

O H R N E T

SHABBAT PARSHAT VAERA · 1 SHVAT 5764 · JAN. 24, 2004 · VOL. 11 NO. 14

PARSHA INSIGHTS

FAME — I'M GONNA LIVE FOREVER

“...and the staff of Aharon swallowed their staffs.” (7:12)

When Aaron's staff swallowed the staffs of the magicians and remained as slim as before, Pharaoh started to fear that the staff would “swallow him and his throne.”

If the staff would swallow him, why would he be concerned that his throne would be swallowed? Is his throne more than his own life? Not only that, why would he care? He wouldn't be around to see the staff swallowing his throne anywhere.

Maybe we can answer this with a poem by Percy Bysshe Shelley:

*I met a traveller from an antique land
Who said: Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert... Near them, on the sand,
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read,
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
The hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed:
And on the pedestal these words appear:*

*“My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
Look upon my works ye Mighty, and despair!”
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away.”*

A Jew works his whole life for *Olam Haba*, the World to Come. Someone who doesn't believe in a World to Come has to come to terms with the frightening finality of his earthly existence. How does he cope with this? By trying to create artifacts of his brief walk in this life. His hope is that he will achieve a kind of eternity because others will remember his name. He was the man who painted such-and-such, who dreamed up the world's most advanced mousetrap, who murdered the world's most famous pop star as he emerged from his limo. As the words of a famous (for how long?) pop song would have it “Fame — I'm gonna live forever.”

To Pharaoh, there was one thing worse than dying — that his throne, his fame, everything that he would leave in this world would die with him.

Source:
• *Midrash Rabba*

PARSHA OVERVIEW

G-d tells Moshe to inform the Jewish People that He is going to take them out of Egypt. However, the Jewish People do not listen. G-d commands Moshe to go to Pharaoh and ask him to free the Jewish People. Although Aharon shows Pharaoh a sign by turning a staff into a snake, Pharaoh's magicians copy the sign, emboldening Pharaoh to refuse the request. G-d punishes the Egyptians and sends plagues of blood and frogs, but the magicians copy these miracles on a small-

er scale, again encouraging Pharaoh's being obstinate. After the plague of lice, Pharaoh's magicians concede that only G-d could be performing these miracles. Only the Egyptians, and not the Jews in Goshen, suffer during the plagues. The onslaught continues with wild animals, pestilence, boils and fiery hail. However, despite Moshe's offers to end the plagues if Pharaoh will let the Jewish People leave, Pharaoh continues to harden his heart and refuses.

THE FOUR FREEDOMS

Four forms of freedom for our ancestors from Egyptian bondage promised by G-d to Moshe and recorded in this week's portion.

Four *mitzvot* that we perform at the Seder table, each of them accompanied by drinking a cup of wine or grape juice.

What is the connection between them?

There are many forms of freedom. (Are you old enough to remember the famous "four freedoms" of F.D.R.?) All of them find expression in the *mitzvot* of the Seder enhanced by the drinking which itself is a celebration of freedom.

The *kiddush* we say at the very outset of the long evening speaks proudly of the freedom from mediocrity we gained by being sanctified by our Creator and given such a holiday. This is followed by the central feature of the evening, the relating of the story of freedom from slavery though the recital of the *Haggada*. But spiritual aristocracy and political

independence are not enough if there is not an economic basis for survival. ("Freedom from want" is what F.D.R. called it.) Our own freedom from want is expressed in the *Birkat Hamazon* we say at the end of the festive meal as our thanks to Heaven for providing us with our nourishment. The fourth and final wine-punctuated *mitzvah* is the completing of the recital of the Hallel which we began before the meal. This song of praise to Heaven opens with the words "Sing praises, you servants of G-d". It may seem paradoxical but the ultimate freedom of a Jew is achieved only when he rejoices in declaring his subservience to the Divine Master. Only then can he truly be free from the enslaving passions of the body and the foolish fashions of a materialistic society.

These are important lessons for all who wish to truly see Israel as a land of freedom forever.

LOVE OF THE LAND - THE NAMES

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

ERETZ TOVA – THE GOOD LAND

When G-d promised Moshe that He would free His people from Egyptian bondage He said that he would "take them up from that land to a good and spacious land" (*Shmot* 3:8).

This same adjective in describing Eretz Yisrael was used by Yehoshua and Calev in countering the



slandorous report given by their fellow spies. "The land which we passed through to spy upon," they declared, "is an exceedingly good land." (*Bamidbar* 14:7)

Succeeding generations up to our own day can testify to the truth of their description.

get in synch with
Ohr Somayach

hr.edu

AvantGo

**GET THE LATEST
FEATURES FROM OHR
SOMAYACH DIRECT TO
YOUR HANDHELD DEVICE AT**

www.ohr.edu

OHRNET magazine is published by Ohr Somayach Tanenbaum College

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

© 2004 Ohr Somayach Institutions - All rights reserved • This publication contains words of Torah. Please treat it with due respect.

