

# O H R N E T

SHABBAT PARSHAT BEHAR-BECHUKOTAI · 24 IYAR 5764 · MAY 15, 2004 · VOL. 11 NO. 30

## PARSHA INSIGHTS

### HIDDEN MIRACLES

*"If you walk in My laws..."*

The purpose of this world is to be factory to produce a product called *olam haba* — the World-to-Come. That is our only target, and the *mitzvot* our only passport.

However, you can read the Torah from cover to cover and you won't find one specific promise about the reward for keeping the *mitzvot* in the next world. Promises of reward in this world abound. We are promised the rains in their time; the land will give its produce and the trees will bear fruit; there will be an abundance of food that we will eat to satiety. We will dwell securely in our land. No one will walk down a dark street and be frightened. No one will worry about sending their children off on the bus in the morning. There will be abundance and peace.

Why is it the Torah makes no open promises about the reward for keeping the *mitzvot* in the next world, but is replete with details of their reward in this existence?

All reward and punishment in this world is through hidden miracles. When a person eats a bacon/cheeseburger and dies prematurely, nobody knows that he died because he ate a bacon/cheeseburger. People die at his age when even when they don't eat bacon/cheeseburgers. They die younger.

A person gives *tzedaka* and becomes rich. You don't say that he became rich because he gave *tzedaka*. There are plenty of rich people who don't give *tzedaka* — they inherited it or they won the sweepstake. The hidden miracle is

that this person wasn't destined to become rich or wasn't supposed to die young, but because he gave *tzedaka* or because he ate the bacon/cheeseburger, G-d changed this person's destiny. It's miraculous, but it's hidden. It looks like nature, but if it were actually the work of nature, then nothing that a person did in this world could have any effect on himself. For a person is born under a certain *mazal*, a certain destiny and without the intervention of an outside force — the hidden miracle — nothing that a person did, whether for good or bad, would have any repercussions in this world.

That's why the Torah speaks at great length about the outcome of the performance (or non-performance) of the *mitzvot* in this world. For it is truly miraculous that our actions should affect anything in this world, a world that, aside from these hidden miracles, is run by a system of *mazal* and nature.

However, as far as the next world is concerned, it's obvious that our actions will have repercussions there. The Torah doesn't need to stress the reward and punishment in that existence because it's obvious that people who engage in spiritual pursuits and serve G-d faithfully should receive spiritual rewards. But it is certainly *not* natural that people who are immersed in the work of the spirit, the study of Torah and the performance of *mitzvot* should receive their reward in this world as well. Thus the Torah stresses the reward for keeping the *mitzvot* in this world because that is something that no one could surmise without being told of its existence.

• Source: *Ramban on the Parsha and at the beginning of Parshat Va'era*

### LOVE OF THE LAND - THE NAMES

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

### THE PEACEFUL LAND

“I will grant peace in the Land” is what G-d promised His people (*Vayikra* 26:6) if they would study the Torah He gave them and perform the *mitzvot*.

This promise of peace comes after those of plentiful rain and bountiful harvests. This order is thus explained by Rashi:



“Lest you say ‘We have food and we have drink but what value do they have if we have no peace?’ the Torah follows the promise of economic success with the Divine promise that there will be peace in the Land.”

“This teaches us that peace is equal in value to everything else.”

## PARSHA OVERVIEW

### BEHAR

The Torah prohibits normal farming of the Land of Israel every seven years. This "Shabbat" for the land is called "shemita". The year 5768 will be 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.

### BECHUKOTAI

The Torah promises prosperity for the Jewish People if they follow Hashem's commandments. However, if they fail to live up to the responsibility of being the Chosen People, then chilling punishments will result. The Torah details the harsh historical process that will fall upon them when Divine protection is removed. These punishments, whose purpose is to bring the Jewish People to repent, will be in seven stages, each more severe than the last. Sefer *Vayikra*, the book of Leviticus, concludes with the details of *erachin* – the process by which someone vows to give the *Beit Hamikdash* the equivalent monetary value of a person, an animal or property.

## ISRAEL Forever

### CAUSE OR EFFECT

When one observes the link between hatred of observant Jews and a total abandonment of religion, which is so pronounced in one sector of secular Israeli Jewry, he cannot help asking himself which is the cause and which is the effect.

