

# OHRNET

SHABBAT PARSHAT VAYESHEV · 21 KISLEV 5765 · DEC. 4, 2004 · VOL. 12 NO. 9

## PARSHA INSIGHTS

### A PICTURE AND A THOUSAND WORDS

*“Then there was an opportune day when he entered the house to do his work – no man of the household staff being there in the house...” (39:11)*

One of the great revolutions in the Torah world was the institution of the Daf Yomi. The Daf Yomi literally means “The daily page.” In 1923, at the First International Congress of the Agudath Israel World Movement in Vienna, Rabbi Meir Shapiro of Lublin proposed that every day across the world one page of the Babylonian Talmud should be learned. In this way, the entire Talmud could be completed in a little over seven years. The idea was eagerly received and has become a tremendous success. This Daf Yomi project has completed numerous cycles, and tens of thousands of Jews connect to their heritage daily through their “Daily Daf.”

At the end of that Congress the heads of the world’s great Torah institutions gathered for the closing session. A photographer got up to record this momentous event. As he raised his camera many of those luminaries raised their hands in front of their faces. Because of their great modesty they did not want themselves to be photographed.

Rabbi Meir Shapiro stood up and said, “My masters, do not cover your faces! A generation is coming whose only link to their Judaism will be the light that shines out from your holy faces.”

A picture is worth a thousand words.

In this week’s Torah portion, Potiphar’s wife, Zulaicha, repeatedly tries to seduce Yosef. Yosef was outstandingly handsome. So much so that when he would pass by, women peeling citrus fruit with sharp knives would cut into their fingers without feeling the pain, so entranced were they by his beauty.

Zulaicha tried to seduce Yosef for over a year. She began by changing her dress three times a day to attract his attention. When this failed, she tried bribing him with a thousand *talents* of gold. Yosef was unimpressed. Persuasion turned to coercion and she began to threaten him.

One day Zulaicha found her opportunity. The day of the Nile’s overflowing was a national religious holiday. All of Potiphar’s household went out to join the singing and dancing in praise of the Nile god. Ever the faithful servant, Yosef excused himself from these festivities and stayed at home to attend to his master’s bookkeeping. Zulaicha, claiming a headache, also stayed at home, knowing that she and Yosef would be alone together in the house.

She dressed herself in her finest clothes and bedecked her hair with a crown of jewels. She perfumed herself with scent and her house with incense, and then she draped herself across the doorway where Yosef would have to pass to get to his work. When Yosef failed to appear, she called, “Yosef, why don’t you go to your work?” As Yosef approached, she stretched her arm across the doorway to prevent him from passing and whispered “I swear, if you don’t do what I want, you’re a dead man.”

Yosef made an oath that he would never acquiesce to her desires, but she persisted. He felt himself bombarded with a combination of threats and bribes. A vision suddenly appeared in front of him. He saw his father Yaakov’s image and that of his mother Rachel. In the vision Yaakov said to him “Yosef! There will be twelve precious gems in the *chosen* (the breastplate of the *kohen gadol*) – one for each tribe. If you sin, your place will be empty!”

The Divine Presence rested on the *choshen*; if Yosef had transgressed, his stone would have been removed, for G-d detests immorality.

Sometimes only the holy faces of our forbears stand in the breach to protect us against a world that glorifies immorality and the unbridled pursuit of pleasure.

**Y**aakov settles in the land of Canaan. His favorite son, Yosef, brings him critical reports about his brothers. Yaakov makes Yosef a fine tunic of multi-colored woolen strips. Yosef exacerbates his brothers' hatred by recounting prophetic dreams of sheaves of wheat bowing to his sheaf, and of the sun, moon and stars bowing to him, signifying that all his family will appoint him king. The brothers indict Yosef and resolve to execute him. When Yosef comes to Shechem, the brothers relent and decide, at Reuven's instigation, to throw him into a pit instead. Reuven's intent was to save Yosef. Yehuda persuades the brothers to take Yosef out of the pit and sell him to a caravan of passing Ishmaelites. Reuven returns to find the pit empty and rends his clothes. The brothers soak Yosef's tunic in goat's blood and show it to Yaakov, who assumes that Yosef has been devoured by a wild beast. Yaakov is inconsolable. Meanwhile, in Egypt, Yosef has been sold to

