

OHR NET

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PARSHA INSIGHTS

BY RABBI YAAKOV ASHER SINCLAIR

THE KEY TO THE FOUNDATION

“If you will follow My decrees... I will walk among you; I will be a G-d unto you, and you will be a people to Me.” (3:12)

In the uplifting prayer of Hallel we say that the “stone that the builders’ ‘hated’, became the *rosh pina*.” *Rosh pina* is typically translated as “the foundation stone”, but the literal translation is “head of the corner”. The “head” of something is far from its “foundation”. Maybe we could find a better concept for “*rosh pina*” than “*foundation stone*”?

When a stonemason builds he wants cuboid stones, ones of a shape that will fit nicely into his construction. Anything else is “a stone that the builders’ hate”.

In his 12-volume *A Study of History*, British historian Arnold Toynbee describes the Jews thus: “There remains the case where victims of religious discrimination represent an extinct society which only survives as a fossil...by far the most notable is one of the fossil remnants of the Syriac

Society, the Jews.”

According to Toynbee the Jews are the “stone that the builders hated.” We don’t fit into any neatly schemed historical theory. We are a useless “fossil.”

But there’s one place in building that you don’t want, and you can’t use a regular cuboid.

When you get to the pinnacle of a building you need a keystone, a wedge-shaped stone that will lock together the rest of the stones in the edifice.

The Jewish People are that keystone, the apex of the entire building of the world.

The Jewish People, the “misfit” of society, the “fossil” of history becomes the “*rosh pina*” — its keystone.

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.

BAVA BATRA 116 - 122

A REASON FOR A GREAT YOM TOV

Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel said: There were no greater Yamim Tovim for the Jewish People than the fifteenth of Av and Yom Kippur, when the daughters of Israel would go out with white dresses that they borrowed from each other, in order not to embarrass those who were not wealthy enough to have their own.” (This was done for the purpose of finding a marriage partner, as is taught in Masechet Ta’anit.)

This *mishna* from the end of *Masechet Ta’anit* is cited in our *sugya* regarding the laws of inheritance of the Land of Israel, and on the 15th of Av permission was granted for inter-tribal marriages for those who were not part of the generation of “the ones who entered the Land”, according to Rav Yehuda in the name of Shmuel. (Rashbam)

One important lesson taught in this *mishna* is that great care was taken in order to show utmost sensitivity towards one another. Even those who had appropriate clothing borrowed from someone else, in order to avoid possibly hurting the feelings of someone who was poor and did not own an appropriate dress for the extremely joyous occasion. The greatest *Yamim Tovim* of the year. The 15th day of the month of Av, and the day of Yom Hakippurim.

The *gemara* states that the “super-*simcha*” of Yom Kippur was on account of its being a day of forgiveness (for the sin of golden calf — Rashbam), and also it was the day when the Jewish People received the second set of Tablets of the Torah, following 120 days of prayer and atonement for breaking of the First Tablets on the 17th of Tammuz. Regarding the extraordinary nature of the Yom Tov of the 15th of Av, however, the reason is not readily obvious, and the *gemara* seeks the reason for this Yom Tov. In response, six different reasons are presented by the Sages of the Talmud.

One of these reasons is offered by Rav Nachman, who said that it was “the day on which the death in the desert concluded.” The adult generation of the desert had accepted the slanderous report of the “spies” who were sent by Moshe to check out the Land of Israel before they would enter it, and were decreed from Above to die in the desert and not enter the Land. The Rashbam cites a Midrash that teaches that on the night of Tisha B’Av each year, the people would dig graves for themselves in the desert, and sleep in them, with some fifteen thousand-plus dying in these graves each year as punishment for their transgression. (This is the meaning of the words in the Torah “a day for a year”: the spies were gone for 40 days, and thus there was one day each year, on Tishba B’Av, when the lethal punishment was exacted — Rashbam).