The answer lies in the commentary of Rashi on one section of the Torah portion, which will be read in the synagogue this Shabbat. In two passages (*Vayikra* 26:14-15) the Torah describes the spiritual degeneration of Jews which leads to a Heavenly response of suffering and exile. Seven categories of sins are listed and one sin, explains Rashi, inevitably leads to another in the following pattern:

"If one ignores the study of Torah he stops performing the *mitzvot*. He then despises those who are observant and follows this with a hatred for the Torah scholars. His next step is to prevent others from being observant. He follows this by denying that G-d ever commanded us to perform His *mitzvot* and ends up denying that there is a

G-d."

A careful analysis of this pattern will yield any number of profound insights into human nature, especially in regard to the urgent need of the sinner to justify his spiritual weakness by turning so viciously against those who remain loyal to their tradition and how this causes him to eventually deny the very basis of this tradition. When we watch with wonder how an anti-religious political party is capable of using its power as a member of the government coalition to wage war against government aid to Torah institutions and to suppress religious life in any way it can, we understand which is the cause and which is the effect.

The success of such a party in gaining so many Knesset seats in the last election is frightening when we hear the Torah warns us of the grave consequences of the seven steps of spiritual degradation, which threatens the security of Israel forever.

## PARSHA Q&A ?

### BEHAR

1. If one possesses *shemita* food after it is no longer available in the field, what must he do with it?
2. From where does the *yovel* year get its name?
3. What prohibitions are derived from the verse “*v’lo tonu ish et amito* — a person shall not afflict his fellow”?
4. If a home in a walled city is sold, when can it be redeemed?
5. What does the word “days” mean in this week’s Parsha?
6. What is considered a walled city?
7. To what is one who leaves *Eretz Yisrael* compared?
8. Why does Rashi mention the plague of the firstborn in this week’s Parsha?
9. List three prohibitions which demonstrate the dignity with which one must treat a Jewish indentured servant.
10. Where is it permitted to prostrate oneself on a stone floor?

### BECHUKOTAI

1. To what do the words “*bechukotai telechu*” refer?
2. When is rain “in its season”?
3. What is meant by “you shall eat your bread to satisfaction”?
4. What is meant by “and a sword will not pass through your land”?
5. Which progression of seven transgressions are taught in Chapter 26, and why in that particular order?
6. What is one benefit which the Jewish People derive from the Land of Israel’s state of ruin?
7. What positive element is implied by the words “and I will bring them into the land of their enemies”?
8. In verse 26:42, why is the word “remember” not used in connection with the name of Yitzchak?
9. What happens when a poor person dedicates the value of a person to the Beit Hamikdash and doesn’t have sufficient funds to fulfill his vow?
10. Where must “*ma’aser sheini*” be eaten?

## PARSHA Q&A!

### Answers to This Week’s Questions!

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

### BEHAR

1. 25:7 - Remove it from his property and declare it ownerless.
2. 25:10 - From the sounding of the shofar. A ram’s horn is called a *yovel*.
3. 25:17 - One may not intentionally hurt people’s feelings, nor give bad advice while secretly intending to reap benefit.
4. 25:29 - Only within the first year after the sale.
5. 25:29 - The days of an entire year.
6. 25:29 - A city surrounded by a wall since the time of Yehoshua.
7. 25:38 - To one who worships idols.
8. 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.
9. 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.
10. 26:1 - In the Mikdash.

2. 26:4 - At times when people are not outside (e.g., Shabbat nights).
3. 26:5 - You will only require a little bread to be completely satisfied.
4. 26:6 - No foreign army will travel through your land even on their way to a different country.
5. 26:14,15 - Not studying Torah, not observing mitzvot, rejecting those who observe mitzvot, hating Sages, preventing others from observing mitzvot, denying that Hashem gave the mitzvot, denying the existence of Hashem. They are listed in this order because each transgression leads to the next.
6. 26:32 - No enemy nation will be able to settle in the Land of Israel.
7. 26:41 - Hashem Himself, so to speak, will bring them into their enemies’ land. This means that even when the Jews are in exile, Hashem will supply them with leaders who inspire them to keep the Torah. This guards the Jews from assimilating into the host culture.
8. 26:42 - Because the image of Yitzchak’s ashes (Yitzchak was prepared to be brought as an offering) upon the altar is always before Hashem.
9. 27:8 - The person whose value was donated goes before the *kohen*, who sets the obligation according to the poor person’s ability to pay.
10. 27:30 - In Jerusalem.

