

O H R N E T

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PARSHA INSIGHTS

A VANISHED WORLD

“You will go mad from the sight of your eyes that you will see.” (28:34)

“The world is falling to pieces, and Adams and Weston are taking pictures of rocks!” — Henri Cartier-Bresson during World War II

Right now, as you are reading this, a million different things are happening in the world. Millions of lives are beginning and millions ending. A vast cacophony called life in all its rawness and gentleness is being played out on this ball turning silently in space. It all seems so chaotic. Great evil is going unpunished. And great goodness is going unrewarded. Where is G-d? Has He thrown up His hands in despair and gone off for a ride with the top down?

The basic credo of Judaism is that G-d is One. Not just that there is one G-d, but that His Oneness precludes the existence of anything apart from Him. This is what I mean when I proclaim in the *Shema*, Judaism’s central declaration of faith: “Hear O Israel, the L-rd our G-d, the L-rd is One.” One. Alone. Nothing else.

Let me ask you a question. If G-d is One, why is this world so full of conflict, so full of contradictions to His Oneness? In other words, if He is One how can evil exist?

A few months ago I was scanning through a magazine and my eye came to rest on one of the photo icons of our age — Ansel Adams’ immortal “Moonrise over Hernandez.” A beautiful full moon skirting a low bank of cloud, rising majestically from the horizon. The evening sky dark and brooding. My eye traveled down to the caption and I started to read:

“Because of my unfortunate disregard for the dates of my negatives, I have caused considerable dismay among photographic historians, students, and museums — to say nothing of the trouble it has caused me. ‘Moonrise’ is a prime example of my anti-date complex. It has been listed as 1940, 1941, 1942, and even 1944. At the suggestion of Beaumont Newhall, Dr. David Elmore of the High Altitude Observatory at Boulder, Colorado, put a computer to work on the prob-

lem. Using data from a visit to the site, analysis of the moon’s position in the photograph, and lunar azimuth tables, he determined that the exposure was made at approximately 4:05 p.m. on October 31, 1941. That is now the official date.”

October 31, 1941. Here was the doyen of American photography making art in all the beauty of a warm New Mexico evening, while, on the other side of the world, this same moon was witnessing the torment of a generation.

I wonder what was happening in Europe when Ansel Adams was making that photograph. October 31, 1941. My curiosity piqued, I fed the date into an electronic search engine. The answer made the hair on the back of my neck rise.

On January 20, 1942, at an idyllic lakeside house in Wannsee near Berlin, there was an intramural meeting attended by Heydrich, Eichmann, and other Nazi leaders. This is how the report begins:

“Protocol of the Wannsee Conference,  
January 20, 1942  
Reich Secret Document 30 Copies  
Protocol of Conference

“The following took part in the conference on the *final solution (Endlosung)* of the Jewish question held on January 20, 1942, in Berlin, Am Grossen Wannsee No. 56–58.”

There it was in black and white. “The final solution.” I was reading the death warrant of the Jewish people.

On page 4 of the Wannsee Protocol, the following statement is made:

“...since the *Machtbernahme* [rise to power of the Nazi Party], January 30, 1933, **until the accounting day, October 31, 1941**, a total of about 537,000 Jews had been brought to emigration...”

October 31, 1941. The day of accounting. While Ansel

*continued on page six*

## PARSHA OVERVIEW

When *Bnei Yisrael* dwell in the Land of Israel, the first fruits are to be taken to the Temple and given to the *kohen* in a ceremony expressing recognition that it is G-d who guides Jewish history throughout all ages. (This passage forms one of the central parts of the Haggadah that we read at the Passover Seder.) On the last day of Pesach of the fourth and seventh years of the seven-year *shemita* cycle, a person must recite a disclosure stating that he has indeed distributed the tithes to the appropriate people in the prescribed manner. With this *mitzvah*, Moshe concludes the commandments that G-d has told him to give to the Jewish People. Moshe exhorts them to walk in G-d's ways because they are set aside as a treasured people to G-d. When *Bnei Yisrael* cross the Jordan

River they are to make a new commitment to the Torah. Huge stones are to be erected and the Torah is to be written on them in the world's seventy primary languages, and they are to be covered with a thin layer of plaster. Half the tribes will stand on Mount Gerizim and half on Mount Eval, and the *levi'im* will stand in a valley between the two mountains. There the *levi'im* will recite 12 commandments and all the people will say "amen" to the blessings and the curses. Moshe then details the blessings that will be bestowed upon *Bnei Yisrael*. These blessings are both physical and spiritual. But if the Jewish People do not keep the Torah, Moshe details a chilling picture of destruction, resulting in exile and wandering among the nations.