In their 40th year in the desert, however, no one died in the graves that they had dug and slept in. They thought that they may have erred in the date, and slept again in the graves on the following night, again not dying there. They continued this procedure each night until the night of the 15th of the month, when they saw the full moon and knew it could not possibly be the 9th of Av.

And so it was that on the 15th of Av they realized that the decree of dying in the desert was no longer in effect, and they were in a state of great joy and happiness. But that was not the reason for the full extent of the tremendous *simcha* of the day, and for its being one the two greatest *Yamim Tovim* of the year, along with Yom Kippur, as the *gemara* concludes the explanation of Rav Nachman’s reason. It was not until that year and day that G-d once again began to “speak” directly with Moshe Rabbeinu, just as He had before the sin of the spies. (See Tosefot who quotes the above explanation based on the Midrash cited by Rabbeinu Shmuel — the Rashbam — which indicated that they did not die in the 40th year. Tosefot questions this explanation for a number of reasons, and maintains that they died during the final year in the desert as well.)

• Bava Batra 121

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.

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?

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?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

Behar

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.

Bechukotai

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.

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Behar

A Puzzling Reference to Mount Sinai

This Torah portion begins with the words, “And G-d spoke to Moshe at Mount 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 Mount Sinai only in regard to this mitzvah since *all* of the *mitzvot* were given at Mount Sinai.

Abarbanel explains that even though Moshe received all the commandments at Mount 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 Mount 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 Mount 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.

Bechukotai

Why the Torah Has No Mention of the World-to-Come

The Torah portion of Bechukotai begins with a description of the agricultural benefits and national security that the Jewish nation will experience in the Land of Israel if the people observe the commandments of the Torah. Abarbanel is bothered by the fact that only physical rewards relevant to our physical existence are mentioned. Why doesn't the Torah mention the most important reward for observing the commandments: the spiritual reward experienced by the soul after death in the World-to-Come.

Abarbanel relates six explanations from other commentators before stating his own answer:

Rambam: Ultimately, G-d wants us to observe the commandments without any expectation of reward. Even though the true reward is a purely spiritual one, the Torah mentions only the physical rewards since they will remove the obstacles that prevent us from serving G-d properly.

Ibn Ezra: Although the true reward is the spiritual one in the World-to-Come, it is difficult for most people to relate to this esoteric and mysterious concept. G-d mentions only the physical rewards and punishments, which are apparent to everyone.

Rabbeinu Bachya: He explains (unlike the Ibn Ezra) that the immortality of the soul and its rewards in the World-to-Come are actually an intrinsic, universal and natural aspect of human understanding. The Torah comes to teach us that reward and punishment in the physical world is actually a profound illustration of the miraculous nature of Divine Providence, an idea not normally accessible to human reason. How else can we explain that man's performance of a particular commandment can have a direct effect on weather or health?

Rabbeinu Nissim and Kuzari: The most important principle required to strengthen the commitment of the Jewish People to Torah observance is their direct experience with Divine Providence. From the beginning of history, with the exception of individuals like Avraham, even the most profound thinkers have viewed the universe as a

continued on page nine

KARET

From: Misha

Dear Rabbi,
Would you please explain the Torah punishment of “karet”?

Dear Misha,

The word *karet* means to be “cut off”. According to the classic Torah commentator Rabbeinu Bachya (Rabbi Bachya ben Asher ibn Halawa 1255-1340 (not to be confused with Rabbi Bachya ben Joseph ibn Paquda, author of *Duties of the Heart*, who lived earlier, in the first half of the eleventh century), there are three types of *karet*: one affects the body only, one affects only the soul, and another affects both.

The first category of *karet*, which affects only the body, applies primarily to otherwise righteous people who transgressed one of the serious transgressions related to *karet* such that they are cut off from this world through physical death, but their souls continue to exist and receive reward in the spiritual realm.

This premature death can occur in two ways: by cutting off one’s years, or one’s days, depending on the age of the person when he committed the offence. Since *karet* is associated with dying before the age of sixty, *karet* of years would apply to someone younger than sixty and *karet* of days would apply to someone older. In either case the person does not reach the age that was designated or him.

