

PARSHA INSIGHTS

THE HOMECOMING

“When you come to the Land...” (13:17)

One of the recurring problems of *Chol HaMoed* is where to take the children for a ‘*tiyul*’ – a family holiday outing.

This Pesach we traveled *Derech HaAvot* — the Path of the Fathers — a section of what used to be the Roman Road linking Jerusalem and Hebron. Along its route are *mikva’ot* – ritual baths — that historians surmise were used by the *olei regel* pilgrims on their way to the Holy Temple.

This part of Eretz Yisrael, the Gush Etzion bloc, however, has historical echoes from the more recent past as well.

On May 13, 1948, while attacking the settlements of the Etzion bloc, Arabs massacred the entire population of the Kfar Etzion settlement. They murdered 127 souls in cold blood. Only three men and one woman survived.

For the next 19 years the survivors and their children would gather every year on a hilltop in Jerusalem to gaze out towards Gush Etzion. The most identifiable landmark was a huge 700 year-old oak tree that pierced the skyline. That tree was once the meeting point of the four kibbutzim of the bloc. The tree became a symbol of what was and what might be again.

Indeed, today the population of the Etzion bloc numbers more than 65,000. And the Lone Tree is a tourist attraction that symbolizes its strength, its rootedness and its permanence.

Or it should.

On our trip, however, the oak tree was showing distinct signs of its age and needed the support of several sturdy steel beams together with concrete filling in the

branches themselves. Not exactly the symbol of vigorous strength and permanence that it is intended to symbolize.

As I looked at the Oak and gazed at the neat beautiful houses in this picture-perfect spot, I felt uneasy. There’s a sense of isolation here; a kind of “never-never world” unreality.

The settler community in Eretz Yisrael finds itself increasingly marginalized, in a State more and more isolated in the world community.

Those perfectly manicured lawns looked no more permanent to me than those of Yamit in the Sinai Peninsula or Gush Katif in Gaza. The garden sprinklers in those ghost-towns are now ripped out and rusting, while the desert sands have long-since reclaimed their turf.

What will become of the Lone Tree?

In this week’s portion the Torah uses the phrase, “When you come to the Land” (25:2).

More accurately it seems that the Torah should have said, “When you go to the Land”. Why does the Torah say *coming* as opposed to *going*?

The true home of the Jewish People is — and only ever will be — Eretz Yisrael, because it is the root of their souls.

Any journey to Eretz Yisrael is always a ‘homecoming.’

I came into the world in London but I was born in Eretz Yisrael.

No one knows the date of the fulfilment of that promise of our eventual homecoming. But that homecoming will inevitably arrive, whether or not the Lone Tree is around to greet it.

PARSHA OVERVIEW

The Torah prohibits normal farming of the Land of Israel every seven years. This “Shabbat” for the Land is called “*shemita*”. The year 5768 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. G-d 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.

TALMUD Tips

ADVICE FOR LIFE

Based on the Talmudic Sages found in the seven pages of the Talmud studied each week in the Daf Yomi cycle

ROSH HASHANA 2 - 8

“One who says: *I donate this Selah (a certain amount of money) to charity in order that my ill child will live, or in order that I will merit life in the World-to-Come, is a completely righteous tzaddik.*”

This *beraita* is taught on our *daf*, but at first glance seems difficult to understand. Why should the fulfillment of a single mitzvah of *tzedaka* — as important as this is — bestow the title of “completely righteous” (*tzaddik gamur*)? What about taking into account all other actions of the person in his success in observing the rest of the *mitzvot* as well?

Rashi’s commentary is brief and intriguing: “If he does this often (gives charity)”. But the question still stands: Why this mitzvah — even if done often — has enough merit to consider the person a *tzaddik gamur*?

I’ve heard from a great Rabbi in Jerusalem that Rashi’s few words are coming to answer the first question of why doing this particular mitzvah is enough to consider a person completely righteous. A person in need who prays to G-d and even offers to help others in need at every possible opportunity demonstrates that he recognizes G-d as the true Source all one’s needs — an indication that the giving person is completely righteous.

• Rosh Hashana 4a

Another question is raised on this same *beraita* by the commentaries. How is stipulating that one is giving charity in order to receive reward an act of a *tzaddik gamur*? Aren’t we taught in a *mishna* that “One should not be like servants who serve the Master (G-d) in order to receive reward”? (*Pirkei Avot 1:3*)

Many answers are offered, such as the following. The *mishna* in *Avot* refers to people who are upset and regretful at having given the charity if it turns out that their request was not fulfilled to their satisfaction. Our *gemara*, however, is speaking about the typical Jewish person who is thrilled with having fulfilled the mitzvah of charity in any event, and even if he ends up suffering, he will not think that G-d was “unfair” but will realize that he deserved the outcome for his own benefit (see Rashi and *Tosefot*).