Potiphar, Pharaoh's Chamberlain of the Butchers. In the Parsha's sub-plot, Yehuda's son Er dies as punishment for preventing his wife Tamar from becoming pregnant. Onan, Yehuda's second son, then weds Tamar by levirate marriage. He too is punished in similar circumstances. When Yehuda's wife dies, Tamar resolves to have children through Yehuda, as this union will found the Davidic line culminating in the *Mashiach*. Meanwhile, Yosef rises to power in the house of his Egyptian master. His extreme beauty attracts the unwanted advances of his master's wife. Enraged by his rejection, she accuses Yosef of attempting to seduce her, and he is imprisoned. In jail, Yosef successfully predicts the outcome of the dream of Pharaoh's wine steward, who is reinstated; and the dream of Pharaoh's baker, who is hanged. In spite of his promise, the wine steward forgets to help Yosef, and Yosef languishes in jail.

### THE DANGER OF INSENSITIVITY

**W**hatever the merits or drawbacks there are in the controversial Disengagement Plan of Prime Minister Sharon, there has been some sharp criticism of the manner in which Israeli leaders have related to the settlers' anguish at being removed from their homes.

Sharon may not be as insensitive as a predecessor of his who cynically referred to the protesting settlers in the territories who circulated around him as "spinning propellers". However the settlers nevertheless feel that he has not only betrayed them but is insensitive to their complaints.

In this week's Torah portion we learn of the sale of Yosef into slavery by his brothers. When Yosef turns the tables on them as an Egyptian potentate, accusing them of being spies,

as we will read in next week's portion, the oldest of the brothers, Reuven, declares to the rest of them:

"But we are guilty regarding our brother whose agony we saw as he pleaded with us and we refused to listen."

Reuven did not challenge the justice of their decision to do away with Yosef whom they all considered a threat because of his tale bearing to their father. What he did see as a sin for which they were being punished by Heaven was their insensitivity to Yosef's pleading, which should have moved them to reconsider their judgment of him.

Government leaders should learn a lesson from this how to deal with their own brothers in maintaining a united Israel forever.

## LOVE OF THE LAND - THE LEGENDS Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael

### HOW THE WALL WAS UNCOVERED

**"**I am of Roman descent and am merely following the ancient practice of my forefathers to dump garbage at this site which is where the Temple of the Jewish people once stood. Unable to completely destroy this wall along with the rest of the Temple, they decreed that garbage be dumped here to cover it over."

This is how the elderly gentile woman explained to the visiting Turkish Sultan why she was adding her rubbish to a large mound near the residence of the local *kadi* where the Sultan was staying.



Determined to uncover the wall, the Sultan, who then ruled the region, sent out a proclamation for people in the city and environs to come to his residence where they would be amply rewarded. When a crowd gathered he scattered some coins on the garbage heap and invited the people to gather up the garbage and keep the coins they found. After a month of such searching, the hidden wall was revealed. The Sultan ordered the arrest of anyone who would continue the Roman custom of dumping garbage and the sacred wall remained uncovered until today.

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## PARSHA Q&A ?

1. "These are the offspring of Yaakov: Yosef...." Give three reasons why Yosef is considered Yaakov's main offspring.
2. What was praiseworthy about the fact that Yosef's brothers did not speak to him in a friendly manner?
3. How do we see from Yosef's dream about the sun, moon and stars that all dreams contain some untrue element?
4. Who brought Yosef down to Egypt?
5. Where was Reuven when Yosef was sold?
6. In addition to the brothers, who else knew that Yosef was alive?
7. Why didn't G-d reveal prophetically to Yaakov that Yosef was alive?
8. For how long did Yaakov mourn the loss of Yosef?
9. Verse 37:35 states "his father wept." To whom does this refer?
10. Who was Tamar's father?
11. In what merit did Tamar deserve to have kings as her descendants?
12. Why is the word "hand" mentioned four times in connection to the birth of Zerach?
13. Why does the Torah relate the incident with Potiphar's wife immediately after the incident of Yehuda and Tamar?
14. How did Potiphar "see" that G-d was with Yosef?
15. Who in this week's Parsha pretended to be sick?
16. Why were the butler and the baker imprisoned?
17. For how long were the butler and the baker in prison?
18. How did the baker know that Yosef had correctly interpreted the butler's dream?
19. What prompted the butler and baker to tell Yosef their dreams?
20. How was Yosef punished for asking the butler for help?