An example of the former, *karet* of years for a younger person, is found in the Talmud (Shabbat 13a), where a certain Talmudic scholar suffered premature death on account of being overly-familiar with his wife before she became fully ritually purified by immersing in a *mikveh*. Since he had no sin other than this breach, the *karet* was only a physical cutting off of years. But his soul was rewarded for his overall righteousness in the Soul World.

An example of the latter, *karet* of days for an older person, is derived from a teaching in the Talmud (Moed Katan 28a) where Rav Yosef made a celebration upon attaining the age of sixty because he “outlived” the age of *karet*. His disciple Abaye countered that even after sixty, one’s life may be shortened due to *karet* of days. To this Rav Yosef replied that since he left the realm of *karet* of years, that was reason enough to celebrate.

Regarding these scenarios the Torah states (Lev. 7:14), “And that person shall be cut off from the midst of his people”. Since there is no reference to the soul being cut off,

this means that his body dies but his soul merits going to the World of Souls and later experiencing Resurrection and the World-to-Come.

The second category of *karet*, which affects only the soul, applies to someone whose transgressions are very numerous, and include the very severe sins for which one is liable for *karet*, such as adultery and incest. Since it is this person’s soul that is so damaged, the *karet* is mainly spiritual and not necessarily physical, such that he might live long and tranquil years in this world. This is as in the verse (Ecc. 7:15), “There is a wicked man who lives long in his wickedness”. But when this person dies his soul leaves his body and is cut off from the Soul World and the World-to-Come. Regarding such sinners the Torah states, “And that soul shall be cut off from its people”, where the specific mention of the term “soul” in this verse refers to spiritual *karet*.

The third category of *karet*, which affects the body and the soul together, is reserved for the most serious offences of all — idolatry and cursing G-d. Regarding these extremely severe transgressions the Torah states (Num. 15:31), “That soul shall surely be cut off”. The term “surely” is denoted by a two-fold mention of *karet*, “*hikaret tikaret*”, from which the Talmud derives that *hikaret* refers to being cut off in this world and *tikaret* refers to being cut off in the World-to-Come. This then is the source for *karet* of the body and soul alike.

Some commentators, namely Ibn Ezra and Rambam, maintain that *karet* of a soul is akin to the death of the soul, and it is described as being cut off because it ceases to exist at all. However, Rabbeinu Bachya and others disagree and maintain that the soul of such a person who dies without repenting would not be properly punished by ceasing to exist. Rather, just as the reward for the righteous is eternal, so too the punishment for such brazen sinners is eternal. Regarding these completely wicked sinners the Talmud teaches (Rosh Hashana 17a), “They suffer in *gehinom* for generation after generation.” That being said, the above applies only if the sinner died without repenting. But if he did *teshuvah*, our sources teach that no sin, not even the most severe, illicit or idolatrous transgression, stands in the face of *teshuvah*! (Yerushalmi, Sanhedrin 49a; Rambam, Teshuva 3:26).

• Sources: HaRav Eliezer Chrysler, *Midei Shabbos Beshabbato*, Vol. 18 No. 29

THE MERCIFUL ONE (G-D) DESIRES THE HEART

It is better to pray less with proper concentration than to pray a lot without concentration. (Shulchan Aruch 1:4)

If one is able to pray all of the prayers with proper concentration, this is better than cutting out some of the prayers. But if someone is forced to cut out some of the prayers, or he realizes that he will not be able to concentrate properly and he cuts out some of the supplications in order to pray with proper concentration, it is considered in G-d's eyes as though he prayed like someone who said all the prayers with proper concentration (Mishneh Berurah). The Sefer Chassidim (315) writes that it is better to praise G-d with few words without hurrying than to rush and say many words.

