

O H R N E T

SHABBAT PARSHAT BEHAR · FOR THE WEEK ENDING 15 IYAR 5760 · MAY 20, 2000 · VOL. 7 NO. 33

PARSHA INSIGHTS

EL AL TO GO  
BANKRUPT?

“And G-d spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai...”

About fifteen years ago El Al, the Israel national airline, was losing money hand over fist. In spite of the best market research that money can buy, the number of unoccupied seats continued to grow, and the company’s profitability continued to plummet.

By a strange twist of what some would call fate, it was decided that the national airline of the Jewish State should no longer operate on the Sabbath. El Al flights which began on Friday and could not reach Tel Aviv before the onset of the Sabbath, or which originated in Tel Aviv between sunset on Friday until after dark on Saturday night, would no longer be offered.

From being one of the least profitable airlines in the world, El Al rapidly became one of the most profitable.

You could call this a coincidence. But isn’t it counter-intuitive to cease operations for one seventh of the week and find your revenues jumping through the ceiling? The laws of production and return would dictate a loss of at least one seventh on

overall revenue.

It’s interesting to note that one of the promises that G-d made to the Jewish People if they keep the Sabbath is that they won’t lose out financially. Why should G-d make such a promise?

We live in a world of illusion. The illusion is that the harder we work, the more we will profit. G-d wants us to know who is running the world. He tells us clearly in His Torah that if we keep the Sabbath, He will bless us not just with spirituality but with material bounty as well.

The greatest demonstration that we know from where our livelihood comes is to put down tools on Friday afternoon, and while the rat-race runs on relentlessly through Friday night and Saturday, we retreat to a world of spirituality, family, closeness — connecting to the real purpose of this physical world.

In the Torah portion which is read this Sabbath in the synagogue, we learn about the commandment of *shemita*. When all the Jewish People lived in the land of Israel, every seventh year was like a Sabbath. (Incidentally, this is the source of the Sabbatical Year so prized by academics.) No planting or harvesting was permitted during the seventh

year. The land of Israel was to have its own Sabbath. However, this was not an agricultural rest. Ask any soil expert, and he’ll tell you that six years of farming followed by one year fallow will not help your crop yield. Rather the reverse. The *shemita* year was a year when the land needed to lie *spiritually* fallow.

This week’s Torah portion starts with an unusual phrase “*And Hashem spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai...*” All of the commandments were given on Mount Sinai. Why then, specifically, does the Torah record that it was on Mount Sinai that G-d told Moshe about the commandment of *shemita*?

A Sabbath for people and a Sabbath for the Land. What connects these two ideas is that our relationship with G-d is based on our realization that it is He and only He who makes the wheels of our lives turn, whether on a personal level or in business.

It’s ironic that even though El Al’s business has soared, they said at the time that not flying on the Shabbat would mean curtains for them. At the height of the controversy, El Al workers even physically attacked obviously religious travelers.

To this day El Al continues to claim that it would make even more money with Sabbath flights ...

The Torah prohibits normal farming of the Land of Israel every seven years. This “Shabbat” for the land is called “shemita.” (5754 was a shemita year in Israel.) After every seventh shemita, the fiftieth year, yovel (jubilee), is announced with the sound of the shofar on Yom Kippur. This was also a year for the land to lie fallow. Hashem promises to provide a bumper crop prior to the shemita and yovel years. During yovel, all land is returned to its original division from the time of Joshua, and all Jewish indentured servants are freed, even if they have not completed their six years of work. A Jewish indentured servant may not be given any demeaning, unnecessary or excessively difficult

work, and may not be sold in the public market. The price of his labor must be calculated according to the amount of time remaining until he will automatically become free. The price of land is similarly calculated. Should anyone sell his ancestral land, he has the right to redeem it after two years. If a house in a walled city is sold, the right of redemption is limited to the first year after the sale. The Levites’ cities belong to them forever. The Jewish People are forbidden to take advantage of one another by lending or borrowing with interest. Family members should redeem any relative who was sold as an indentured servant as a result of impoverishment.