## ISRAEL Forever

### A SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY

“Blessed is one who will uphold the words of the Torah to perform them.” This is what our ancestors heard when they entered Eretz Yisrael and stood on Mount Gerizim and Mount Eyal. It was the conclusion of a series of eleven pronouncements uttered by the Levites, first in the form of a blessing and afterwards as a curse for those who did the opposite.

While the simple meaning of this is that a Jew must believe that every one of the Torah's commandments is from

G-d even if he fails to always observe them, there is another meaning as well. In his commentary on Chumash, Ramban cites the Jerusalem Talmud's interpretation of this blessing and curse as relating to one who has the power to influence others to be loyal to the Torah.

This sense of responsibility to a fellow Jew was dramatically communicated to our people as soon as they entered their Promised Land and is one that must be preserved to secure this Land for us forever.

## LOVE OF THE LAND- THE PLACES

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

### TSEFAT – THE ABUHAV SYNAGOGUE

The Abuhav Synagogue in the Old City of Tsefat has a fascinating background. Rabbi Yitzchak Abuhav, author of the classic *Menorat Hama'or* who lived in Spain during the 14th century, was the owner of a Sefer Torah which tradition says was brought with the victims of the Spanish expulsion and ended up in Tsefat. There it



was housed in a synagogue that was given the name Abuhav.

In the earthquake of 1759, which destroyed all the buildings in Tsefat, the only survivor was the wall of the Abuhav Synagogue — which contained the Holy Ark and the Abuhav Sefer Torah in perfect condition.

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POB 18103, Jerusalem 91180, Israel • Tel: +972-2-581-0315 • Email: info@ohr.edu • www.ohr.edu

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## PARSHA Q&A ?

1. When historically did the obligation to bring *bikkurim* begin?
2. *Bikkurim* are from which crops?
3. How does one designate *bikkurim*?
4. Who shakes the basket containing the *bikkurim*?
5. What does “*v’anita v’amarta*” mean?
6. Which Arami “tried to destroy my father?”
7. When during the year may *bikkurim* be brought? Until when are the special verses recited?
8. Someone declaring that he separated *terumah* and *ma’aser* says: “And I didn’t forget.” What didn’t he forget?
9. What were the Jewish People to do with the 12 stones on Mt. Eval?
10. Six tribes stood on Mt. Eval and six on Mt. Gerizim. Who and what were in the middle?
11. Who “causes the blind to go astray”?
12. How does one “strike another secretly”?
13. Eleven curses were spoken on Mt. Eval. What is the significance of this number?
14. Why are sheep called “*ashterot*”?
15. How is the manner of expressing the curses in *Parshat Bechukotai* more severe than in this week’s *parsha*?
16. What is meant by “the Jewish People will become a proverb”?
17. Why did all the curses expressed in 48:16-44 befall the Jewish People?
18. “In the morning you shall say, ‘If only it were (last) evening’ and in the evening you will say, ‘If only it were (this) morning.’” Why?
19. To which tribe did Moshe give the Torah first?
20. How long does it take to understand the depth of one’s teacher’s wisdom?

## PARSHA Q&A!

### Answers to this week’s Questions!

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

1. 26:1 - After the Land was conquered and divided.
2. 26:2 - The seven species for which *Eretz Yisrael* is praised: Wheat, barley, grapes, olives, figs, dates, and pomegranates.
3. 26:2 - When he sees the first fruit ripen on a tree, he binds a piece of straw around it to mark it as *bikkurim*.
4. 26:4 - The *kohen* places his hands under the hands of the one bringing it, and they wave the basket together.
5. 26:5 - Speak loudly.
6. 26:5 - Lavan.
7. 26:11 - *Bikkurim* are brought from Shavuot until Chanukah. The verses are recited only until Succot.
8. 26:13 - To bless G-d.
9. 10. 27:2 - Build an altar.
10. 27:12 - *Kohanim*, *levi’im* and the Holy Ark.
11. 27:18 - Any person who intentionally gives bad advice.
12. 27:24 - By slandering him.
13. 27:24 - Each curse corresponds to one of the tribes, except for the tribe of Shimon. Since Moshe didn’t intend to bless the tribe of Shimon before his death, he did not want to curse them either.
14. 28:4 - Because they “enrich” (*m’ashiro*) their owners.
15. 28:23 - In *Bechukotai* the Torah speaks in the plural, whereas in this week’s Parsha the curses are mentioned in the singular.
16. 28:37 - Whenever someone wants to express the idea of extraordinary suffering, they will use the Jewish People as an example.
17. 28:47 - Because they did not serve G-d with gladness when everything was abundant.
18. 28:67 - Because the curse of each hour will be greater than that of the previous hour.
19. 29:3 - To the Tribe of Levi.
20. 29:8 - 40 years.

