

O H R N E T

SHABBAT PARSHAT TOLDOT · 29 CHESHVAN 5768 · NOV. 10, 2007 · VOL. 15 NO. 6

PARSHA INSIGHTS

THE SEED OF ETERNITY

“Because Avraham obeyed... My Torah” (26:5)

Nothing in the Torah is merely poetic. True, the Torah is esteemed as great literature; the Psalms of King David, even exported from their native tongue, express mankind’s longings, his hopes and his dejection, his frustration and his joy.

No book has been more read, more quoted or more distorted than the Jewish Bible.

The Torah, however, is more than a book of beautiful words and lofty sentiments; it is more than the highest code of behavior demanded of a human being.

The Torah is the seed of eternity.

After the public reading of the Torah, we make a blessing: We thank G-d “Who has given us a Torah of truth and planted within us eternal life.”

A casual examination of those words might impress us with the poetic symbolism of an eternal life planted within us. However, the Torah never departs from its simple meaning.

What is the true understanding of the symbolic connection of *planting* with *eternal life*?

The plant will never be more than the seed.

In every seed is the entire DNA of the plant. The seed is the blueprint of the plant; it determines what the plant will be. Our eternal life is planted in this world; every positive thought and action is a seed that flowers into a reality that lives forever.

Those flowers are our eternal life

And what we don’t plant will never flower.

It’s as simple as that.

However, what does “a Torah of truth” have to do with the planting of an eternal life? Why do we mention the implanting of eternal life in the blessing after the Torah?

The Torah’s blessing is eternal life.

The word Torah derives from *horah*, which means, “to conceive”. Just as an embryo starts to grow from a seed at the time of conception, so too the Torah builds within us a new life, ennobling us and lifting us to a spirituality and a unique inclination to good.

Our holy Torah, that seed of eternity, makes our bodies holy, so

that they become fit partners for the soul’s journey into infinity.

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## PARSHA OVERVIEW

After 20 years of marriage, Yitzchak's prayers are answered and Rivka conceives twins. The pregnancy is extremely painful. G-d reveals to Rivka that the suffering is a microcosmic prelude to the worldwide conflict that will rage between the two great nations descended from these twins, Rome and Israel. Esav is born, and then Yaakov, holding onto Esav's heel. They grow and Esav becomes a hunter, a man of the physical world, whereas Yaakov sits in the tents of Torah developing his soul. On the day of their grandfather Avraham's funeral, Yaakov is cooking lentils, the traditional mourner's meal. Esav rushes in, ravenous from a hard day's hunting, and sells his birthright (and its concomitant spiritual responsibilities) for a bowl of lentils, demonstrating his unworthiness for the position of first-born. A famine strikes Canaan and Yitzchak thinks of escaping to Egypt, but G-d tells him that because he was bound as a sacrifice, he has become holy and must remain in

the Holy Land. He relocates to Gerar in the land of the Philistines, where, to protect Rivka, he has to say she is his sister. The Philistines grow jealous of Yitzchak when he becomes immensely wealthy, and Avimelech the king asks him to leave. Yitzchak re-digs three wells dug by his father, prophetically alluding to the three future Temples. Avimelech, seeing that Yitzchak is blessed by G-d, makes a treaty with him. When Yitzchak senses his end approaching, he summons Esav to give him his blessings. Rivka, acting on a prophetic command that the blessings must go to Yaakov, arranges for Yaakov to impersonate Esav and receive the blessings. When Esav in frustration reveals to his father that Yaakov has bought the birthright, Yitzchak realizes that the birthright has been bestowed correctly on Yaakov and confirms the blessings he has given Yaakov. Esav vows to kill Yaakov, so Rivka sends Yaakov to her brother Lavan where he may find a suitable wife.

## ISRAEL Forever

### THE VOICE AND THE HANDS

“The voice is the voice of Yaakov but the hands are the hands of Eisav.” This is the statement of perplexity uttered by our blind forefather Yitzchak when Yaakov disguised himself as his evil brother by outfitting himself with hairy clothing. Our Sages saw in this statement a prophecy about the future of the descendants of both brothers.

“So long as the voice of Yaakov is heard praying and studying Torah in the synagogues and study halls,” say our

Sages, “the hands of their enemies represented by Eisav cannot harm them.”