PARSHA Q&A ?

1. Did G-d ever appear to Avraham and say "I am G-d?"
2. What cause did the forefathers have to question G-d?
3. How was Moshe commanded to act towards Pharaoh?
4. How long did Levi live?
5. Who was Aharon's wife? Who was her father? Who was her brother?
6. Why are Yitro and Yosef both referred to as "Putiel?"
7. After which plague did G-d begin to "harden Pharaoh's heart?"
8. Why did Pharaoh go to the Nile every morning?
9. Give two reasons why the blood was chosen as the first plague.
10. How long did the plague of blood last?
11. Why did the frogs affect Pharaoh's house first?
12. What did Moshe mean when he told Pharaoh that the frogs would be "in you and in your nation?"
13. What are "chamarim?"
14. Why didn't Moshe strike the dust to initiate the plague of lice?
15. Why were the Egyptian sorcerers unable to bring lice?
16. What were the Egyptians likely to do if they saw the Jews slaughtering lambs?
17. Why didn't the wild beasts die as the frogs had?
18. The *dever* killed "all the cattle of Egypt." Later, boils afflicted their cattle. How can this be?
19. Why did Moshe pray only after leaving the city?
20. What was miraculous about the way the hail stopped falling?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

1. 6:9 - Yes.
2. 6:9 - Although G-d swore to give them the land, they never actually had control over it.
3. 6:13 - With the respect due a king.
4. 6:16 - 137 years.
5. 6:23 - Elisheva, daughter of Aminadav, sister of Nachshon.
6. 6:25 - Yitro fattened (*pitem*) cows for idol worship. Yosef scoffed (*pitpet*) at his evil inclination.
7. 7:3 - After the sixth plague — *shechin*.
8. 7:15 - To relieve himself. Pharaoh pretended to be a god who did not need to attend to his bodily functions. Therefore, he secretly used the Nile for this purpose.
9. a. 7:17 - Because the Nile was an Egyptian god.
b. 8:17 - Because an invading army first attacks the enemy's water supply, and G-d did the same.
10. 7:25 - Seven days.
11. 7:28 - Pharaoh himself advised the enslavement of the Jewish People.
12. 7:29 - He warned that the frogs would enter their intestines and croak.
13. 8:10 - Piles.
14. 8:12 - Because the dust protected Moshe by hiding the body of the Egyptian that Moshe killed.
15. 8:14 - The Egyptian sorcerers' magic had no power over anything smaller than a barley kernel.
16. 8:22 - Stone the Jews.
17. 8:27 - So the Egyptians would not benefit from their hides.
18. 9:10 - In the plague of *dever* only the cattle *in the fields* died. The plague of *shechin* affected the surviving cattle.
19. 9:29 - Because the city was full of idols.
20. 9:33 - The hailstones stopped in mid-air and didn't fall to the ground.

BONUS QUESTION ?

Moshe said: "**When shall I pray for you, your servants and your people, to rid you of the frogs?**" Pharaoh answered: "**Tomorrow.**" (8:5,6) Why did Pharaoh subject his nation to an extra day of plague by saying "Tomorrow?" Didn't he want the frogs to go away immediately?

BONUS ANSWER !

Pharaoh didn't believe that the frogs were a plague from Hashem. He preferred to believe that the frogs were a natural phenomenon about which Moshe had special knowledge. When Moshe asked "When shall I pray...?" Pharaoh thought Moshe was simply timing his question to coincide with the plague's natural end, expecting Pharaoh to say "Right now!" By saying "Tomorrow" Pharaoh tried to trick Moshe and make him look foolish.

• *Ibn Ezra in the name of Rav Shmuel ben Chofni*

A RULE ABOUT RULERS

“The ruler who listens to lies, all his servants are wicked.” (*Mishlei 29:12*) This rule of relationship between an evil ruler and his subjects is cited by our *gemara* in defining the religious nature of the servants of the idol worshipping King Achav, ruler of the Kingdom of Israel. Its converse is applied to the servants of the righteous King Yehoshofat, ruler of the Kingdom of Yehuda, who Achav had invited to dine with him.

This application is based on the simple meaning of this passage. A ruler who gives credence to lies and evil invites his followers to please him with falsehood, flattery and emulation of his evil ways. It then follows that a righteous ruler will inspire righteousness in his followers.

The commentaries on *Mishlei*, however, explain this portrait of an evil ruler as being an allegory to the relationship between a man’s heart and the rest of his being. The heart is the ruler while man’s intelligence, imagination and all his faculties are the servants. Should the heart desire satisfaction of base passions man’s imagination will conjure up images for him, his intelligence will provide him with the strategy for achieving gratification, and his faculties will implement it. But if his heart chooses to fulfill the will of G-d then all of these servants will rally to help him achieve this goal.

