

O H R N E T

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PARSHA INSIGHTS

Behar

YES, WE HAVE SOME BANANAS!

“I will ordain My blessing for you in the sixth year...” (13-17)

Seven years ago, at the end of the last Shemita cycle, a secular farmer whose produce is bananas decided that he would undertake to keep Shemita.

He approached the “Keren HaShvi’it” organization for assistance, and they stipulated that he would be registered in their program if he would also undertake to personally observe Shabbat throughout the Shemita year.

He agreed and the organization undertook to cover his farming expenses, in return for which all the produce would become the property of “Otzar Beit Din” and would be distributed in full accordance with Jewish law.

And then a major spell of cold weather gripped the Land of Israel for over 2 weeks.

Bananas don’t like cold.

When bananas get hit with frost while still growing, they turn brown and become rock-solid hard.

The banana farmer knew he was in deep trouble when the relentless cold hadn’t let up for over a week. As his orchard was some distance from where he lived, he hadn’t seen the damage with his own eyes. His neighboring farmers, whose orchards bordered his, started to call him, complaining bitterly that their entire banana crop had been destroyed by the frost.

He decided it was time to inspect the damage, no matter how painful it might be.

He drove up close to Tiveria (Tiberias) to inspect his orchard. Passing by his neighbors’ orchards, one after another, he was overwhelmed by the damage.

Not a single fruit had survived; no tree was spared. All the bananas were brown, hard as rock. He could only imagine how bad his trees must be.

When he finally got to his orchard, he couldn’t believe his eyes. Not one of his bananas was brown. It was as though his orchard was in a totally different place. His orchard bordered those of his neighbors, but not a single tree of his was struck by the frost.

It was as if a protective wall kept the damage away. At first he thought he was imagining it, but as he moved from one section of his orchard to another, he realized that “more than the farmer keeps the Shemita, the Shemita keeps the farmer”.

He immediately called his contacts at Keren HaShvi’it and yelled into the phone, “Karah nes!, karah nes!” “There’s been a miracle! There’s been a miracle!”

A miraculous modern-day manifestation of “I will ordain My blessing for you in the sixth year...”

As a result of this miracle, his neighbors who previously refused to keep Shemita turned to the Keren and decided they were now ready to commit to Shemita observance.

“Very nice”, I can hear you say, “but did everyone who kept Shemita experience a miracle? Did everyone walk away without the loss of a shekel?”

The Chazon Ish (*Shevi’it 18:4*) says that the Torah isn’t guaranteeing here that everyone is going to prosper despite the restrictions of Shemita. Rather the farmers who observe these laws will have a *general blessing*. As always, and not just in the case of Shemita, the sins of the individuals can cause them to forfeit that blessing, as might also their neighbors’ actions.

The Jewish People are one. What *any* one of us does affects every one of us.

continued on page seven

KETUVOT 100 - 112

“Don’t eulogize me in the small cities.”

Rebbi (Rabbi Yehuda Hanasi) told this to the great Sages of his generation before his passing. However, his reasoning for this request was not initially clear. The Sages first thought that Rebbi, being humble, did not want to burden the people, since if there were eulogies in the towns, the people living in the nearby villages would travel to the small cities. However, when the Sages saw that there were eulogies in the large cities and everyone came there, even from the smaller cities and villages, the Sages understood that Rebbi’s intent was “for honor”.

The Maharsha explains that Rebbi requested this “honor” despite his being the most humble person of his generation. “After Rebbi passed, humility ceased” states the *gemara* in Sota (49a). But he didn’t want people to honor him; rather he wanted that they show honor to the Torah. Requesting no eulogies in the smaller cities meant that everyone would come together to honor the Torah in a great manner. He could forgo his own honor but could not forgo the honor of the Torah. In fact, this request shows another interpretation of the *gemara* that “after Rebbi passed, humility ceased” — i.e. he nullified his own personal, humble desire to not bother others in order that the Torah be honored properly by everyone gathering together to hear the Torah-filled eulogies from the greatest Torah scholars.