This is the lifesaving formula for Jewry. History, ancient and modern, has shown that the security of our people cannot depend solely on military might. Those responsible for defending the Jewish state against the forces wishing to destroy it should therefore see in the synagogues and *yeshivot* their most vital resource for securing Israel forever.

## LOVE OF THE LAND - THE WISDOM

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

### AMUKA – SEARCH FOR A SOUL-MATE

Single people from all over Israel and the world come to pray at the tomb of Rabbi Yonatan ben Uziel in Amuka, an unpopulated area north of Tsefat. Tradition has it that those without spouses or children have found their salvation as a result of heartfelt prayers said at the tomb of the great Talmudic Sage.

Although there is no clear connection between this



Sage and the power of these particular prayers the Talmud tells us a few things about this extraordinary Torah achievement. When this outstanding disciple of Hillel studied Torah the fiery energy of his Torah singed the wings of a bird flying overhead.

He is best known, however, for his translation of the Torah and Prophets into Aramaic.

Special Mazel Tov to the  
**NEWMAN & GOLDBERGER FAMILIES**  
on the occasion of the wedding of their children

## PARSHA Q&A ?

1. Why was it important that Yitzchak look like Avraham?
2. Why does the Torah stress that Rivka was Betuel's daughter and Lavan's sister?
3. What are the two differences between Tamar's pregnancy and Rivka's pregnancy?
4. Why was Esav named Esav?
5. Who gave Yaakov his name?
6. How did Esav deceive his father?
7. Why was Esav faint when he returned from the field?
8. Why are lentils a food for mourners?
9. What was the birthright that Yaakov bought from Esav?
10. Why was Yitzchak not permitted to go to Egypt?
11. Why did the Philistines plug up the wells?
12. Why did Yitzchak lose his sight? (three reasons)
13. At what age should one anticipate his own death?
14. Why did Rivka ask Yaakov to bring two kid goats?
15. Why did Esav leave his special garments with Rivka?
16. What fragrance did Yitzchak detect on Yaakov's garments?
17. What was the "fat of the land" promised to Esav?
18. When will Esav be freed from subjugation to Yaakov?
19. What inspired Esav to marry the daughter of Yishmael?
20. Knowing that Machalat was Yishmael's daughter, it's self-evident that she was the sister of Nevayot. Why, then, does the Torah state that Esav married "Yishmael's daughter, the sister of Nevayot?"

## PARSHA Q&A!

### Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

1. 25:19 - So everyone would agree that Avraham was indeed his father.
2. 25:20 - To praise her, that even though her family was evil she was righteous.
3. 25:24 - Rivka gave birth at full term to two children, one righteous and one wicked. Tamar gave birth after seven months to two righteous children.
4. 25:25 - He was born fully developed. The name Esav is based on the Hebrew word for "made".
5. 25:26 - G-d.
6. 25:27 - Esav deceived Yitzchak by asking questions that suggested that he was very strict in mitzvah observance.
7. 25:29 - From having murdered.
8. 25:30 - They are round like a wheel and mourning is like a revolving wheel that eventually touches everyone.
9. 25:31 - The right to bring sacrifices.
10. 26:2 - Through the *akeida* he had attained the status of a *korban* and was forbidden to leave Eretz Canaan.
11. 26:15 - They felt that either marauders would attack to capture the wells, or, if attacking for other reasons, they would use the wells as a water supply.
12. 27:1 - a) From the smoke of the incense offered by Esav's wives to their idols; b) From the angel's tears which fell into Yitzchak's eyes at the time of the *akeida*; c) In order for Yaakov to receive the blessings.
13. 27:2 - When he reaches five years from the age his parents were when they passed away, until five years after.
14. 27:9 - One for Yitzchak and the other to offer as a *korban Pesach*.
15. 27:15 - He suspected that his wives might steal them.
16. 27:27 - The scent of *Gan Eden*.
17. 27:36 - Italy.
18. 27:40 - When the Jewish People transgress the Torah.
19. 28:7 - Seeing that his father despised his current wives, he resolved to take a wife from his father's family.
20. 28:9 - To indicate that Yishmael died between her betrothal and her wedding, and that it was Nevayot who gave his sister in marriage to Esav. Knowing the date of Yishmael's death, we can determine the date of Esav's marriage and thus Yaakov's age, 63, at the time of his flight from Esav.