### BECHUKOTAI

1. 26:3 - Laboring in the study of Torah.

## WEEKLY DAFOOTNOTES

CHULLIN 107 - 113

### How LONG THE LOAN

**D**uring his visit to the Babylonian community of Sura, the Sage Rami bar Tamri of Pumpedisa did some strange things which aroused the suspicion of the sages there. One of these was the fact he wore a four-cornered garment which did not have *tzitzit* fringes on it as required by the Torah.

When he was challenged in regard to this, he announced that what he was wearing was a borrowed garment and cited a ruling of Rabbi Yehuda, head of the Pumpedisa courts, which is mentioned a little later in our *mesechta* (136a). In regard to the mitzvah of *tzitzis* the Torah writes "You shall place *tzitzit* on the four corners of your garment" (*Devarim* 22:12). Rabbi Yehuda saw in the Torah's stress on "your garment" an indication that if someone wears a four-cornered garment which he has only borrowed from someone else, he is not required to put *tzitzit* on it.

Rabbi Yehuda's ruling, however, does not exempt the borrower indefinitely from putting *tzitzit* on that garment. Once it is in his possession for thirty days he is required by rabbinic law to put *tzitzit* on it. The reason for this, explains *Tosefot*, is that since it is not common for people to lend things to others for longer than thirty days, the impression gained by people seeing the borrower wearing such a garment after this time period is that he is the owner and is ignoring his responsibility.

The *Tosefist* Rabbeinu Tam draws an interesting halachic conclusion from this. Just as when someone borrows money without stipulating a date for payment, he cannot demand payment before thirty days, so too if one lends someone an object he cannot demand its return before thirty days since this is assumed to be the length of time one is prepared to allow the borrower to use it.

• Chullin 110b

### THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

### COUNTING TEETH

**O**ne of the most encouraging signs of spiritual revival in our generation is the growing number of Jews regularly studying the laws of *lashon hara* and guarding their tongue against speaking gossip and slander. The laws they study were compiled by the saintly sage Rabbi Yisroel Meir HaCohen known as the "Chafetz Chaim" because that is the title of his seminal work on this important subject.

The story is told of a Torah scholar who paid a visit to this sage in his home in the Polish town of Radin. Despite his frail condition in the middle eighties of his life, the Chafetz Chaim was in a particularly good mood as he asked the visitor to come close to him and open his, the sage's, mouth. There was an

### MORE THAN ONE KIND OF KID

**I**s the word "kid" used in the Torah's prohibition against cooking meat with milk (*Shmot* 23:19) a term limited to goats or does it simply mean any young animal?

The *mishna* informs us that the Torah's prohibition applies to all animals. Elsewhere the Talmud states that the mention of this prohibition in three different places in the Torah was intended to include a ban not only on cooking meat and milk together but also on eating or deriving any benefit from the product of such cooking.

But how do we know that the term "kid" used in each of these passages does not refer specifically to goats whose young are generally called by that name?

The answer is provided by Rabbi Elazar who directs us to two passages in the Torah which do not even discuss any matter of law and are only part of a narrative. One is in *Bereishet* 38:20 which reports the gift of Yehuda to Tamar of a "kid goat sent with his friend the Adulamite." The other is in *Bereishet* 27:16 describing the efforts of Rivka to pass off her smooth-skinned son Yaakov to her blind husband Yitzchak as her hairy son Eisav by covering the former's arms with "the skins of kid goats she placed upon his exposed arms and neck."

In both of these passages the term is explicitly coupled with goat, an indication that anywhere else where it appears by itself it refers to any animal.

In his commentary on *Chumash*, Rashi notes that the term "kid", based on our *gemara*, means a "soft, young animal" and not necessarily a goat. Although we generally call a young sheep a lamb and a young cow a calf, the term kid can apply to them as well. It should also be added that despite the use of the term "kid", the prohibition covers the meat of older animals as well, just as the milk referred to is not necessarily the milk of the animal's own mother.