• Ketuvot 103b

“A judge who accepts a bribe feels so ‘close’ to the giver that he sees himself as the giver, and a person cannot see anything wrong with himself.”

This is the explanation that Rava gives on our *daf* as the reason why a judge may not take a payment in any manner from a litigant, even to rule that the guilty party is guilty and the innocent is innocent.

He adds that the word in the Torah indicates this reason for his identifying with the giver. The Hebrew word “*shochad*” — bribe — can be understood as “*shehu chad*”, “that he is one” with the bribe-giver. The giver and the receiver are now as if they share one heart. Once he accepts a payment he can no longer think objectively in judgment, just as he cannot be objective about himself. This is so even if his intent is to judge according to the truth (Rashi).

The *gemara* on *amud aleph* teaches that a judge named Karna would take payment from both parties in advance to compensate him for the clear loss of income he incurred from lack of involvement in his wine “quality control” occupation in order to judge a case. (See Shulchan Aruch Choshen Mishpat 9:4 for more details regarding a judge’s receiving payment.)

• Ketuvot 105b

continued on page ten

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 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.

PARSHA Q&A ?

Behar

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 Behar'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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PARSHA Q&A ?

Bechukotai

1. To what do the words “*bechukosai telechu*” (walk in My statutes) refer?
2. When is rain “in its season”?
3. What is the blessing of “*v’achaltem lachmechem l’sova*” (and you shall eat your bread to satisfaction)?
4. What is meant by the verse “and a sword will not pass through your land”?
5. Mathematically, if five Jewish soldiers can defeat 100 enemy soldiers, how many enemy soldiers should 100 Jewish soldiers be able to defeat?
6. How much is ‘*revava*’?
7. Which “progression” of seven transgressions are taught in Chapter 26, and why in that particular order?
8. What is one benefit which the Jewish People derive from the Land of Israel’s state of ruin?
9. What was the duration of the Babylonian exile and why that particular number?
10. How many years did the Jewish People sin in Israel up till the time the northern tribes were exiled?
11. In verse 26:42, the name Yaakov is written with an extra “*vav*”. From whom did Yaakov receive this extra letter and why?
12. What positive element is implied by the words “and I will bring them into the land of their enemies”?
13. In verse 26:42, why is the word “remember” not used in connection with the name of Yitzchak?
14. Why does the Torah say in 26:46 “*Toros*” (plural) and not “Torah” (singular)?
15. What happens when a poor person dedicates the value of a man to the *Beit Hamikdash* and doesn’t have sufficient funds to fulfill his vow?
16. If a person says, “The leg of this animal shall be an *olah* offering”, the animal is sold and sacrificed as an *olah* offering. What is the status of the money received for the animal?
17. If a person dedicates his ancestral field to the *Beit Hamikdash* and fails to redeem it before *Yovel* what happens to the field?
18. Where must “*Ma’aser Sheini*” be eaten?
19. When a person redeems “*Ma’aser Sheini*” what happens to the food? What happens to the redemption money?
20. How does a person tithe his animals?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to Bechukotai’s Questions!