- Grounds for divorce with or without payment of *ketubah*
- Standards of modesty for the married woman
- Marriage with strings attached
- Outwitting the reluctant *yavam*
- Vows or blemishes of a wife and their impact on her marriage
- Resolving disputes between seller and buyer
- “Citizens of Zion”
- When husband is compelled to divorce his wife
- Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi and the contagious illness
- Two Sages and their conversations with the Angel of Death
- The wife’s rights to sell inherited property

## CONVERSATIONS WITH THE ANGEL OF DEATH

When the time came for Rabbi Chanina bar Papa to depart from this world he was approached by the Angel of Death with whom he had an extraordinary relationship. “Give me thirty days to review the Talmud I have studied,” he requested. This desire was based on the Talmudic account (*Bava Batra* 10b) of a Sage hearing an announcement during a brief experience in Heaven: “Fortunate is the man who arrives here with his Talmud in his hand.”

Thirty days later a dramatic exchange took place between the Sage and his angelic executioner. When Rabbi Chanina asked him to lend him his terrifying sword as he accompanied him to show him his place in Gan Eden, just as he had done for an earlier Sage, Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi, the angel pointed out to him that he

lacked the merit of his predecessor. Although he conceded that he had fulfilled in his lifetime every command of the Torah, he had not demonstrated the heroic kindness of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi. That Sage had braved the danger of being contaminated by a serious and highly contagious disease in order to provide company for the victims of that disease while studying Torah, confident in the protection that such study would provide.

Nevertheless, when death finally came Heaven vindicated the exalted status of Rabbi Chanina by placing a pillar of fire between his funeral bier and the crowd which came to honor him, a Heavenly honor accorded to only one or two people in a generation. Appeals to the deceased to have this barrier removed in order to eliminate the impression that the other Sages were not worthy of being in his presence did not succeed. Only when an appeal was made to remove the barrier so that they could properly bury him did the fiery pillar disappear.

• *Ketubot 77b*

## WHAT THE Sages SAY

“If the study of Torah confers charm (as promised in *Mishlei* 5:19) upon the one who is involved in it, will it not provide him also with the protection of immunity?”

- *Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi as he exposed himself to the danger of contagion, confident that Torah would protect him*

## LIVING IN ISRAEL

From: T. in Miami, FL

Dear Rabbi,

I have a small dilemma. I am 18 years old. I have a close relative now living in Israel who is very extremist when it comes to living in Israel. He has always disapproved of people living outside Israel for he never really sees them as “worthwhile Jews” or Jews who are so dedicated to their Jewish heritage.

Lately, he has criticized me for living outside of Israel, and claims that there will be a price I will have to pay for doing such a “sin.” I know I want to come to Israel once I get an education so I could support myself later on in the future. Neither does he agree that this is the right way to go and he claims that by the time I will get to Israel (when I will be about 20 - 22 years of age), I will be “too old” and therefore it won’t have an impact on me.

I have decided to write to you for, as a Rabbi, I would respect your opinion. I don’t want to believe that I’ll be too old to go to Israel at 22 or that my life outside Israel is a waste of time. Yet, by the letters I receive from them, I am beginning to feel guilty.

Do you think I should work now so I could support myself in the future and meanwhile help in the local Jewish community, or should I ignore the Jews outside Israel and go to Israel now, so I won’t be “too old” in a couple of years? Thank you.

Dear T.,

As you probably know, the Land of Israel is central to Judaism. It’s an intrinsic part of the covenant between G-d and Abraham, and it’s where the Patriarchs and Matriarchs lived and are buried. Most events recorded in the Tanach took place in Israel.

Israel is the only land conducive to developing the faculty of prophecy. All the prophets either received prophecies in Israel, or prophecies that related to the Land of Israel. For example, Abraham’s only prophecy outside Israel was the command to go there.

Even today, people who live in Israel experience extraordinary Divine assistance in Torah study and spiritual growth. As the Sages said: “There’s no Torah like the Torah of the Land of Israel.” – “The air of the Land of Israel imparts wisdom.” Despite the security situation, in

many ways one can experience a higher level of tranquility in Israel than can be experienced elsewhere.

Furthermore, most of the commandments only apply when the majority of Jews are in Israel; nowadays, when most Jews live outside Israel, only 270 of the 613 *mitzvot* can be fulfilled.