The complexities of Jewish prayer! Praying in Hebrew, saying words chosen for us, searching for a *minyan*, “lengthy” prayers, complex laws of prayer — you get the idea. These factors may make it easy to lose sight of what prayer is all about. In three simple words: *Rachamana liba ba’ei* — the Merciful One desires the heart — our Sages remind us what, above all, G-d truly desires (Zohar Parshat Ki Teitzei 281b). Prayer is a bond of love between G-d and us, and its magical ingredient is one that only G-d

can measure.

Today, prayer stands in place of the daily sacrifices offered in the Beit Hamikdash, the Holy Temple in Jerusalem, regarding about which it is said: Man lit a fire below, while a spiritual fire came from above (Yoma 21b, 52a). True, the Sages gave us the words to say, but it is our job to bring them to life, to say them with *heart*. In doing so we provide the fire from below to meet with G-d's fire from above.

Prayer is not reserved for the righteous; we all have a voice. G-d listens and responds to the child and the scholar alike. His door is open for both observant and non-observant. It is thus written: “My house (the Beit Hamikdash) is called a house of prayer for all nations” (Isaiah 56:7). Not always is it the smartest, most skilled individual who offers G-d the best prayer. On the contrary, sometimes the simplest, least noticed person is the one who awakens G-d's mercy with his sincere, humble supplication.

PLEASE JOIN US...

...in saying Tehillim/Psalms and a special prayer to G-d for the safety and security of all of Klal Yisrael in these times of conflict and conclude with the following special prayer:

אחינו כל בית ישראל

“Our brothers, the entire family of Israel, who are delivered into distress and captivity, whether they are on sea or dry land – may G-d have mercy on them and remove them from stress to relief, from darkness to light, from subjugation to redemption now, speedily and soon.”

BURKE AND REBUKE

Edmund Burke (1729-1797), the father of contemporary conservatism, purportedly said, “All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing.” When good people stand idly by and allow evil people to do as they please, then evil will certainly triumph. The implication of Burke’s dictum is that it is incumbent upon good people to stop the treachery of evildoers. The Torah takes this Burkian approach to the responsibility of the righteous and implores us to reprimand the wicked for their sins (Lev. 19:17). The Hebrew language collates the notion of rebuking sinners in two different words: *tochachah* and *mussar*. In the following paragraphs we shall seek to delineate the differences between these two words and their implied approaches to rebuke.

The Vilna Gaon (1720-1797) explains that *tochachah* is rebuke that comes from the mouth, while *mussar* comes from other body parts. In other words, telling somebody off for his misdeeds constitutes *tochachah*, while physically driving home the same point is called *mussar*. Thus, when a parent disciplines his child by hitting him (obviously, in a non-abusive way) or when G-d teaches somebody a lesson by afflicting him, that is called *mussar*. In fact, the Vilna Gaon connects the word *mussar* with the word *yissurin* (“suffering”). When G-d warns the Jews of the calamities that shall befall them should they fail to properly heed the Torah’s laws, this is called *tochachach*. Indeed, there are two passages in the Torah which do exactly that, and each is traditionally known as “the *tochachach*”: Leviticus 26:14-43 (which is always read before Shavuot) and Deuteronomy 28:15-68 (which is always read before Rosh Hashana).

The Malbim (1809-1879) identifies three differences between the implication of the words *tochachah* and *mussar*. Those differences lie in the “who, what, and why” of the admonition in question. Firstly, *mussar* is rebuke given by a person of authority to a subordinate, while *tochachah* may even be rebuke exchanged amongst equals. Secondly, *mussar* may be carried out through corporal punishment or simply a verbal tongue-lashing, while *tochachah* exclusively refers admonishing another by logically proving that he has done wrong. Thirdly, *mussar* focuses on inculcating proper behavior for the future, while *tochachah* focuses on castigating a sinner for his past deeds. (This last distinction is also found in the writings of the Vilna Gaon.)

Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim of Breslau (1740-1814) con-

nects the word *tochachah* to *nochach*, which means “opposite” — both in terms of ideology (e.g., “Communism is the *opposite* of Capitalism.”) and physical location (e.g., “The car stopped *opposite* the red light.”). By offering his words of criticism, the rebuker *opposes* the rebukee, both in an ideological sense and possibly even in a physical sense, if the two meet face-to-face.