In both the simple and allegorical approaches King Solomon spoke only of the negative side of the ruler-subject relationship because it is most readily observed in regard to evil and relied on us to understand that the positive converse is also true.

• *Chulin 4b*

THE BRAZEN SERPENT

When the righteous King Chizkiyahu succeeded his idol worshipping father Achaz he set about removing all traces of the idolatry which had proliferated during his father’s reign. One of these actions is described as “he broke in pieces the brazen serpent that Moshe had made, for until that time the Children of Israel burned incense to it; and he called it *Nechushtan*.” (*Melachim II 18:4*)

This brazen serpent was created by Moshe at G-d’s command after He accepted Moshe’s prayers to put an end to the plague of venomous serpents which had been sent against the people who had spoken rebelliously against G-d and Moshe when they became weary of their journey in the wilderness. A serpent of brass was then made by Moshe and put on a pole. Anyone bitten by a serpent only had to look upon this brazen serpent and he was healed. (*Bamidbar 21:4-9*)

Long after this incident the brazen serpent was held around as a sort of monument to this miracle that took place in the days of Moshe. But when idolatry became so popular in a later generation someone came up with the idea that the curative power of the brazen serpent indicated a measure of divinity and it soon became the fashion to burn incense to it. Chizkiyahu decided that the danger posed by the brazen serpent as an object of idol worship outweighed the value it had as a reminder of the miracle. He thereupon destroyed it and branded it with the derisive title of “*Nechushtan*” which is a diminutive form of the word for brass as if to communicate to his misguided subjects that some little brass thing had no power of its own and did not deserve to be worshipped.

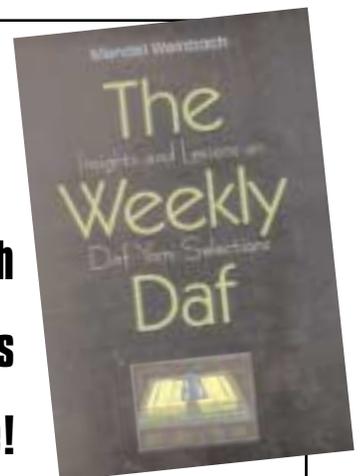
• *Chulin 6b*

The Weekly Daf

by RABBI MENDEL WEINBACH

Published by Targum Press / Distributed by Feldheim

At Jewish
Bookstores
Everywhere!



From: Many Readers

Dear Rabbi,

What is the meaning and significance of the name of your fine yeshiva, "Ohr Somayach"?

Dear Many Readers,

Our yeshiva was named after one of the works of Rabbi Meir Simcha HaKohen of Dvinsk (1843-1926), one of the most unique Torah giants of this century. His renowned work "Ohr Somayach" is a brilliant commentary on the Rambam's Mishne Torah, while another of his works, "Meshech Chochma", is a profound commentary on Chumash. Rabbi Yehudah Copperman, editor of the latter work, describes it as a unique blend of "halacha, thought and commentary". In it Rabbi Meir Simcha demonstrates the unity between the Written and Oral Torah and presents strikingly original interpretations of Biblical verses and Talmudic passages.

His unusual mastery of philosophic and kabbalistic texts is reflected throughout his writings. So great was his mastery of the Jerusalem Talmud that, when in 1906 Shlomo Friedlander claimed to have discovered the missing Talmud on Kodoshim, Rabbi Meir Simcha immediately determined that it was a forgery.

Rabbi Meir Simcha served in Dvinsk for nearly 40 years and was deeply loved by his congregants. He frequently helped restore peace to quarreling couples. Once a couple visited him to discuss their problem when, after a long period of silence, the sound of singing and dancing suddenly burst forth from the rabbi's study. Rabbi Meir Simcha's secretary peered in only to find him dancing with the couple,

rejoicing in their reconciliation.

In 1906 he was offered the position of Rabbi of Jerusalem, but obliged the entreaties of his congregants to remain in Dvinsk. Twenty prominent leaders of Dvinsk wrote to Jerusalem as follows: "We of the Russian Golah (Diaspora) in the city of Dvinsk rise up in response to the report that the sons of Jerusalem wish to take away our master, our teacher... Not only will they destroy us, but shall also destroy the entire Golah for whom he is the teacher and the respondent for all who seek the word of G-d".

Rabbi Meir Simcha was a strong supporter of the settlement of Eretz Yisrael. He also believed that in order for a Rabbi to be a true leader of his community, he must be fluent in the language of the land. In a famous near-prophetic passage written before 1926, he presents a brilliant theory of Jewish history in the Diaspora and asserts that those who forget their origins, thinking "Berlin is Jerusalem", are doomed to destruction. Elsewhere he writes forebodingly that a Jew should willingly give his life to sanctify G-d's name, because it is natural that when one is confronted with an opposing force, his essence comes to the fore.