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

1. 26:3 - Laboring in Torah learning.
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 on their way to a different country.
5. 26:8 - Two thousand.
6. 26:8 - Ten thousand.
7. 26:14,15 - Not studying Torah, not observing *mitzvot*, rejecting those who observe *mitzvot*, hating Sages, preventing others from observing *mitzvot*, denying that G-d gave the *mitzvos*, denying the existence of G-d. They are listed in this order because each transgression leads to the next.
8. 26:32 - No enemy nation will be able to settle in the Land of Israel.
9. 26:35 - 70 years. Because the Jewish People violated 70 *Shemita* and *Yovel* years.
10. 26:35 - 390 years.
11. 26:42 - In five places in the Torah Yaakov’s name is written with an extra “*vav*” and in five places the name Eliyahu is missing a “*vav*.” Yaakov took these *vavs* as a pledge that Eliyahu will one day come and announce the redemption of Yaakov’s children.
12. 26:41 - G-d Himself, so to speak, will bring them into their enemies’ land. This means that even when the Jews are in exile, G-d will supply them with leaders who inspire them to keep the Torah. This guards the Jews from assimilating into the host culture.
13. 26:42 - Because the image of Yitzchak’s ashes (who was prepared to be brought as an offering) upon the altar is always before G-d.
14. 26:46 - To teach that both the Written Torah and the Oral Torah were given to Moshe on *Har Sinai*.
15. 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.
16. 27:9 - The money is ‘*chullin*,’ meaning it does not have ‘holy’ status, except for the value of the animal’s leg which does have ‘holy’ status.
17. 27:16 - It becomes the property of the *kohanim* who are on rotation at the beginning of *Yovel*.
18. 27:30 - In Jerusalem.
19. 27:31 - The food becomes permissible to him outside of Jerusalem. The redemption money must be brought to Jerusalem and used to purchase food to be eaten there.
20. 27:32 - He passes them through a door individually and every tenth animal he marks with a rod smeared with red dye.

Albarbanel

ON THE PARSHA

By Rabbi Pinchas Kasnett

Behar

Albarbanel offers three different perspectives on the meaning of the *mitzvot* of Shemita and Yovel which are the main focus of the beginning of this week's Torah portion.

The first perspective focuses on the Creation and the giving of the Torah. The observance of Shemita, the refraining from agricultural activities every seventh year, hints at G-d's overall Creation. Just as the seventh day is the day of rest for the week, symbolizing G-d's "resting" after six days of Creation, the seventh year is a day of rest for the Land. Just as the word "Shabbat" is used for the seventh day of the original Creation, so too the word "Shabbat" is used repeatedly in reference to every seventh year. However, in reference to the Yovel year, the fiftieth year that follows seven cycles of seven years each, the word "Shabbat" is not used. That year is not meant to remind us of the nature of the Creation, but rather to remind us of the giving of the Torah at Sinai which took place on the fiftieth day after the Exodus from Egypt. Just as the Torah instructs us to count seven weeks and to then sanctify the fiftieth day, we are also instructed to count seven cycles of years. Since the giving of the Torah was accompanied by the blowing of the shofar, so too the Yovel year is heralded by the blowing of the shofar. Shemita reminds us of the nature of the Creation in general, while Yovel reminds us of G-d's sanctification of the Jewish nation through the giving of the Torah.

The second perspective focuses on Shemita and Yovel as hints to the various stages and requirements of the life of the individual. Our years are finite; man is granted seven decades of life. In his first decade the individual is maturing and is not responsible for his spiritual development. For the next five decades he is building his life. He is, in a sense, planting, cultivating, pruning and gathering the results of his efforts. However in his "Shemita year", the last decade of his life, his focus on his material existence must give away to an emphasis on spiritual growth. Observance of the Shemita year enables us to focus on the purpose of our lives. Additionally, another lesson can be learned from the requirement that even though we don't work the land, the produce which grows by itself must be left to whatever people or animals find it. This is a hint that after we die, the fruits of our labors might end up being enjoyed by those who had no part in their creation. The Yovel year also hints at the next stage after the fifty years of physical toil. Through the Torah's command to count and keep track of the years of each fifty-year cycle, we are also being taught to keep track of our years, and to dedicate that final decade to spiritual accomplishments. When the Torah tells

us to proclaim freedom throughout the land and to return each man to his family, it is telling us to free ourselves from the demands of physical accomplishment and to return to our true family — our spiritual roots.