Is there a specific *mitzvah* to live in Israel? Many authorities say it is a *mitzvah* to live in Israel, in keeping with the verse, “and you shall possess the Land and dwell in it (*Bamidbar* 33:53).” Maimonides, on the other hand, states that “one should always dwell in the Land of Israel”; yet he does not list it as one of the 613 commandments. Rabbi Moshe Feinstein explains that according to Maimonides there’s no obligation to go to Israel, although it is a good thing to do.

Since living in Israel affects almost the entire range of *mitzvah* observance, all factors should be considered. Will you be able to find work that provides you with the time and money to fulfill the *mitzvot* — for example, study Torah, give charity, and provide a Torah education for your children? Halachic authorities throughout the ages have emphasized that a person should come to Israel only if reasonably sure he can support his family and guarantee his children a Torah education.

However, one shouldn’t seek luxuries — the importance of living in Israel outweighs driving a Ferrari and eating steak every day for breakfast.

Other factors to consider: How will you deal with living far from family? How do you feel about the security situation? How will you adapt to a new culture? What suitable marriage prospects are available? What appropriate Torah study program will you connect with? Will you be able to live in a Torah neighborhood?

G-d forbid anyone should say a life isn’t “worthwhile” just because it’s lived outside of Israel. A life dedicated to Torah and *mitzvot* is certainly worthwhile, wherever it is. Sometimes a person’s contribution to the Jewish People can be even greater outside of Israel, especially a person involved in Jewish education, outreach or community matters.

Coming to Israel is sort of like getting married: Everyone should do so eventually, but not because a well-meaning relative bullies you into it. And if you do so when you want to, you’re more likely to fall in love.

• Sources: “After the Return”, Rabbi Mordechai Becher & Rabbi Moshe Newman (Feldheim Publishers). Ch. 7

## TAKING THE BOTTLE

**Question:** I am often tempted to take a bottle of soda belonging to my dormitory roommate without his knowledge because I am certain that if he were there he would gladly offer it to me. What is the right thing to do?

**Answer:** The Talmud (*Bava Metzia 22a*) tells about the time that three sages were offered fruits from the orchard of Mari bar Issak by his sharecropper. In contrast to his two companions the Sage Mar Zutra declined eating the fruits. Tosefot explains that the reason the others did eat was because they assumed that the sharecropper had presented fruit from his share of the crops. The other possibility – that they ate because they assumed that even if the fruits were from the share that belonged to the absent owner he surely would

have consented to offer them to such honored guests – is rejected by Tosefot because this would be forbidden.

The ruling of Tosefot is based on the conclusion of the Talmud that if someone finds a lost object before the loser is aware of his loss and has expressed despair of ever regaining it, he is still obligated to return it. The fact that the loser would have despaired had he been aware of the loss does not affect the finder's responsibility. Tosefot argues that the same is true in regard to taking someone's property without his knowledge.

Other major authorities (*Hagahot HaOshri* and *Hagahot Mordechai*) concur with this ruling while the *Siftei Kohen* (*Choshen Mishpat 358:4*) challenges the comparison made by Tosefot.

In conclusion, try to avoid taking such liberty and ask your roommate for blanket permissions in advance.

## THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY \_\_\_\_\_

### “I ALSO HAVE A SUCCAH DECORATION”

The story in last week's Ohrnet moved one reader to call attention to a somewhat similar story that appears in “*Aleinu Leshabeiach*” by Rabbi Yitzchak Zilberstein, the rav of the Ramat Elchanan community in Bnei Brak.

When his children were busy decorating the family succah with the traditional items, the head of the family surprised them with the declaration “I also have a Succah decoration”. As he pulled out a batch of “pink slips” he explained their significance.

This Jew was one of the brave souls who refused to work on Shabbat although, in those depressed times, this

meant that he would not be able to hold a steady job and support his immigrant family. Every Friday it was the same story. He would inform his boss that he was not coming to work the next day and was told that he was fired. He bravely accepted his dismissal and only asked that his erstwhile employer put his firing into writing. The employers generally went along with this strange request but his family couldn't understand the purpose of the written dismissals. He assured them that the time would soon come when all would be clear.

Came Succot and the “pink slips” testifying to heroic loyalty to Shabbat occupied a central place in the succah.

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# LOVE of the LAND

*A compendium of selections from Torah and historical sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and the Land of Israel.*

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