• Chullin 113a

## A GHOST STORY

**From: Jeppe M.**

Dear Rabbi,

I'd like to ask about the Jewish view on ghosts because I have read in the Tanach that when a person dies all activity ceases. Thanks.

Dear Jeppe M.,

Ghosts are departed souls that continue to sojourn in the physical world rather than entering higher spiritual domains. Our sources offer several explanations for this. One is that a soul that is reincarnated three times without repair is not permitted to *gehinom*, nor to be reincarnated again; rather it is forced to wander bodiless in this world (see Ask the Rabbi – Reincarnation). [Such a bodiless, wandering soul may eventually cleave to a living person resulting in the phenomenon of *dybuk*.]

Another explanation is premature death. Our Sages taught, "Once tragedy is let loose, it doesn't differentiate between innocent or guilty". Without delving into the issue of how one may "die before his time", a prematurely disconnected soul is incomplete and seeks to remain in this world to fulfill its purpose. Such a soul's presence in this world is perceived as a ghost.

The British Society for Psychic Research, a group of qualified scientists, asserts that while most ghost reports are due to illusion, many seem to be verified. Their studies show that in cases where ghosts were reported as a result of sudden tragic deaths, people totally unaware of the death attested to "feeling" something in the house. Animals in particular seem to have this sense. In a "haunted" Kentucky home, a cat, a dog, and a rattlesnake all reacted strongly against a certain unoccupied chair in the house. This is consistent with the teaching of our Sages, "When dogs bark [incessantly], the Angel of Death is in town".

There are several explanations as to how we sense the presence of a bodiless soul. For one, just as a person sees another person, so one's soul perceives the presence of another soul, giving one the unexplainable feeling that "something is there". Alternatively, the soul senses being "stared" at by the bodiless soul, just as a person can often feel when someone is staring at him. Regarding this the Rabbis taught, "Even though a person doesn't see, his *mazal* sees". This means that the soul perceives and interacts with unseen spiritual forces that the conscious mind is unaware of except for a faint impression. In addition,

the Kabbalists teach that even though a soul is basically ethereal, it nevertheless has some physical mass (called *tzelem* or *guf hadak*) that can be felt by a sixth, subconscious sense.

A well-known account in Tanach in fact deals with the appearance of a "ghost". In an act of despair, King Saul commissioned a witch to summon the soul of the prophet Samuel: "And the woman saw Samuel, and she cried aloud....And Saul said to her, What is his form? And she said, An old man is coming up, and he is wrapped in a cloak. And Saul knew that he was Samuel" (I Samuel 28). Rashi explains that when one summons through a medium, the medium sees but doesn't hear; the one who summons hears but doesn't see. Ralbag (Rabbi Levi ben Gershon 1288-1344) notes in either case the apparition is not a real sight or sound, but neither is it imaginary or a hallucination, but rather an "illusion" of a spiritual reality. In this vein Rambam states, "The forms that are devoid of matter cannot be perceived with the physical eye but only with the mind's eye".

The Talmud also records several "ghost sightings". After Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi — Rebbe — died, he would return to his home every Sabbath Eve. Once, a neighbor came speaking very loudly when Rebbe's maid whispered, "Be quiet, Rebbe is sitting there". When he heard this, he came no more, in order not to slight the honor of earlier rabbis. In another account, Rabbi Akiva once saw an apparition enduring great punishment. He asked why it must suffer so, to which the soul replied that he had committed many severe transgressions. Rabbi Akiva asked, "whom did you leave behind", to which he responded "a pregnant wife". Rabbi Akiva found the woman, waited until she gave birth to a son, circumcised him, and taught him to pray and learn Torah. Eventually the apparition reappeared to him and said, "May your mind be put at ease for you have put my mind at ease."