The third perspective focuses on Shemita and Yovel as hints to the fundamental impermanence of the entire physical universe itself. The word "Yovel" is rooted in the Hebrew words for deterioration and destruction. Although the evidence for physical impermanence is readily available in our daily experience, we may be tempted to think that the celestial bodies are not subject to decay or destruction. However, only G-d's existence is permanent. The six days of Creation and the six years of the seven-year cycle also refer to the six thousand years of physical existence which will be followed by a millennium of desolation. Shemita and Yovel are hints to the two different stages of this destruction. In the first stage the earth and the other celestial bodies will remain intact. However the earth will be totally desolate. In reference to Shemita the Torah states that the seventh year will be a year of rest for the Land. This is a reference to the seventh millennium in which the Land will be totally unproductive. The Yovel year, however, refers to a total destruction of the entire physical universe that will take place after seven cycles of seven millennia, or in the fifty-thousandth year. The general principle of this third perspective is that just as the physical universe was created from absolute nothingness, so too it will be utterly destroyed and returned to the same absolute nothingness. This explains why we learn that Shemita and Yovel are so important that the failure to observe them properly is what caused the exile of the people from the Land of Israel. In essence, as the Ramban also mentions, one who heretically denies this concept of the eventual absolute destruction of all physical existence is essentially denying the concepts of Creation *ex nihilo* and the existence of a non-physical World-to-Come.

Bechukotai

At the end of the long series of curses that are predicted to befall the Jewish nation if it fails to keep the Torah, a curious, seemingly self-contradictory paragraph appears: "Then they will confess their sin and the sin of their forefathers, for the treachery with which they betrayed Me, and also for having behaved toward Me with casualness. I, too, will behave toward them with casualness and I will bring them into the land of their enemies — perhaps then their unfeeling heart will be humbled and then they will gain appeasement for their sin." (Vayikra 26:40-41) Why is G-d

continued on page ten

TORAH PRAYER

From: Gabe

*Dear Rabbi,
Since the prayers were instituted by the rabbis of the Talmud, before that time did Jews not pray? Or if they did, how did they pray?*

Dear Gabe,

Before the Sages instituted the formal prayers we know today, Jews prayed according to the Torah. What does this mean?

For one, when discussing the basis for the rabbinic requirement to pray, the Talmud (*Berachot 26a*) says that the Sages patterned their prayers after the Torah-mandated sacrifices — morning, afternoon and evening (since the afternoon offering was completed in the evening). In fact, in the absence of the Temple, the prayers are described as being in lieu of the sacrifices. Accordingly, before the formal rabbinic prayers, Jews got close to G-d through the venue of personal or communal sacrifices. Indeed, the word for sacrifice in Hebrew is “*korban*” which implies “getting close”.

Secondly, another source mentioned in the Talmud (*Ber. 26a*) as a basis for the formal rabbinic prayers is the example of the forefathers Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov. Avraham is described as standing before G-d in prayer early in the morning (Gen. 19); Yitzchak is described as communing in the fields in the late afternoon (Gen. 24); and Yaakov’s quintessential connection to G-d occurred at night (Gen. 28).

Even though their service was individualized, their prayers set a precedent for personalized prayer, which was followed by their descendents until eventually becoming the basis for the standardized rabbinic prayers.

Lastly, even though the Torah does not prescribe a daily requirement to pray specifically-worded prayers, according to the Rambam there is still a Torah requirement to pray to G-d in one’s own words at least once a day (Laws of Prayer 1:3). Most other commentators differ (See Mishna Berura 106:2:4). But even they agree that the Torah requires calling out to G-d for help in time of individual crisis or during times of danger for the community, such as times of famine or war (See Rambam, Laws of Fasting 1:1 on Num. 10:9). Thus, even before the Sages instituted the formal prayers, Jews nevertheless fulfilled the mitzvah of prayer, either personally or in these types of circumstances, respectively.

One very important point that’s worth making in the context of this discussion is that since individualized, personal prayers were practiced at least since the times of the forefathers, the formalized, rabbinically required prayers were not intended to, and should not, replace personal prayer. Rather, they were instituted in addition to, or parallel to, one’s personal prayers that develop and maintain a highly personal relationship with G-d. In truth, the two forms of prayer actually complement each other and eventually, if one works hard at it, can be merged and fused into one uplifting and inspiring connection with G-d.