## PARSHA Q&A!

### Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

1. 37:2 - (a) Yosef was the son of Rachel, Yaakov's primary wife. (b) Yosef looked like Yaakov. (c) All that befell Yaakov befell Yosef.
2. 37:4 - They did not act hypocritically.
3. 37:10 - The moon represented Rachel. Since she had already died, it was impossible for that element of the dream to come true.
4. 37:28 - A caravan of Midianites.
5. 37:29 - He was attending to Yaakov.
6. 37:33 - Yitzchak.
7. 37:33 - Because the brothers had issued a ban against revealing the truth to Yaakov, and G-d, so to speak, abided by their ban.
8. 37:34 - Twenty-two years.
9. 37:35 - Yitzchak, who wept because of Yaakov's suffering.
10. 38:24 - Shem.
11. 38:26 - In the merit of her modesty.
12. 38:30 - To allude to his descendent, Achan, who sinned with his hand by taking four things from the spoils of Jericho.
13. 39:1 - To teach us that just as Tamar acted with pure motives, so did Potiphar's wife.
14. 39:3 - Yosef mentioned G-d's name frequently in his speech.
15. 39:11 - Potiphar's wife.
16. 40:1 - The butler was imprisoned because a fly was found in the king's goblet, and the baker was imprisoned because a pebble was found in the king's bread.
17. 40:4 - Twelve months.
18. 40:5 - The baker dreamed the interpretation of the butler's dream.
19. 40:6 - Yosef asked them why they looked troubled.
20. 40:23 - He remained in prison an additional two years.

## THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

### MEZUZAHS ON STRANGE DOORS

A large silver mezuzah adorns the doorpost of a Supreme Court Justice's chambers in Washington D.C. In a recent talk to a thousand participants at the United Jewish Communities' International Lion of Judah Conference, Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg explained that this mezuzah and the works of art in her chambers inscribed with a commandment from the Torah translated as "Justice, justice shall you pursue" serve as "ever-present reminders of what judges must do."

To students of American history this may have recalled the legendary gentile journalist Lincoln Steffens who wrote a great deal about Orthodox Jewish immigrants on New York's East Side. In the book "Poor Cousins" by Ande Manners, a little-known facet of Steffens is revealed. "To the amusement of his Jewish friends," writes the author, "he had a mezuzah nailed to his office door and fasted on Yom Kippur."

## OF ANGELS AND DEMONS

When Hagar, the slave of the Matriarch Sarah whom she had given to the Patriarch Avraham for a wife, fled from her mistress, she had an encounter with three angels who relayed a Heavenly message to her. This is evident from the fact that “an angel of G-d” is mentioned three times in the passages describing this encounter (*Beresheet 16:7-11*).

Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai sadly reflected on this event when he encountered a demon named Ben Tamalyon on his way to Rome to seek an annulment of some terrible decrees against the observance of important *mitzvot*. When the demon offered to assist him in his mission, Rabbi Shimon wept that the slave of the Patriarch was privileged to meet three angels while he was not privileged to meet even one.

“Let the miracle come from any source,” he exclaimed and accepted the demon’s offer. The strategy was for the demon to precede Rabbi Shimon’s arrival in Rome and enter into the body of the Roman emperor’s daughter. She would subsequently go mad and cry for the help of Rabbi Shimon whose whispered command to the demon would cause him to depart and allow the princess to regain her senses.

The plan worked perfectly and the grateful emperor rewarded the Sage by allowing him to enter the royal vaults and take whatever he wished. Rabbi Shimon thus succeeded in finding the document containing those awful decrees and destroying it.

Maharsha adds a fascinating note to this story. A heretic, he writes, once asked a Torah scholar why it was indeed a demon that had been chosen for saving Jewry from those decrees which threatened the very essence of Judaism. His explanation was that the idea of issuing such anti-religious decrees could only have been planted in the mind of the emperor by a demon, so it was that demon who was given the job of having them annulled.

• *Me'ilah 17b*

## CHANGE AND BETRAYAL

The term *me'ilah*, which serves as the title and principal subject of this *mesechta*, appears in the Torah chapter describing the sacrifice which one must offer if he

involuntarily was guilty of making personal use of property belonging to the *Beit Hamikdash* (*Vayikra 5:15*).

Not only does this atonement differ from that required for other involuntary sins in that here the sacrifice is an *asham* rather than a *chatat*, but the sin itself is described as *me'ilah* rather than just as ordinary sin.