### Sources:

- *Soul of the Matter*, pp. 20,22,50,51.
- *Rabbi Chaim Vital, Sha'ar HaGilgulim*, Introduction 4.
- *R. Gedaliah b. Yosef Ibn Yachyiah (1515-1587), Shalsheles Ha-Kabbalah*.
- *Baba Kama* 60a, see *Be'er HaGolah*, 5 p 98.
- *Megilla* 3a.
- *Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzatto, Derech Hashem* 3:1:5.
- *R' Menashe ben Israel (1604-1658), Nishmat Chaim* 1:13
- *Rambam, Mishna Torah, Yesodei Ha-Torah* 4:7.
- *Ketuvot* 103a, *Sefer Chasidim* 327.
- *Tractate Kala ch. 2.*

## WHAT'S THE RIGHT THING TO DO? \_\_\_\_\_

REAL-LIFE QUESTIONS OF SOCIAL AND BUSINESS ETHICS

### PRAYER IN THE AIR

**Question:** When I travel on an airplane I regularly join a *minyan* of Jews for prayer service at the back of the plane. This invariably creates highly unfavorable conditions for proper concentration and sometimes causes discomfort for stewardesses and fellow passengers. What is the right thing to do?

**Answer:** This question was recently put to the renowned halachic authority Rabbi Shmuel Halevi Wosner by El Al's Rabbi Shmuel Avraham Katzir. In the ruling which he sent to El Al president Amos Shapira, Rabbi Wosner came out against the practice of large numbers of passengers gathering together for a prayer service in one part of the plane. He pointed out that, aside from being a safety hazard, such a practice is a

detriment to true concentration.

Passengers should instead form small *minyanim* scattered around the plane and try to sit in their seats. During the *amida* prayer when they are required to stand, they should try to stand in or near their own places on the plane. If this is impractical they should not clog the aisles but remain seated even during this prayer – and even fasten seat belts if asked to do so by the staff.

Another perspective on this problem was provided by Rabbi Ovadia Yosef who ruled that it is preferable to pray in the airport before a flight, even without a *minyan*, than with a *minyan* on the plane that risks disturbing the sleep of fellow passengers.

## PUBLIC DOMAIN

Comments, quibbles and reactions concerning previous Ohrnet features

#### Ohrnet for Two

I keep on getting the Ohrnet by email twice every week lately. Thanks for the amazing Ohrnet and so sorry to bother you.

• C. Y.

**Ohrnet replies:** Are you writing to thank us or to complain that you are not receiving three? Just kidding. We will note to send one and you can make as many copies as you like.

#### Cell Count

B. sent the following suggestion: I had an idea I thought I'd present to Ohr Somayach if they want to consider something maybe for next year's *sefira* count. Many cell phone service providers allow you to email a phone where it is presented as a text message (text messaging). For example I text message my wife using her cell phone number: "<number>@mobile.att.net". You could allow people to subscribe to a *sefira* list where you can email people the *sefira* count to their cell phones as a reminder from Ohr Somayach of the day's count which would appear as a text message. You might also allow for time zone specification so it is emailed at the right time too.

#### Re: Holiday Any Day? — Israel Forever (Ohrnet Emor)

Regarding what Ohrnet wrote about a holiday being "any day" and; that "even in Israel we saw last month how the 5th of Iyar Independence Day was moved to a day later," I ask:

Wasn't this done as an adjustment to prevent desecration of Shabbat, one of the times this has been done by an Israeli government? They should be praised for it.

• Ira

**Ohrnet replies:** Agreed. However, the point of the article was to contrast holidays that commemorate an historical event as opposed to those in which we relive the events.

#### Ohrnet in South Africa

I have contacted you in the past for permission to use some of your articles in the festival issues of the SA Jewish Report.

Again we ask for permission to use four articles for our Shavuot edition:

- 1) The Medium and the Message by Rabbi Yaakov Sinclair;
- 2) The Sound of Silence by Rabbi Lauffer; 3) What's in a Kiss; by Rabbi Sinclair; 4) Let Freedom Reign by Rabbi Kantrowitz;

I can't promise that we will use them but I would like permission in the interim, just in case.

Thanking you.

Best Regards,  
Lara Greenberg, SA Jewish Report  
Editorial Assistant/Youth Editor/Journalist

**Ohrnet replies:** Permission granted as usual (and keep an eye out for new articles!), and Ohr Somayach wishes you and your readers a Chag Shavuot Somayach from Jerusalem!