## HAFTARAH

### THE ULTIMATE LANDLORD

The first verse of this week’s Parsha reminds us that the land of Israel is only on loan to the Jewish People. Hashem remains the Owner. The Jewish People acknowledged that Hashem was the ultimate “Landlord” of Eretz Yisrael by observing shemita and yovel.

The Haftarah presents a shattering picture. The Chaldeans are at the gates, poised for the final assault. All the admonitions to keep the Torah have proven fruitless. Yirmiyahu, who had dared to tell the truth about the dire situation of the Jewish People, had been jailed by King Tzidkiyahu. In prison, Hashem tells him that he should now prophesy about the time of the return from exile. For this purpose, he was to do something that was ostensibly absurd. He was to purchase a valueless field at full price, thus demonstrating the firm conviction that the impending destruction would ultimately pass.

• Rabbi Mendel Hirsch

### RIGHTS AND RAMIFICATIONS

“Great of counsel and mighty of deed, Whose eyes are cognizant of all the ways of

### YIRMEYAHU 32:6 - 18

humankind, to give each man according to his ways and the fruit of his deeds.” (32:19)

When the Heavenly court judges someone deserving the death penalty, Hashem throws into the balance the grief that his innocent parents, wife and children will suffer if the sentence is executed.

Hashem does not punish anyone until calculating whether this will cause undeserved punishment to one of his family members. That is the meaning of this verse: “Great of counsel and mighty of deed...” Only Hashem is capable of calculating the precise extent of a person’s due, that he should only be called upon to bear “according to his ways and the fruit of his deeds.”

• Rabbi Mahara Yitzchaki

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General Editor:  
**Rabbi Moshe Newman**  
Editorial & Web Advisor:  
**Rabbi Reuven Lauffer**  
Associate Editors:  
**Rabbi Mordechai Becher,**  
**Rabbi Reuven Subar**  
Contributing Writers:  
*Weekly Daf, Love of the Land:*  
**Rav Mendel Weinbach**  
*Insights, Overview:*  
**Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair**

---

Web Production: **Michael Treblow**

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**Rabbi Eliezer Shapiro, Director**

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## I DIDN'T KNOW THAT!

“The son of an Israelite woman went out — and he was the son of an Egyptian man...and pronounced the Name of Hashem and cursed....”(24:10)

The “Egyptian man” above is the one Moshe struck dead by uttering Hashem’s Name. Therefore, many years later, that Egyptian man’s ill-begotten son blasphemed the Name of Hashem through which his father was killed.

• Rabbi Zalman Sorotzkin in *Oznaim Latorah*

## BURY ME NOT!

If a man instructs his children that the funds he bequeaths them not be used for the purpose of burying him, rules Rabbi Masneh, this request must be ignored. The reason — he has no right to enrich his heirs by imposing himself upon the community’s charity fund.

Tosefot (*Mesechta Bechorot 42b*) cites this *gemara* in reference to a question raised in *Mesechta Sanhedrin (46b)*. Is the purpose of burial, pondered the Sages, to prevent the indignity of his decomposing corpse being viewed? Or is it to serve as an atonement for the sins of the deceased by subjecting him to subterranean concealment? The practical ramification of this question is how to rule in a case when a man, prior to death, asks that he not be buried. If the purpose is to prevent indignity, he has no right to waive burial, as his unburied corpse will be a source of embarrassment for his family. If, however, the only purpose is atonement, it is his prerogative to waive atonement.

Why, asks Tosefot, does the *gemara* there not cite the ruling of Rabbi Masneh in our *gemara* as a proof that one cannot waive burial?

The answer given is that in our case he did not actually waive burial but rather wished to be buried at the expense of the community. In such a situation there is no question that he must be buried, even for the purpose of atonement.

• *Ketubot 48a*

## A SOLID INVESTMENT

“Wealth and riches shall be in his house,” says King David (*Tehillim 112:3*), “and his righteousness shall endure forever.” Who is the unnamed recipient of such a blessing?

One interpretation in our *gemara* is that this refers to one who studies Torah and teaches it to others.