The *Sefer Hachinuch* writes that the reason for this special term is to indicate that it is a very serious sin to appropriate Heavenly property for personal use.

The *gemara*’s definition of *me'ilah* is “change”. When one appropriates *Beit Hamikdash* property for personal use he is changing its status from sacred to secular. The same term is applied to a woman suspected of marital infidelity (*Bamidbar 5:12*) because adultery is also making a change in regard to the man to whom the woman owes her loyalty. It appears once again in regard to the betrayal of G-d by the tribes of Reuven and Gad and half the tribe of Menashe (*Divrei Hayamim I 5:25*), a betrayal which represented a change in whom these Jews owed their loyalty to.

• *Me'ilah 18a*

# The Weekly Daf

by RABBI MENDEL WEINBACH

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## THE ENVIRONMENT

From: Liron in L. A.

Dear Rabbi,

Doesn't the verse "...Be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth and subdue it; have dominion over...every living thing..." (Genesis 1:28) seem to teach disrespect and ego-centric insensitivity to the environment. What is Judaism's attitude to environmental issues?

Dear Liron,

The idea you suggest was promoted by Arnold Toynbee whose superficial reading of the Torah and ignorance of other traditional Jewish sources brought him to the erroneous conclusion that the Bible is the cause of human exploitation of nature. This group even advocated pagan deification of nature in an attempt to teach mankind to respect the environment.

This alleged license to dominate and subdue the earth is qualified in the very next chapter of the Torah as a mandate to guard and protect the world: "And G-d took man and placed him in the garden of Eden, to work it and to guard it" (Genesis 2:15). The Torah attitude is not to conquer the world by raping and destroying its resources, but rather to both permit and require: cultivation with concern, progress with restraint, growth with conservation and technology with preservation.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch describes the magnitude of this mandate in no uncertain terms: "'Do not destroy anything!' is the first and most general call of G-d, which comes to you....If you regard the beings beneath you as objects without rights, not perceiving G-d Who created them...you have no right to the things around you....If you use them unwisely, you commit treachery against My world, you commit murder and robbery against My property....With this call He represents the greatest and the smallest against you and grants the greatest and the smallest a right against your presumptuousness" (Horeb, London: Soncino Press, 1962, ch. 56, #397).

The Jewish Scriptures, so full of references to nature and its sublime grandeur, inspire respect and appreciation for the environment. In fact, Maimonides declares that meditating on nature is a main way to fulfill the commandment to "love G-d with all your heart" (Mishne Torah, Yesodei HaTorah 2:2). Both of these ideas are behind the Jewish practice to pronounce blessings over natural phenomena such as a rainbow, lightning, shooting stars, the first blossoms of a tree, and many more. In addition, Jewish law provides comprehensive legislation on issues such as preservation, conservation, animal welfare, species preservation, sanitation and pollution.

The number of sources that deal with environmental issues is vast, but here are a few:

**Preservation:** The Torah's emphasis on preservation of the environment is perhaps most apparent in its emphatic opposition to waste. In Sefer HaChinuch, Rabbi Aaron HaLevi of

Barcelona writes, "This is the way of pious and elevated people...they will not waste even a mustard seed, and they are distressed at every ruination and spoilage they see, and if they are able to save, they will save anything from destruction with all of their power...Every person is obligated to master his inclinations and conquer his desires" (Sefer HaChinuch 529).

**Conservation:** Shabbat is a weekly rest for people, animals and the natural world. This weekly rest culminates in *shemita*, when all fields lie fallow for an entire year, bringing rest and rejuvenation to the earth. The Torah also orders the preservation of green belts around cities: "You shall measure from outside the city two thousand cubits on the eastern side, two thousand cubits on the southern side, two thousand cubits on the western side, and two thousand cubits on the northern side, with the city in the middle; this shall be your cities' open spaces" (Numbers 35:5).

**Animal Welfare and Species Preservation:** There are many commandments regarding animal welfare, such as feeding animals before the owner eats, preserving their health, alleviating their work load and more. In addition, Nachmanides suggests that prohibitions such as mixing species (*kilayim*), slaughtering an animal and its offspring on the same day, taking the mother bird together with the eggs and castration are to ensure the preservation of all species (Lev. 19:19, Deut. 22:6). In fact, these laws against grafting diverse seeds and cross-breeding animal species can be understood as the Biblical model for bio-diversity.

