*." What did he mean by "*shalom*"?
5. Why did Yaakov rebuke the shepherds?
6. Why did Rachel, and not her brothers, tend her father's sheep?
7. Why did Yaakov cry when he met Rachel?
8. Why did Lavan run to greet Yaakov?
9. Why were Leah's eyes tender?
10. How old was Yaakov when he married?
11. What did Rachel find enviable about Leah?
12. Who was Yaakov's fifth son?
13. Who was Leah's handmaiden? Was she older or younger than Rachel's handmaiden?
14. How do you say "*dudaim*" in Arabic?
15. "Hashem remembered Rachel" (30:22). What did He remember?
16. What does "Yosef" mean? Why was he named that?
17. G-d forbade Lavan to speak to Yaakov "either of good or of bad." Why didn't G-d want Lavan to speak of good?
18. Where are there two Aramaic words in this week's Parsha?
19. Who was Bilhah's father? Who was Zilpah's father?
20. Who escorted Yaakov into *Eretz Yisrael*?

## PARSHA Q&A!

### Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

1. 28:10 - The departure of a righteous person leaves a noticeable void in that place.
2. 28:11 - Sleep at night lying down.
3. 28:13 - That the Land would be easy for his descendants to conquer.
4. 28:21 - Completely without sin.
5. 29:7 - He thought they were loafing, stopping work early in the day.
6. 30:27 - Her brothers weren't born yet.
7. 29:11 - He saw prophetically that they would not be buried together; or because he was penniless.
8. 29:13 - He thought Yaakov was carrying money.
9. 29:17 - She cried continually because she thought she was destined to marry Esav.
10. 29:21 - Eighty-four.
11. 30:1 - Her good deeds, thinking they were the reason Leah merited children.
12. 30:5 - Dan.
13. 30:10 - Zilpah. She was younger.
14. 30:14 - Jasmine (*Yasmin*).
15. 30:22 - That Rachel gave Leah the "signs of recognition" that Yaakov had taught her, so that Leah wouldn't be embarrassed.
16. 30:24 - "Yosef" means "He will add." Rachel asked Hashem for another son in addition to Yosef.
17. 31:24 - Because the "good" that comes from wicked people is bad for the righteous.
18. 31:41 - *Yagar Sahaduta*, meaning "wall of testimony."
19. 31:50 - Lavan.
20. 32:1 - The angels of *Eretz Yisrael*.

## KASHA! (KASHA MEANS "QUESTION")

### G-d said: "Beware lest you speak with Yaakov either good or bad." (31:24)

G-d told Lavan not to talk to Yaakov at all, yet we see that Lavan did indeed meet Yaakov and speak with him. Did Lavan simply ignore G-d's command?

### Answer:

G-d's command that Lavan speak "neither good nor bad" meant that Lavan should make no offers to entice Yaakov to return, nor threaten him with punishment if he failed to do so.

• Ramban

Do you have a KASHA? Write to [kasha@ohr.org.il](mailto:kasha@ohr.org.il) with your questions on any Parsha!

## NO NO NOSTRADAMUS

**Perplexed along the Potomac wrote via the Internet:**

*Dear Rabbi,*

*A nearby Jewish group is planning to hold a book discussion on Nostradamus. It was my impression that Judaism seriously frowned upon the belief that the stars can be used to predict the future. Nostradamus, to me, seems way off the Jewish path...despite the fact that I'm now told he had a Jewish background. I usually attend this series of book discussions; however, Nostradamus strikes a discordant note. Have I misread Jewish law and not heard enough about Nostradamus? (Thank you for a wonderful Ask-the-Rabbi feature).*

Dear Perplexed along the Potomac,

Actually, it is generally accepted by the Talmud and Midrashim that the stars do indeed influence events, and that one who understands this influence can, to some extent, predict future events. It's not really so different from the way a meteorologist or a stock analyst look at trends and influences and foresee tomorrow's outcome.

For example, the Egyptian astrologers correctly foresaw that a baby would be born who would redeem the Jews from Egypt — which, by the way, is why Pharaoh decreed that the babies be cast into the Nile.