Maharsha offers a fascinating explanation of the comparison between Torah and material wealth. In regard to wealth, we have been taught by Rabbi Yochanan (*Mesechta Taanit 9a*) that the Torah’s usage of a double phrase “Tithe, you shall surely tithe” (*Devarim 14:22*) teaches us that the reward for fulfilling the mitzvah of tithing is the blessing of wealth. (The Hebrew word can be read both as “te’asser” which means “tithe” and as “te’asher” which means “become wealthy.”) Tosefot there cites a Sifrei that this applies not only to agricultural produce which the Torah commands us to tithe but to the tithing of any earnings and profits as well.

Just as one who gives a share of his wealth to charity does not suffer a reduction in his resources but actually enjoys an increase, so it is with the sharing of his Torah knowledge. The greatest Sages (Rabbi Chanina in *Mesechta Ta’anit 7a* and Rebbie in *Mesechta Makkot 10a*) have declared “Much have I learned from my teachers; even more from my colleagues; and the most from my students.” The scholar who shares his learning with others loses nothing. He becomes even wealthier with the true riches of Torah knowledge.

• *Ketubot 50a*

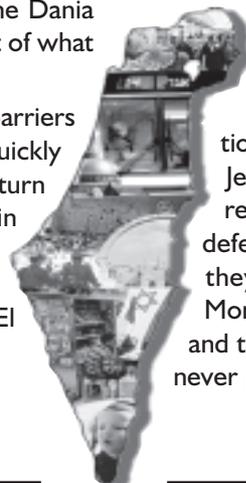
## LOVE OF THE LAND

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

### THE CARMEL PLAN

Rusty iron rails driven into the ground in the Dania quarter of Haifa are the only reminders left of what was known as the “Carmel Plan.”

These rails were supposed to have served as barriers against the tanks of Rommel’s Afrika Korps quickly approaching Palestine in 1942. The plan was to turn Mount Carmel into a Masada-like mountain fortress from which the Jews of Palestine would fight to the death if the German forces broke through the last line of British resistance at El Alameen.



Although the Jewish community in Palestine forgot its differences with the British over the White Paper and joined the allied war effort (in sharp contrast to the flirtation of Haj Amin Hussein, the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, with Hitler and Mussolini), the British refused to supply their Jewish allies with arms to defend themselves because they were afraid that they might not be returned. General Montgomery’s forces turned back Rommel’s army, and the Carmel Plan, with the help of Hashem, was never put into effect.

## PARSHA Q&A ?

1. Why does the Torah specify that the laws of *shemita* were taught on Har Sinai?
2. If one possesses *shemita* food after it is no longer available in the field, what must he do with it?
3. The Torah commands, "You shall sanctify the fiftieth year." How is this done?
4. Which two "returns" are announced by the *shofar* during *yovel*?
5. From where does the *yovel* year get its name?
6. What prohibitions are derived from the verse "v'lo tonu ish et amito — a person shall not afflict his fellow"?
7. What is the punishment for neglecting the laws of *shemita*?
8. If *shemita* is observed properly, how long is the crop of the sixth year guaranteed to last?
9. After selling an ancestral field, when can one redeem it?
10. Under what circumstance may one sell ancestral land?
11. If a home in a walled city is sold, when can it be redeemed?
12. What does the word "days" mean in this week's Parsha?
13. What is considered a walled city?
14. What is the definition of a "ger toshav"?
15. To what is one who leaves *Eretz Yisrael* compared?
16. Why does Rashi mention the plague of the firstborn in this week's Parsha?
17. List three prohibitions which demonstrate the dignity with which one must treat a Jewish indentured servant.
18. Who supports the family of the Jewish indentured servant during his years of servitude?
19. If a Jew is sold as a servant to a non-Jew, does he go free after six years?
20. Where is it permitted to prostrate oneself on a stone floor?