Rabbi Meir Simcha did not leave any surviving relatives. Therefore the founders of our yeshiva named the yeshiva in his memory, so that their students should simultaneously inherit and perpetuate the Ohr Somayach's spiritual legacy.

Sources:

- Orthodox Union website, <http://www.ou.org/>, *Learn Torah, Great Leaders of Our People*
- *Meshech Chochma, Parshat B'Chukotai and V'Etchanan*

PUBLIC DOMAIN

Comments, quibbles and reactions concerning previous Ohrnet features

Re: Holy and Kadosh (Ohrnet Vayishlach)

As Rav Avigdor Miller zt"l would say, Kadosh when referring to G-d is referring specifically to G-d's extraordinary perfection in all ways, beyond comparison or comprehension. As the possuk states "El mi t'damyuni v'eshveh, yomar kadosh!?" The kedusha is referring to his incomparable perfection.

- Rabbi Avrohom Bleich, *Modi'in Ilit*

Re: The Human Side of the Story - The Prayer Pact (Ohrnet Miketz)

This happened to my own daughter after 7 years unable to bear a child. She now has three, thank G-d. In my old community this produced many happy celebrations after years of anguish. Shalom.

Re: Parsha Q&A and the "Evil Eye" (Ohrnet Miketz)

In question 12 you ask why Yosef's brothers entered the

city through different gates, and answer that in this way they could search the entire city for him (42:13). As an alternative answer please see 42:5, that they separated to avoid the *ayin hara* ("evil eye"). Keep up the good work.

- D. Levy

Re: Ohr Somayach Educational Software

I am the head teacher of the (name withheld) Jewish school. We have a diskette of a terrific educational game made by yourselves called "Where in Israel?" that was donated to our school. We have a computer room with 4 computers and I was wondering how we can go about getting a license to make copies of your software to use by our students in that room. Thank you.

- R. L.

(Ohrnet's reply: Please contact TES Torah Educational Software who holds all distribution rights.)

THE COAT MERRY-GO-ROUND

One of the beautiful features of religious communal life in Israel is the service provided by the used clothes centers popularly known as *gemachim* (GEMilAt CHassadim). These centers receive used clothes from local contributors and foreign charitable organizations and distribute them to needy families, or offer them for sale at token prices and then apply the income to other charitable projects.

In their haste to clear their homes of long-unused clothes families sometimes mistakenly place in the packages they bring to centers an item which is currently in use. A woman recently called the Kiryat Mattersdorf, Jerusalem branch of the “Begeg Yad Leyad” network of used clothes centers to report that she had mistakenly included her young daughter’s

coat in the package she had brought there. She could not afford to buy a new coat and when informed by the center’s director that it was virtually impossible to locate her daughter’s coat in the mountains of clothes to be sorted, the distraught lady put in a request to buy a used girl’s coat if one turned up in the sorting process. It wasn’t long before such a coat became available and reached its happy customer. Then came another call from this lady to the director, laughingly informing her that the coat she received was exactly the one she had mistakenly given away!

Jews visiting Israel are invited to bring along with them used clothes – the customs charged makes shipping them impractical – and contact Mrs. Sheindel Weinbach at 02-537-2303 for details on delivery.

WHAT’S THE RIGHT THING TO DO?

REAL-LIFE QUESTIONS OF SOCIAL AND BUSINESS ETHICS

VIRTUAL EVIDENCE

Question: As the manager of an inner-city supermarket I am faced with the usual problem of shoplifting. When we catch someone and call the police to arrest him the law enforcement officers insist that we give them the stolen item to be used as evidence in court. The probability of ever getting this item back is very low. Must I comply with their request even at the cost of losing the item?

Answer: In Torah law a thief can be convicted on the basis of the incriminating testimony of witnesses without the need for such “evidence”. But if you want police cooperation in your community you have no choice but to go along with their requests and it is probably worth sacrificing the item in

order to eliminate the danger of a shoplifter you may not catch another time.

But there may be a solution to your problem. A Brooklyn supermarket owner recently told me a story about a fellow who stood at the checkout counter with blood running down his forehead. An emergency call was made for paramedic help but it was soon discovered that this fellow was hiding a frozen steak he had pilfered and concealed under his hat. When the police came and took away the thief – and the steak – the owner decided on a new strategy. He installed a Polaroid camera at the counter to photograph the stolen item and he now offers the picture taken to the police as “virtual evidence” while retaining the real thing.

subscribe to
www.ohr.edu

for Ohrnet and other publications delivered to your email