**Sanitation and Pollution:** We find that the Sages prohibited burning wood from olive trees and grape vines on the altar. According to one opinion, this was to avoid air pollution since these woods burn with a great deal of smoke. Jerusalem had special legislation to protect its unique environment: all garbage was removed from the city and no kilns or tanneries were allowed to operate within its borders. In this way pestilence and pollution were kept out of the city to preserve the quality of life (Baba Kama 82b).

Judaism's attitude toward protecting nature is not just for tangible results in the present; the Torah also teaches to plan preservation strategies for the future. The Talmud relates that Choni HaMe'agel was walking on the road. He saw a man planting a carob tree. He asked the man, "How long until this tree will produce fruit?" He answered that it will take seventy years. Choni asked him, "Are you sure that you'll still be around in seventy years?" The man replied, "Just as my fathers planted for me, so will I plant for my children."

We'll conclude with a Midrash that beautifully summarizes the Torah approach to environmental issues: "When the Holy One Blessed Be He created the first man he took him and showed him all the trees of the Garden of Eden and said to him: "See my works, how beautiful and praiseworthy they are; and I created all of it for you. Be careful not to spoil or destroy my world because if you spoil it, there will be no one after you to repair it" (Kohelet Rabba 7:13).

## “DID YOU COME TO VISIT ME?”

**Question:** I recently went to the hospital to visit a close friend and after I left him learned that another friend was hospitalized as well. When I went to his room he beamed with joy and asked me if I had come especially to visit him. What is the right thing to do in such a case?

**Answer:** While it is forbidden to deceive outright the one you did not really come to visit, there are two things you can do. One is to avoid answering the question and allow the asker to misinterpret your silence as an affirmative reply. If this is difficult, you can diplomatically reply that he is certainly worthy enough for one to take the trouble to come

and visit him. This too fits into the formula presented by the Talmud (*Mesechta Chullin* 94) for avoiding a direct deception but allowing for self-delusion.

It should also be noted that if the patient is seriously ill and a “white lie” that you intentionally came to visit him will bring him the comfort that can improve his condition, then it is permissible to deviate from the truth if the other options are not feasible.

- Based on the ruling of Rabbi Yitzchak Zilberstein, rabbi of the Ramat Elchanan community in Bnei Brak

## PUBLIC DOMAIN \_\_\_\_\_

Comments, quibbles and reactions concerning previous Ohrnet features

### Where's Yossi?

I once saw an illustrated “comics” version on the Parsha for youth in Israel and the world in English printed in Ohr Somayach's Ohrnet Parsha magazine, as well for Holidays. Where can I get this type of material for children nowadays? Thanks,

- B. N.

**Ohrnet Replies:** You refer to “Yossi & Co.”, a cartoon-like presentation containing thoughtful and humorous messages taught in the weekly Parsha, which were drawn and written by a professional artist who is an Ohr Somayach alumnus. These “comics” appeared in our Ohrnet magazine during the years 5758 and 5759 and are still relevant today. They can be found in the archives on our web site [Ohr.edu](http://Ohr.edu) Enjoy the learning experience!

### Source Please

Can you remind me of the source of the phrase “Tuvcha Yabiyu”? which you referenced as the name of a book by Rabbi Zilberstein in a recent Ohrnet column of “What's the Right Thing To Do”? Is it in Psalm 19? Thank you,

- Stanley

**Ohrnet replies:** Dear Stanley, the phrase comes from

*Tehillim* chapter 145 (the well-known Psalm of Ashrei). The phrase literally means “Abundant Goodness”. The Sforino explains this as referring to abundant flow of goodness from G-d into the world.

### Talmud On-Line

My friends and I want to learn Tractate Berachot. Where “On-line” can we find it?

- Arthur

**Ohrnet replies:** Of course the preferred way to learn is if you are able to find a rabbi and learn together with a group taught by a rabbi. However, to find the texts and for additional information, various websites can serve as tools when used with great discretion.

For the first time, the entire text of the Babylonian Talmud as it appears in the standard Vilna edition is now available on-line thanks at the website called E-Daf <http://e-daf.com>.

The site, conceived by Rabbi Dovid Kraus, contains all 2,711 pages of the Talmud, which are laid out using precisely the same format as printed versions of the text (known in Hebrew as *Tzurat HaDaf*). Users can download or print out the desired page for free, enabling them to study at their convenience, even when they travel. In addition, the site contains links to English-language Talmud classes archived on the web, which can be listened to on-line at no cost.