• Rosh Hashana 4a

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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 sonu ish es amiso* — 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 Beis 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 the L-rd your G-d who took you out of Egypt." Rashi explains that just as G-d discerned in Egypt between those who were firstborn and those who were not, so too will G-d 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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Abarbanel

ON PARSHAT BEHAR

By Rabbi Pinchas Kasnett

This Parsha begins with the words, “And G-d spoke to Moshe at Mt. Sinai”. The narrative then proceeds to a discussion of the requirement to refrain from all agricultural activity in the Land of Israel every seven years. The commentaries are puzzled by the unusual reference to Mt. Sinai only in regard to this mitzvah since *all* of the *mitzvot* were given at Mt. Sinai.

Abarbanel explains that even though Moshe received all the commandments at Mt. Sinai, he did not teach all of them to the people at the same time. Rather, he was instructed by G-d prophetically when to teach particular commandments.

When Moshe first descended from Mt. Sinai he was confronted by the tragedy of the idolatry of the golden calf. In order to rebuild the spiritual level of the nation, the emphasis of the Torah narratives for the rest of the Book of Exodus and the first several *parshiot* of the Book of Leviticus is on the spiritual purification of the nation, focusing on the construction and services of the Tabernacle, which represents the epitome of the pure spiritual relationship between G-d

and the Jewish People, as well as numerous commandments focusing on the spiritual elevation of the people. As a result, G-d speaks to Moshe in the Tent of Meeting in the Tabernacle itself.

Once the solid foundation of sanctity has been rebuilt from its source in the Tent of Meeting or Tabernacle, the Torah can then again refer to Mt. Sinai, the original source of all the commandments. The ultimate relationship between G-d and the Jewish People can only be brought to fruition in the Land of Israel. However, the Torah makes it abundantly clear that only when the nation has been purged of its idolatrous and heretical past through its forty-year experience with the Tabernacle in the desert can it merit the privilege of dwelling in the Land of Israel. It is in the Land of Israel that the Jewish People are given the opportunity to demonstrate to the entire world their faith and trust in G-d as the ultimate source of our material welfare by refraining from agricultural activities every seven years.

LOVE OF THE LAND

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

A BUILDING FOR THE HEREAFTER

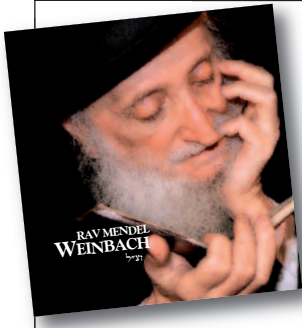
“I bought this building so that when Mashiach comes, and we have a revival of the dead, I will have a home in Jerusalem. And so, I want the building to remain in our possession.”

Thus wrote a Turkish rabbi over 400 years ago in his will,



regarding a building he had purchased in what is now known as the Armenian Quarter of Jerusalem and is adjacent to a church. Two hundred years ago there was family litigation about this property and the will was cited as proof of the family's ownership that is intact to this very day.

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RECONNECTING WITH OLD FRIENDS

From: Odelia

Dear Rabbi,

I have been religious now for several years. Lately, I have felt an urge to reconnect with some old friends of mine from before I became religious. I'm not sure why this is, and whether it's a good thing or not. On the one hand, I feel that I'm in a good place religiously speaking. On the other hand, I'm concerned that I may be influenced in ways which might not be good for me. Do you have any advice that might help me understand why I'm experiencing these feelings and what I should do about meeting up with them?

Dear Odelia,

Let me assure you that it's perfectly normal and very common for people such as yourself to want to reconnect with old friends sometime after you've stabilized your path of religious observance.

A main reason for this is that during the initial stages of becoming religious, most people need to make a break from old places, activities and friends which often hinder one's *teshuva*. However, after stabilizing one's self in a religious lifestyle, most people want and need to make peace with their past in order to bridge that past to their present and future.

For obvious reasons this is often triggered by associations which may include music, the season, or a visit back home.

As long as you feel that your interest in reconnecting is coming from a place of strength and stability – of serene fulfillment in your path — then it's alright to meet up with certain old friends. Of course this requires discretion. A person who you know to have a strong influence on you, or for

whom you have special feelings, and who might thereby draw you into unacceptable scenarios should be avoided.

That being said, you can contact your friends about getting together. Keep in mind that even if they know you're now religious they probably don't fully appreciate what that means, and you should spell out in advance in a warm and friendly way how kosher, Shabbat and physical contact are going to have a bearing on your gathering.

Choosing an appropriate setting for the reunion is very important. This is going to depend on who and how many friends are meeting up. But the general rule of thumb is to be sure that if your friends are still living the same basic lifestyle as in the past, you have to be careful to avoid the types of places and activities that would cause them to unwittingly compromise your new values and practices.

As far as the topic of conversation goes, it's natural to catch up on what everyone's been doing since you were last in contact, what they're doing now, and what people's plans are for the future. Even if some of this involves things which aren't entirely in keeping with the Torah, that's okay. Be patient, understanding and non-judgmental. Had you not become religious, you'd probably be much like your friends are now.