LOVE OF THE LAND

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

TEL RECHOV — BEE HONEY IN THE LAND OF MILK AND HONEY

Although the Torah’s description of Eretz Israel as the “Land of Milk and Honey” was a reference to the honey-like date fruit rather than bee honey, it may well be that honey-making from beehives was once a local industry.



Recent archeological excavations at Tel Rechov in the Bet She’an Valley uncovered the oldest known beehive colony in the Middle East. According to the archeologists these beehives date back close to 3,000 years.

PARSHA INSIGHTS

Bechukotai

HIDDEN MIRACLES

“If you walk in My laws...” (26:3)

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 that 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 even when they don't eat bacon-cheeseburgers. They die younger.

A person gives *tzedaka* and becomes rich. You don't see that he became rich because he gave *tzedaka*. There are plenty of rich people who don't give *tzedaka* and yet become rich by receiving an inheritance or winning the sweepstake. The hidden miracle is that for someone who 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. Therefore, 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

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Bechukotai

The Torah promises prosperity for the Jewish People if they follow G-d'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 a detailed description of *Erachin* – the process by which someone can make a vow to give to the *Beit Hamikdash* the equivalent monetary value of a person, an animal, or property.

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IN THEIR MERIT

Around this time of year many visit the resting place of the holy Tana Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai. Countless stories of the great miracles people testify having experienced after praying there are well known. However, one may wonder what is so special about praying at the grave of a *tzaddik* (righteous person)? Doesn't G-d hear all prayers from wherever a person may be?

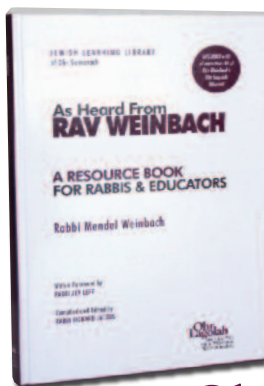
The Talmud relates that Rabbi Chama asked, "Why was Moshe's grave hidden from mankind?" He answered that it was known to G-d that the Temple would one day be destroyed and that the Jews would be exiled from their Land. If the location of Moshe's grave was known, then the Jews of that time would be able to go to his burial place and cry and plead with Moshe, "Moshe our teacher, please stand in prayer for our sake." Moshe would then stand in prayer and cancel the Heavenly decree of exile. The Talmud continues, "The righteous are dearer to G-d in their death than in their lifetime."

The obvious question must be asked: "Why can't the Jewish People ask Moshe to pray for the exile to end without actually being at his burial place? The answer is that there is a special connection between the soul of a *tzaddik* and the

place where he is buried. In fact, the *nefesh*, the lowest part of the soul, actually stays attached to the body even after it has decomposed. (Arizal)

Thus, when one goes to the grave of a *tzaddik*, according to Jewish law one is permitted to request that the soul of the *tzaddik* pray on his behalf. In the case of *tzaddikim* like Rabbi Shimon, Rabbi Meir and the like, just as we see that their prayers and blessings bore fruit in their lifetimes, so too in their death their prayers continue to bear fruit. When visiting the grave of the righteous one should also make sure to remember to be focused on strengthening his faith in G-d and to do *teshuva*. He should also beseech G-d to answer his prayers in the merit of the righteous who were perfect in their Divine service. The merit of the holy resting place, together with the prayers of the souls buried there, as well as the *teshuva* and repentance of the individual, can cause great miracles to be manifest.

Based on the above we can understand why so many people visit the gravesites of the righteous, in particular that of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai. The Zohar singles him out from all of the righteous, commenting that on his day of celebration ("*hillula*") all should gather together and join in the festivities.