Nonetheless, Rabbi Pappenheim argues that the most effective way of rebuking another is not direct confrontation, but to “innocently” question his actions and spur a debate about their correctness. Hopefully, the ensuing discussion will allow the sinner to realize the folly of his ways in a more powerful way than if he was simply confronted with a litany of his misdoings. For this reason, the word *tochachah* is also related to the words *hochachah* (proof) and *vikuach* (debate). Indeed, the proper way of chastising is not simply sermonizing about fire and brimstone descending from the heavens à la Jonathan Edwards’ *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*. That Puritan tract may indeed arouse emotive feelings of repentance through elaborate descriptions of the hellish fires of purgatory, but such emotions are merely fleeting bursts of contrition, unless they are backed with a logical and intellectual acceptance to do only good. *Tochachah* seeks to logically *prove* the vanity of sin and provide fodder for a rational acceptance to do only good.

On the other hand, Rabbi Pappenheim writes that the word *mussar* is related to the word *le’hasir* (“to remove” or “to separate”). This is either because *mussar* seeks to “displace” or “remove” an offender from the path of sin within which he had been entrenched or because it clearly “delineates” and “separates” between what is right and what is wrong. Alternatively, the word *mussar* is related to the word *assur* (which literally means “tied”, although it colloquially means “forbidden”) because the rebuker seeks to show the rebukee that he is “bound” to certain expectations of right and wrong. Rabbi Yaakov Tzvi Mecklenburg (1785-1865) similarly explains that *mussar* is related to “tying” because it gives a person the ability to tie down his evil inclination and keep his illicit desires in check.

Author’s note:

Le’Zechut Refuah Shleimah for Bracha bat Chaya Rachel

SCOTT SPIEGLER

Age 58 - Framingham, Massachusetts

Brown University, BA Philosophy - University of Massachusetts, Boston MA International Conflict Resolution Software Engineer and Cyber-Security and Networking Consultant

As evidenced from his excerpted biography above, Scott Spiegler's interests are quite varied. If there is one thread running through his life it would appear to be a drive to resolve conflicts — whether of a philosophical or a physical nature. This same drive led him to Ohr Somayach in the 1980's.

Scott grew up in the Canarsie neighborhood of Brooklyn, and when he was 12 the family moved to Rehoboth, Massachusetts to be near his father's business in Providence, RI. His family was fairly secular, and Scott grew up with very little knowledge of Judaism. He was an extremely curious boy and questioned everything. With such a turn of mind, "Philosophy" seemed to be a natural major for him when he went to Brown University.

In his senior year he took a course in Jewish Studies given by Professor Jacob Neusner. During the course the class viewed a film about the Holocaust. This was Scott's first visual exposure to that tragedy. It bothered him so much that he decided to explore Judaism, which, while a part of his identity, had not, up to that point, had



any deeper meaning to him. He bought the ArtScroll book on Genesis, which had just recently been published.

It opened his mind up to a fascinating new world. It led him to explore the Jewish community in Providence, the home of Brown University. He shopped around for a com-

fortable and welcome setting. He finally found it in Rabbi Peretz Gold's shul, the most *yeshiv-ische* in Providence. He studied Torah there, and was mentored by Rabbi Gold, who suggested that Scott spend time in Yeshiva in Israel — specifically, Ohr Somayach. He began in the Introductory Program. His first Gemara *rebbe* was Rabbi Moshe Newman. Scott also had a close connection to Rabbi Simcha Wasserman, who was teaching in the Yeshiva at that time. He loved Rabbi Gottlieb's classes, a teacher Scott could relate to as a fellow

philosopher. One important lesson that Rabbi Gottlieb taught him was that if he really wanted to understand Judaism he had to learn the basics, such as Chumash and Gemara. Scott loves learning Gemara and is a mainstay of the religious community in Framingham.

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YAD AVSHALOM — MOMUMENT OR HAND?