Regarding conversation about the path you've chosen, use the opportunity to share the beauty of Judaism with others who may not yet appreciate it; but you must avoid appearing in their eyes to be dogmatic or fanatical. Just be the pleasant and non-confrontational "you" that you really are. And be sensitive not to dwell on the subject of Judaism or religion more than people have patience for.

With the right approach and framework, these reunions are usually very beneficial. Even though the old connection may no longer be there, and the get-together is not repeated (which is often the case), your friends get a positive exposure to Judaism, while you gain a greater self-awareness of the progress you've made. Also, your being exposed to the relatively fresh perspective of your friends should be a refresher for you, while any challenges that result from your sharing with them should serve as incentive for your further growth.

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THE SHEMONEH ESREI

1. The site of the Holy Temple is the place where all prayers ascend to Heaven. Accordingly, one should direct his prayers towards Jerusalem, the Beit Hamikdash (Temple) and specifically the Holy of Holies.

2. When saying the name of G-d, which is pronounced Adonai, one should have in mind that G-d is the Master of all, Who always was, is, and will be.

3. When saying the name *Elo-heinu* or *Elo-hei*, one should have in mind that G-d's powers and abilities are unlimited.

4. Prayer was instituted in place of the Temple service, and just as the Temple service required full concentration, so too one must fully concentrate on the words of prayer. Ideally, one should focus on the meaning of each word of the entire Shemoneh Esrei. If this is too difficult, then one should try to concentrate at least on the first blessing. In fact, in the times of the Talmud, if one failed to have proper concentration for the first blessing he would have to repeat it. Today, one does not repeat the first blessing in such a case, out of concern that he will not concentrate the second time either.

5. At the word "blessed" one bows forward at the knees; at the word "You" one's head and body are bent forward; finally, the body and head are straightened when G-d's name is said.

We bow at the beginning of the first blessing when we say the phrase, "Blessed are you, G-d". There are several reasons given for this practice:

1) We bow before G-d, just as one bows before a mortal king, expressing our humility and subjugation. Although, unlike a mortal king, G-d does not really need our honor, since we show people of stature proper respect, relating to G-d too casually would constitute a slight to His honor.

2) Another reason given for bowing towards the earth is to remind us that we come from earth and we will one day return to the earth. This humbling thought should help a person to focus on what is truly important and pray accordingly.

3) Yet another reason for bowing is to symbolize the drawing down of Divine flow and blessing from the higher spiritual realms into this world. In fact, the word "blessing" connotes drawing down and increasing.

The phrase — "Blessed are You, G-d" — has posed a great difficulty for many of the early commentators because its most simple meaning seems to imply that we are giving G-d a blessing, something which is clearly impossible when referring to G-d. For this reason many explain that the intent of the above phrase is to praise G-d as the Source of all blessing.

@ OHR *Profiles of Ohr Somayach Staff, Alumni and Students*

LIKE "IRON-MAN" TO A MAGNET

Rabbi Larry Shain - Beit Midrash Alumnus

Rabbi Larry Shain is an Ohr Somayach alumnus from the late 1970's who maintained his ties to Ohr Somayach and helped build the Ohr Somayach network of outreach programs in his native South Africa. He grew up in the coastal town of Durban, South Africa and was active in a Jewish youth movement throughout high school which provided him with an important sense of familiarity with Judaism.

He spent one of his high school years as an exchange student in the US. Because he was disconnected from Judaism during that year, he decided to reconnect by visiting Israel on his way "home" to South Africa. He accepted an offer to simply "eat and sleep" at Ohr Somayach in Jerusalem and, as they say, the rest is history. After several years in Yeshiva and two years in *kollel* in Zichron Yaakov, he returned to South Africa in 1984 and spent the next 30 years helping to build Ohr Somayach into a vibrant educational force there.

He recently returned to Israel and is currently living in Ramat Beit Shemesh where he has started a small yeshiva

which combines learning and vocational training. When he moved from Jerusalem to Zichron Yaakov to begin his stay in *kollel*, he had an experience which helped to serve as the magnet to draw him back to Israel after his many years in South Africa.



He arrived at the old train station in Jerusalem, burdened by numerous suitcases (and two black hats on his head to keep a hand free) on a hot day only to be told that there were no trains due to a strike. He started ranting in English about everything Israeli as the cab drove him back to Bayit Vegan. The bare-headed, non-observant cab driver got the gist of his rant and

calmed him down, "This is also for the best. Who knows what G-d has in mind for you? He knows better than you, so don't be upset." As Larry puts it, "We were all soon laughing — only in Israel not only does your non-observant co-religionist calm you with '*divrei mussar*', but he doesn't see any irony in it at all and offers the words innocently and sincerely."

That's when he knew that he could never leave for good.