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SHIMON YAAKOV LAXER

**Age: 24 - Born: Montreal, Canada - Raised: Charlotte, NC
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If I were to give you a multiple choice question: “What is the national sport of Canada?” a) Hockey, b) Football, c) Lacrosse, d) Dog sled racing, what would your choice be?

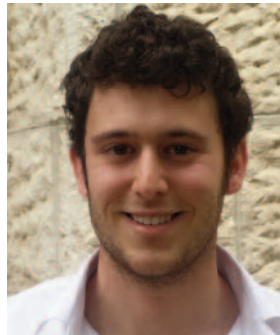
I would have chosen “a”. Everyone knows that hockey is Canada’s national sport. Kids in Canada start playing when they’re old enough to skate while holding a stick on the abundant waters of the frozen north.

You wouldn’t be wrong if you chose “Hockey”. But, according to Shimon Yaakov Laxer, the original and still king of the Canadian sports world is Lacrosse — an ancient Northern American Indian game played with wooden sticks with small nets at the sticks’ ends and a ball made of the same hard material as a hockey puck. It is a violent game with legal body checks, rock-like projectiles and played with minimal body protection. It’s something like ice hockey played outdoors on dirt or in hockey rinks without skates.

Shimon Yaakov’s parents (his father is an orthopedic surgeon and his mother is a pediatric dentist) moved to Charlotte, North Carolina when he was five years old. While in Canada, Shimon Yaakov never played lacrosse. He also never played it before he was in High School. But, when the lacrosse coach at his high school in Charlotte discovered that he was originally from Montreal — the capital city of lacrosse in Canada — he was invited to try out for the team. Perhaps the air he first

breathed changed his DNA; he was a natural and made the varsity squad that earned the State Championship that year. He still plays in a pick-up league in Jerusalem.

Although his parents had sent him to a Jewish primary school in Charlotte, he was not convinced of the truth of Torah. In his second year of college he typed “Jewish history” into a search engine and was directed to Paul Johnson’s “History of the Jews”. “I was blown away by what we went through”, says Shimon Yaakov. “No matter what happened, we passed on the resilience. I wanted to be part of the saga.” He started reading many more books on Jewish history and started to put on *tefillin* daily.

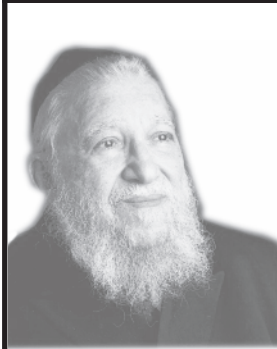


In the summer of his third year of college he got a job as a goatherd on a farm owned by a Jewish family in Illinois. While the goats were grazing, he would voraciously read books about Jews and Judaism. By his fourth year of college he was wearing a yarmulke and *tzizit*.

After graduation he came to Israel to study at Bar Ilan University. While he was there, his family’s rabbi in North Carolina (an Ohr Somayach alumnus) suggested that he drop into Ohr Somayach for some classes.

Shimon Yaakov entered the Center Program in Elul 2014. “I’m loving it” he says. “If someone told me that I could work out a *p’shat* in a *gemara* or *rishonim* I never would have believed him.” But he’s doing it now.

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Rav Bulman *zt”l*
on the
Torah Portion of the Week

Alarbanel **ON THE PARSHA** *continued from page four*

telling them that after repentance, rather than experiencing G-d's mercy, they will end up suffering an even harsher punishment?

The verse is referring to the generations of the second Beit Hamikdash. Even though the people confessed their sins, they never really changed their behavior. Besides repeating the transgressions of previous generations, they also behaved with casualness, meaning that they attributed their punishments to coincidence and happenstance rather than Divine Providence. In order to eliminate these transgressions they would be sent into the exile of Rome — “perhaps then their unfeeling heart will be humbled.” In effect, if the nation does not mend its ways absolutely, then exile will be required to achieve that goal. How long that exile will last depends on their behavior. As the verse in Isaiah states, “In its time I will hasten it.” (Isaiah 60:22) This means if they merit it, G-d will hasten the redemption. Otherwise, it will come “in its time.”