## PARSHA Q&A!

### Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

1. 25:1 - To teach us that just as *shemita* was taught in detail on Har Sinai, so too, all the *mitzvot* were taught in detail on Har Sinai.
2. 25:7 - Remove it from his property and declare it ownerless.
3. 25:10 - At the beginning of the year the *Beit Din* declares, "This year is *kadosh* (sanctified)."
4. 25:10 - The return of the land to its original owner, and the "return" (freedom) of the slave from slavery.
5. 25:10 - From the sounding of the *shofar*. A ram's horn is called a *yovel*.
6. 25:17 - One may not intentionally hurt people's feelings, nor give bad advice while secretly intending to reap benefit.
7. 25:18 - Exile.
8. 25:21,22 - From Nissan of the sixth year until Sukkot of the ninth year.
9. 25:24 - After two years following the sale, until *yovel*. At the beginning of *yovel* it returns to the family automatically.
10. 25:25 - Only if one becomes impoverished.
11. 25:29 - Only within the first year after the sale. Afterwards, even in *yovel*, it does not return.
12. 25:29 - The days of an entire year.
13. 25:29 - A city that has been surrounded by a wall since the time of Yehoshua.
14. 25:35 - A non-Jew who lives in *Eretz Yisrael* and accepts upon himself not to worship idols.
15. 25:38 - To one who worships idols.
16. 25:38 - The prohibition against taking interest is accompanied by the phrase, "I am Hashem your G-d who took you out of Egypt." Rashi explains that just as Hashem discerned in Egypt between those who were firstborn and those who were not, so too will Hashem discern and punish those who lend with interest, pretending they are acting on behalf of others.
17. 25:39-43 - a) Do not make him perform humiliating tasks; b) Do not sell him publicly; c) Do not make him perform unnecessary jobs.
18. 25:41 - His master.
19. 25:54 - No. If he is not redeemed with money, he must wait until the *yovel* to go free.
20. 26:1 - In the *Mikdash*.

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## MEAH SHEARIM

**From: Stephanie in Tomelilla, Sweden**  
<stephanie@kurir.net>

Dear Rabbi,  
What is Meah Shearim?

Dear Stephanie,

Meah Shearim is the name of a Jerusalem neighborhood about a ten minute walk from where I am sitting!

“Meah Shearim” means “a hundred-fold” or “a hundred gates.” It is one of the oldest Jerusalem neighborhoods outside the walls of the old city, founded by devoutly orthodox Jews in the 19th century.

It was originally settled by just over 100 families who signed up to be part of the new “colony,” and they took the name “Meah Shearim” from the weekly Torah reading. The signing occurred during “Parshat Toldot,” the week when the Torah portion read in synagogues tells of Isaac’s great success: “He planted in that land and found in that (famine) year a hundred-fold (of the estimated produce), for G-d had blessed him.” (Genesis 26) Thus, the place was named Meah Shearim, indicating Divine blessing 100 times the expected.

This name was also chosen due to the founders’ awareness of kabbalah, Jewish mysticism. The numerical value of the words Meah Shearim equals 666,

which has esoteric and kabbalistic meaning in Judaism, as indicated by the Vilna Gaon in his commentary to the Zohar.

Stephanie, thank you for your question! Because of it, I was able to learn some fascinating new insights into a neighborhood which I can see from my window.

## GUINNESS WORLD RECORDS – THE WORLD’S YOUNGEST RABBI

**From: Duncan Flett in London, UK**  
<duncan.flett@guinnessrecords.com>

Dear Sir/Madam,  
I am a researcher with Guinness World Records, the world’s biggest selling copy-right book. I write as one who needs some help with an issue concerning Judaism — should you not be able to help me could you please kindly pass this mail onto a colleague or associate that you think may be able to help. I am currently looking into finding the world’s youngest qualified rabbi ever. I was hoping you could help point me in the right direction. Many thanks.

Dear Duncan Flett,  
The Talmud records that Shmuel

Hanavi (Samuel the Prophet) at age two rendered a complicated yet correct legal decision based on the Talmudic principles of Biblical interpretation. The correctness of his ruling was endorsed by the High Priest and the leading Sage of the day, Eli Hakohen. (*Talmud Bavli, Tractate Berachot 31b*)

The basis for understanding that the above encounter occurred while Shmuel was only two is the Book of Samuel I, chapter one, which records this event as having taken place just after the child was weaned, which throughout the Talmudic writings is considered to be age two. (Tractate Ketubot and elsewhere.)

That would make him just about the youngest Rabbi around!

## WHO IS A BAGEL

**From: <Name@Withheld>**  
in Germany

Dear Rabbi,  
What’s a bagel?