- More about the trials of Iyov
- Death of the very righteous
- Environmental hazards to be avoided
- The bees and the neighbor's mustard plants
- Threats to a neighbor's wall
- Barriers against spread of ritual contamination

- Neighbor's objection to fumes or noise
- The birth of public education of Torah
- Rules of competition in business and education
- The special rights of a Torah scholar
- Whose curse caused the death of Rabbi Ada bar Abba
- Protecting the wall and privacy of a neighbor

## FROM ZION SHALL GO FORTH TORAH

When Yehoshua ben Gamla pioneered public education for children who had no fathers to teach them Torah he first established a yeshiva for them in Yerushalayim.

In explanation of this choice of a site the *gemara* quotes the well-known passage "From Zion shall go forth Torah, and the word of G-d from Yerushalayim." (*Yeshayahu* 2:3)

Why Yerushalayim was so ideal for the study of Torah is elaborated upon by *Tosefot*. The student in Yerushalayim was exposed to a high level of spirituality and witnessed the

*kohanim* performing their sacred service in the *Beit Hamikdash*. This experience made him more attuned to the fear of Heaven and the study of Torah.

*Tosefot* adds that this also explains what the Sages say about the mitzvah of consuming the second tithing of agricultural produce in Yerushalayim leading to Torah study. Since a Jew from anywhere would remain in Yerushalayim until he finished consuming this almost ten percent of his produce four years of every seven-year cycle, he would see so many people involved in sacred matters and would become motivated towards fear of Heaven and the study of Torah.

• *Bava Batra 21a*

## What the SAGES Say

"G-d created the *yetzer hara* (the evil inclination) and He created Torah as the antidote."

• *The Sage Rava - Bava Batra 16a*

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## PATH OF PENITENCE

**From: Shiri**

Dear Rabbi,

*It is now the month of Elul, a special time for teshuva in preparation and anticipation for Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. But I've run into a problem. I don't know exactly how to do teshuva or what path to take. Please set me on course.*

Dear Shiri,

It's interesting that you seem to use the language of movement and travel in your description of teshuva: "run into", "path", "on course".

Just as movement is a dynamic which is generally applicable to all, but travel is highly individual, so too there are general principles of penitence, but the paths of teshuva are entirely personal.

In general, teshuva starts with introspection. Searching our beliefs, attitudes and deeds in order to determine what's in line with the will of G-d and what's off course, or worse, in the wrong direction. Once we've recognized what needs improvement or changing, we must truthfully own up to and

regret having erred, correct any damage we've caused, and make firm resolutions about not going there again.

These three common elements of teshuva are referred to in Hebrew as "vidui" – confessing/admitting, "charata" – regretting/repenting and "kabala l'atid" – making corrective resolutions for the future.

But within these general parameters, the particular path of teshuva a person takes is highly personal and known only by a person and G-d. Regarding this, the wise King Solomon wrote allegorically: "There are three things that are concealed from me...the way of a ship in the heart of the sea" (Prov.30:18). The sea has no ways, no set paths; and the way a ship travels through the sea leaves no indication of it having passed there. This can be understood as referring to teshuva. There is no set road or fixed course; and the path one takes is a very personal and private matter, which need not be observed or traversed by others.

You have to search deep within yourself to hear your own inner voice like a beacon in the night drawing you to G-d. In fact, to continue the analogy, in times of old people primarily navigated the sea, not by day when the light showed no way, but by night when, looking to heaven, they would be guided by the stars. So too, we should be guided safely through the tempestuous seas of doubt and temptation by turning our eyes Heavenward for guidance in finding our own personal path to penitence.

## WHAT'S THE RIGHT THING TO DO?

REAL-LIFE QUESTIONS OF SOCIAL AND BUSINESS ETHICS

## VISITING THE SLEEPING PATIENT

**Question:** Heading for a visit to a friend in the hospital I was informed that it was likely that he would be asleep when I arrived. Since this was the only time I had available for such a visit I wondered whether there was any point in visiting him. What is the right thing to do?