But you don't put your full faith in the weather forecast, and certainly not in stock predictions, do you? All the more so should we be highly skeptical of the accuracy of whoever presumes to read the stars, especially today. Even the ancient Egyptians, who were proven experts, were only able to see generalities, and couldn't predict anything with perfect accuracy. The farther along we get from their ancient wisdom, the hazier this area of knowledge seems to become.

Furthermore, G-d is All-Powerful and can change what the future seems to hold. For example, through our prayer and good deeds, G-d may change a "bad" event into a good one.

Astrologers told Rabbi Akiva that a snake would bite and kill his daughter on the day of her wedding. On her wedding night, she took the jeweled pin from her

hair and stuck it into the wall; in the morning light she saw that her pin was stuck through the head of a snake which had been poised to bite her! Rabbi Akiva asked her, "My daughter! Some good deed must have saved you from this snake. Can you think what it might have been?" "Well," she answered, "last night a poor man came to the wedding, but everyone was too busy with the feast to notice, so I gave him my portion of food."

The Torah tells us to live in the present and have perfect faith in G-d. If we do so, we won't feel the need to know or worry about future events that are beyond our control. All said, therefore, I don't think a Jew should give much weight to the predictions of any would-be star-gazer.

Source:

• *Shabbat 156b*

## TALKING TURKEY

**Bob Mogel from Omaha, Nebraska**

**<Rmogel@aol.com> wrote:**

*Dear Rabbi:*

*One of my friends is Jewish. Is it ok to invite him to Thanksgiving at my house? If so, is there anything I should not serve, given the Jewish dietary laws? Is there any special way the turkey should be served or cooked? I was wondering also...do Jews themselves celebrate Thanksgiving? Thank you for taking my question.*

Dear Bob Mogel,

First of all let me commend you on your sensitivity and on your inquiry.

Keeping kosher is easy for those who keep a kosher home. However, the kosher laws are very comprehensive and complex, and include the way the turkey is slaughtered, prepared, cooked, and even how it is served and eaten. It would be beyond the scope of this forum to explain how to prepare a kosher meal in your home for a one time basis.

Regarding your second question: I think most American Jews observe Thanksgiving the same way most Americans do, as a break from work and a time to gather with family — perhaps even to offer a word of thanks to G-d — but not really as a religious holiday. Many religious Jews do not observe it at all,

since it is a non-Jewish custom and since we are anyway obligated to give thanks to G-d every day of the year.

Interestingly, Thanksgiving has "Jewish" roots. The Pilgrims based Thanksgiving on the Torah (Bible), in which G-d commands us Jews to celebrate the Harvest Festival. This festival is called Succot, the Festival of Booths, which Jews have been celebrating for several thousand years.

## TESTING TESTING

**Ben Waldbaum from Washington University, St. Louis**

**<bwaldbau@artsci.wustl.edu> wrote:**

*Dear Rabbi,*

*I heard someone advise a student at my university that they can say, "I will study five pesukim (Torah verses) this week if You, G-d, give me an "A" on an exam." Is someone allowed to say this? If it is allowed, why is it not considered testing Hashem? Thanks a lot!*

Dear Ben Waldbaum,

Did he mean that he will study the Torah verses first, and as a result he expects G-d to reward him with an "A" on the exam? If so, this is considered testing G-d and is forbidden. (One may test G-d only in regard to giving tithes and charity.)

Or did he mean that if he gets an "A" he will then study five Torah verses? If so, this is not testing G-d. Rather, it's like a conditional vow. It's like saying: "If I get an A, then I vow to study five verses. But if not, then not."

In this week's Torah portion, Jacob made a conditional vow: "Jacob took a vow saying: If G-d will be with me...give me bread to eat and clothes to wear, and I return in peace to my father's house... then this stone which I have set up as a pillar shall become a house of G-d...." (*Bereishet 28:21-2*).

However, a person should not make vows, because the punishment for breaking a vow is very severe. Furthermore, making a vow smacks of arrogance, like saying, "I'm so perfect that, not only do I fulfill 100% of my obligations to G-d, but I'm even taking on extra obligations!"

Source:

• *Shulchan Aruch Yoreh De'ah 247:4*