In the next paragraph the Torah returns to its prediction of the first exile which will follow the destruction of the first Beit Hamikdash: “I will remember my covenant with Jacob and also my covenant with Isaac, and also my covenant with Abraham I will remember, and I will remember the Land. The Land will be bereft of them; and it will be appeased for its sabbaticals, having become desolate of them; and they must gain appeasement for their iniquity; because they were revolted by My ordinances and because their spirit rejected My decrees.” (Vayikra 26:42-43) The exalted merit of the forefathers stands in contrast to the insult to the Land that will result from the failure to observe the years of Shemita and Yovel, when, in general, agriculture activities are forbidden. The Land will

“repay” them by becoming “desolate of them”. The verse then continues, “They must gain appeasement for their iniquity.” This is in reference to other transgressions that were not the main cause of the Babylonian exile but were present during both the first Beit Hamikdash and during the second Beit Hamikdash, and resulted in the long exile following the destruction of the second Beit Hamikdash. These included idolatry, immorality, murder, theft and desecration of the Shabbat. (Even though the idolatry of the second Beit Hamikdash period was not comparable to that of the first, it still provided fertile ground for such heretical sects as the Tzadukim, the Boethians and the early Christians, which was the most grievous of all.) Because they attached even more transgressions to those of the earlier generations, their exile would be longer and more difficult.

However, in order that we shouldn't think that this last exile will be unending, without any hope for a rebirth, the Torah states, “Despite all this, while they will be in the Land of their enemies I will not have been revolted by them nor will I have rejected them to obliterate them. I am Hashem your G-d.” (Vayikra 26:44) Even though Bnei Yisrael has broken their side of the covenant, G-d does not break His promise. This is expressed by the prophet Malachi, “I, G-d, have not changed, and you, Bnei Yisrael, have not perished.” (Malachi 3:6) Because of this, G-d says “I will remember for them the covenant of the ancients, those whom I have taken out of the land of Egypt with signs and wonders and miracles, “to be G-d unto them — I am Hashem.” (Vayikra 26:45) G-d is promising to do the same at the end of our current long exile: “Like the days of your leaving Egypt, I will show My wonders.” (Malachi 7:15)

TALMUD *Tips*

continued from page two

Rabbi Elazar said, “Anyone who lives in the Land of Israel dwells without sin.”

He learns this from a verse in Isaiah (33:24) that states, “One who lives there will not say ‘I am ill’; (because) the nation that dwells there is forgiven of sin.” The word “ill” is understood to be synonymous with sin. This statement is codified by the Rambam (Laws of Kings 5:11).

Does this really mean that just by living in Israel a person automatically and constantly has a “clean slate”? Can this be true? Numerous *Rishonim* and *Achronim* offer various approaches to help understand this teaching. One approach is that our *gemara* is speaking about a person who lives in the Land of Israel for the sake of the mitzvah, and wants to live in a place of this *kedusha* (holiness) to help prevent him from sinning. Such a person, even if he does sin, will very likely regret it and will return to G-d in *teshuvah* (repentance), thereby being free of sin (Pnei Yehoshua).

• *Ketuvot 111a*

“One who is buried in the Land of Israel is as if he is buried under the Altar.”

Rav Anan teaches that burial in the Land of Israel provides a degree of atonement, just as the Altar did, based on comparing two verses in the Torah (Deut. 32:43 and Ex. 20:22). This teaching is also cited by the Rambam (Laws of Kings 5:11).

Man was formed from a place of his atonement, the ground, as we are taught that the Altar is made from the ground. The idea that Man receives atonement from burial in the ground points to his lofty nature. Just as his non-physical soul returns in purity to the place from which it originated, so too the physical “ground” of body returns to a place of purity from which it was originally formed. (Maharsha)

• *Ketuvot 111a*