A visitor to the Mount of Olives cannot help but take notice of an impressive ancient structure called Yad Avshalom.

Although the simple meaning of *yad* is a reference to the monument that this rebellious son of King David erected for himself to be remembered by, there is a legend that there was actually a carved hand (*yad* in Hebrew) atop this structure representing Avshalom's hand. It isn't there anymore, says this legend, because Napoleon fired a cannonball from a nearby hilltop, which chopped the "hand" off. "The hand that rebelled against its father, the king" reportedly declared the great French conqueror, "is hereby cut off."

The only problem with this legend is that Napoleon and his invading army never got past Acco, so it is highly unlikely

that he was ever in Jerusalem.

(*Editor's note: A number of years ago a group of American JLE students were at Ohr Somayach for the summer, and I accompanied them on an educational tour to various sites in Jerusalem. At Yad Avshalom, after the guide told the "Napoleon story" one of the participants, Charlie, wanted to see for himself if there really was a cannonball or signs of a stone "hand" inside the monument. After shimmying up the stone pillars — with half the group calling him to come back down, and the other half cheering him on — he reached the top and went inside the gaping hole in the monument. Then he emerged, holding something. "A cannonball?" we shouted to him. But, alas, in his hand was a mere piece of rubble. I can't deny that there was a measure of disappointment in the air.)



ABARBANEL *on the Parsha*

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clockwork mechanism governed by fixed laws. Their intellectual powers led them to seek a rational and logical explanation of all physical phenomena. The idea that these laws were the result of the will of an omnipresent G-d and could be overturned at any time for any individual or group was completely foreign. G-d knew that the only way to solidify the commitment of the Jewish nation was to demonstrate this Divine Providence in a tangible manner in the physical world. A promise of reward in the next world would not be sufficient.

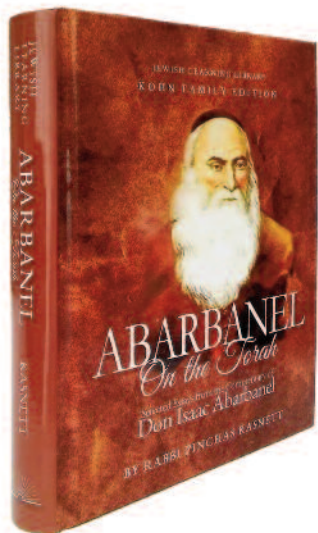
Rav Saadiah Gaon: One of the attractions of idolatry was that it created a link between idolatrous practices and physical rewards. In order to counteract this belief, the Torah emphasizes that physical rewards are actually the result of *refraining* from these idolatrous practices and observing the commandments.

Rabbeinu Nissim and Kuzari: The reward for the soul in the next world is actually alluded to in several of the verses that describe the physical rewards at the beginning of the *parsha*. For example: "I will place my sanctuary among you", "I will walk among you", "I will be G-d onto you and you will be a people onto me." All of these verses refer to the G-dly connection of our souls to a higher spiritual existence. Whereas other religions dismiss any possibility of real accomplishment in this world and point only

to the next world, we believe that the soul, even while contained within the limitations of the body, is capable of attaining lofty heights of spirituality. In effect, the body follows the soul. The promise of physical or bodily rewards for the performance of the commandments demonstrates this reality. If the soul can achieve this when contained within the body, how much more so will it soar when it is freed in the next world! In effect, the promise of reward in this world is actually a promise of reward to our true essence, our souls.

Abarbanel: The Torah focuses on physical rewards only because it is referring to the nation as a whole. When a majority of the nation is observing the commandments, then physical reward is possible. However, when a majority is negligent in its observance, their dire consequences enumerated later in the *parsha* are possible. But the reward that accrues to the soul in the next world does not depend on the behavior of the nation as a whole. Rather, each of us is judged individually, regardless of the behavior or our brethren. When the nation is judged favorably and is physically rewarded, even the transgressors can benefit, and vice versa. But this is not the case for the soul's ultimate reward and punishment.

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