Dear <Name@Withheld>,

A hole with dough around it! A bagel is an individual-sized, ring-shaped bread roll. It is made from yeast dough, briefly boiled and then baked.

The bagel has given rise to the ancient saying: The optimist sees the bagel, the pessimist sees the hole!

## RECOMMENDED READING LIST

### RAMBAN

25:3 First Six Years  
25:9 Two Kinds of “Shofar”  
25:10 The Word “Yovel”  
25:20 Three Year Blessing  
25:23 Ban on Perpetual Sale  
25:36 Two Kinds of Usury  
26:1 Commitment in Hostile Environment

### SEFER HACHINUCH

330 Counting until Yovel  
331 Call of the Shofar  
337 Unfair Profit  
342 National Land  
343 Usury

### SFORNO

25:4 “A Shabbat to Hashem”

## WHO KNOWS 15?

In the song at the end of the Pesach Seder we describe the significance of the numbers from one to thirteen as they relate to Jewish life and thought. "Three are the fathers, Four are the Mothers... 12 are the Tribes of Israel..." What about the next 13 numbers? And after those? What significance do they have in Jewish tradition? This week, we challenge to answer: "Who knows 15?" Write to <info@ohr.org.il>

**Last time we asked:** Who knows 14? Here are some reader responses:

How about: 4 cups of wine, 3 matzahs, 6 items on seder plate (*beitza, z'roa, karpas, chazeres, marror, charoses*), and salt water = 14 things used at the seder.

Marc Melincoff <marcdo@medscape.com>

I was born and raised in Amsterdam, Holland and every year at the seder we used to say: "And 14 who knows? 14 is Johan Crujff (world famous Dutch soccer player with number 14 on his shirt). Sorry I couldn't come up with something more halachic.

Nathalie Zafrany <zafrany@internet-zahav.net>

Rachel's 14 family members who go to Egypt (*Bereishet 46:22*).

Raffi <RaffiAs@shaam.gov.il>

I know 14! 14 is the number of calendrical permutations (i.e. depending on whether the year has 12 or 13 months, what day Rosh Hashana is on, etc. the calendar can take on 14 different arrangements).

Tzvi Goldman <goldmat@ecf.utoronto.ca>

14 years Yaakov worked for Rachel and Leah, 14 advisers to King Achashverosh.

Aaron and Tzippy Ross <asr209@is7.nyu.edu>

14 years conquering and settling the Land of Israel by Joshua and the 12 tribes.

Ephy Carmel <ephy.carmel@ps.ge.com>

14 separate ritual components of the seder, *kadesh urchatz*, etc. (*Motzi-matzah* is regarded as one).

Rabbi Jeffrey M. Cohen  
Stanmore, Middlesex, UK  
<Jeffrey@yonah.demon.co.uk>

14 lambs offered each day of Succot; 14 days of dedication of the first Temple by Solomon.

Rabbi Edward M. Friedman,  
Synagogue Emanu-El,  
Charleston, S. Carolina  
<Edward.M.Friedman.C71@alumni.upenn.edu>

The 14 books of Rambam's (Maimonides) *Yad Hachazakah*. The Hebrew word "yad" has the numerical value 14.

Aryeh Wanderman <kwander@inter.net.il>

## THE OTHER SIDE OF THE STORY THE OTHER SIDE OF THE GLOBE

### Giving People the Benefit of the Doubt

When the "candy police" blow the whistle, it's...

## TOOT SWEET

When my firstborn son was a toddler I used to take him to synagogue. On several occasions I saw that he was given a piece of candy by one of the worshippers. I asked this person not to give my son candy but this continued. So I spoke to him again; he denied giving my son a sweet; and I replied that I saw this myself. Then he explained that my son came to him with a sweet and all he did was remove the wrapping paper so my son

could eat it! It was another person in the synagogue who was giving out the treats!

This was quite a lesson to me about not jumping to conclusions, for though I thought I saw everything with my own eyes, my immediate conclusion was wrong.

Raphael B. Yehezkael,  
Jerusalem, Israel  
<rafi@avoda.jct.ac.il>

*Moral of the story:*

*When a relationship sours, sugar-coat it by judging the other person favorably.*