**Answer:** Of course there is a point in making a sick visit to a sleeping person.

First of all, the power of prayer at his bedside is still a con-

sideration even if you cannot converse with him.

While the moral support provided by a visit to the sick is not provided while he is asleep, you must take into account how he will feel when he awakes and is told that you honored him with a visit.

There is even a case to be made for visiting someone who is in a coma or considered a "vegetable" since the *halacha* does not distinguish between one patient and another in commanding us to visit the sick.

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## AN OFFER YOU CAN REFUSE

Avi is a Jerusalem cab driver who has a regular passenger whom he refers to as his “special mitzvah”. Almost every day he transports a totally blind youngster from his home in Tel Aviv to a special school for the sightless in Jerusalem.

A very special relationship has developed between the youngster and the cabbie who treats him like his own child.

One day Avi had a rich tourist for a passenger who was so impressed with the kindness shown by the cabbie that he

made him an offer he was sure could not be refused.

“I have \$10,000 here in my pocket,” he said, “which I am prepared to give you if you sell me the merit of your mitzvah in dealing with this child.”

To his surprise Avi, a non-observant Jew with a Jewish heart, informed him that for even a million dollars he would not give up the merit of this mitzvah, which he saw as his passport to Gan Eden.

### PARSHA INSIGHTS

*continued from page one*

Adams was busy photographing a moonrise in New Mexico, the sun was setting on an entire generation. The Germans had drawn a red line under the emigration of Jews from the Reich. There was to be no more emigration. The final phase had been reached. The death sentence of European Jewry had been sealed.

And where was G-d?

Judaism teaches that G-d created the world to reveal His perfection.

Given that G-d can do anything He wants, it’s logical that nothing should emerge from this wish except that which is perfect and complete in every way. Nothing in this world should exhibit any sign of lacking or deficiency. There should be no room for evil. What possible purpose could there be in His creations exhibiting seeming deficiency?

G-d’s perfection has many facets, such as His kindness, His wisdom and His justice. G-d could have chosen to reveal His perfection through any of these aspects. He chose, however, to reveal His perfection in one way only — by revealing His Oneness. And His Oneness is uniquely different from any other aspect of His perfection because, amazing as it may seem, we can understand it.

For the mind of man to fathom G-d’s kindness, His wisdom, or His justice is impossible. For example, when we talk of the wisest person in existence, we mean that no one is wiser; however, theoretically more wisdom could exist of which that person was unaware. G-d’s wisdom is greater not just in magnitude but in kind: G-d’s wisdom is not just the greatest wisdom that exists, but it is impossible for any wisdom to exist of which He is ignorant. Our concept of wisdom is relative, and G-d’s wisdom is absolute. Thus, we cannot fathom His perfection through His wisdom, nor His kindness, nor His justice, nor any other attribute that He possesses.

With one exception.

G-d’s Oneness is different. It is unique among the other aspects of His perfection because we *can* understand it.

When we say that G-d is not two, we have defined exactly His Oneness — that there is no existence, no other power, nothing, except for Him. *That* we can understand. The negative defines precisely the positive. It’s like all the information of a print being carried in the film. Even if viewing the “print” is beyond human capacity, the negative defines exactly the positive. Only G-d’s Oneness can be revealed through its negative counterpart. For to understand, say, His wisdom by its opposite — saying that He is not foolish — is obviously absurd.

Since G-d’s will was to reveal His perfection, it follows that the perceiver of that perfection, man, must be able to grasp that revelation. Finite man must be able to comprehend something infinite. Since G-d chose to reveal His perfection through His Oneness, and we can only perceive that Oneness through its opposite, there must exist in this world the opposite of His Oneness — namely evil.

Through the existence of evil man can grasp G-d’s Oneness.

But this is no mere spectator sport. G-d gave the Jewish People the task of eradicating evil from the world — or more precisely revealing His Unity — by performing a set of spiritual tasks known as the *mitzvot*. Every mitzvah (commandment) has the power to reveal a little more of G-d’s Oneness in the world. It’s like a dirty window through which the light cannot penetrate. The light itself is in no way diminished by the dirty window. It’s just that the light cannot penetrate the dirt. G-d’s Oneness is not diminished in any way by the existence of evil. It is just obscured. Every mitzvah cleans away a little of the dirt from the window, until the light shines undimmed.

One day G-d will show us His utter dominion over all that exists, and our perception of this Oneness in its most complete form will come from having been the agents through which G-d’s Oneness was revealed.

• Source: Based on the *Da’at Tevunot of the Ramchal*