

# OHRNET

SHABBAT PARSHIOT BEREISHET-NOACH · 26 TISHREI-3 CHESHVAN 5766 · OCT. 29-NOV. 5, 2005 · VOL. 13 NO. 1

## PARSHA INSIGHTS

### Bereishet

## LIFE'S REAR VIEW MIRROR

*"And G-d saw everything that He had made, and behold it was very good."*

Wouldn't life be so much easier if we had eyes in the back of our heads? No need for rear-view mirrors in our cars! No need to worry when walking down dark alleys at night that someone is going to jump you from behind! For teachers, the highly dangerous practice of writing on the blackboard would lose its trepidation! Come to think of it, wouldn't life be much easier if we had three feet? Think how much more comfortable standing in shul on Yom Kippur would be! People would be able to shift from one foot to the other – to the other. Shoe and sock manufactures would be able to make a better living! Another thing. Why is it that only the chosen few of us can walk on our hands, and that only with some difficulty? If we could walk on our hands, we would be able to see the world from an entirely different perspective! We could revitalize the cerebral cortex with all the blood flowing to the brain! We could do Yoga and aerobics at the same time! And what about if we had four kidneys? We could donate two of them to people in need with much less problem! And why not two hearts? While we're on the subject, I really don't understand why our faces aren't coated with plastic so we don't need to use soap? Just a damp cloth would do the trick!

When G-d created the world, He consulted with His Heavenly court. G-d premeditated the creation of every organ. The evidence of G-d's wisdom shines from every creature. If you assembled all the greatest Nobel Prize winners throughout history and gave them unlimited

funds they still wouldn't be able to put life into the tiniest insect.

And even if we can admit that G-d knew exactly what He was doing with the physical creation, sometimes we question His wisdom in other areas. For example, "Why does this guy have so much money? If G-d had given it to me, I'd use it much better." Or "Why did G-d give this person such talent, such a mind? It's wasted on him. I'd have put that talent to much better usage."

Just as G-d created the physical world with perfection, and we need neither eyes in the back of our heads, nor hands on which we can walk, nor a third leg, so too each one of us is uniquely and perfectly equipped to fulfil our mission in creation.

Sources:

- Midrash Hagadol 1:26, Bereishet Rabba 39:21

### Noach

## THE WISDOM OF WINE

*"Noach, the man of the earth, debased himself and planted a vineyard." (9:20)*

Jews are not known for their alcoholic indulgence. Statistically, the incidence of alcoholism amongst us is among the lowest in the world. On the other hand, alcohol is not taboo in our tradition. On Purim, we have a holy obligation to become drunk enough not to know the difference between "Mordechai the blessed" and "Haman the cursed." A Jewish child grows up with Friday night Kiddush wine on his lips. The same is true on Shabbat morning. And at the close of Shabbat, wine is part of *Havdala* that guides our re-entry into the week. In addition, wine features in the Four Cups at Pesach, at

*continued on page eight*

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

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## PARSHA OVERVIEW

### Bereishet

In the beginning, Hashem creates the entire universe, including time itself, out of nothingness. This process of creation continues for six days. On the seventh day, Hashem rests, bringing into existence the spiritual universe of Shabbat, which returns to us every seven days. Adam and Chava — the human pair — are placed in the Garden of Eden. Chava is enticed by the serpent to eat from the forbidden fruit of the “Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil,” and in turn gives the fruit to Adam. By absorbing “sin,” Adam and Chava render themselves incapable of remaining in the spiritual paradise of Eden and are banished. Death and hard work (both physical and spiritual) now enter the world, together with pain bearing and raising children. Now begins the struggle to correct the sin of Adam and Chava, which will be the main subject of world history. Cain and Hevel, the first two children of Adam and Chava, bring offerings to Hashem. Hevel gives the finest of his flock and his offering is accepted, but Cain gives inferior produce and his offering is rejected. In the ensuing quarrel, Cain kills Hevel and is condemned to wander the earth. The Torah traces the genealogy of the other children of Adam and Chava, and the descendants of Cain until the birth of Noah. After the death of Sheith, Mankind descends into evil, and Hashem decides that He will blot out Man in a flood which will deluge the world. However, one man, Noah, finds favor with Hashem.

### Noach

It is ten generations since the creation of the first human. Adam’s descendants have corrupted the world with immorality, idolatry and robbery, and Hashem resolves to bring a flood which will destroy all the earth’s inhabitants

except for the righteous Noah, his family and sufficient animals to re-populate the earth. Hashem instructs Noah to build an ark. After forty days and nights, the flood covers even the tops of the highest mountains. After 150 days the water starts to recede. On the 17th day of the 7th month, the ark comes to rest on Mount Ararat. Noah sends out a raven and then a dove to ascertain if the waters have abated. The dove returns. A week later Noah again sends the dove, which returns the same evening with an olive leaf in its beak. After another seven days Noah sends the dove once more; the dove does not return. Hashem tells Noah and his family to leave the ark. Noah brings offerings to Hashem from the animals which were carried in the ark for this purpose. Hashem vows never again to flood the entire world and designates the rainbow as a sign of this covenant. Noah and his descendants are now permitted to slaughter and eat meat, unlike Adam. Hashem commands the Seven Universal Laws: The prohibition against idolatry, adultery, theft, blasphemy, murder, eating meat torn from a live animal, and the obligation to set up a legal system. The world’s climate is established as we know it today. Noah plants a vineyard and becomes intoxicated from its produce. Ham, one of Noah’s sons, delights in seeing his father drunk and uncovered. Shem and Yafet, however, manage to cover their father without looking at his nakedness, by walking backwards. For this incident, Canaan is cursed to be a slave. The Torah lists the offspring of Noah’s three sons from whom the seventy nations of the world are descended. The Torah records the incident of the Tower of Babel, which results in Hashem fragmenting communication into many languages and the dispersal of the nations throughout the world. The Parsha concludes with the genealogy of Noah to Avram.

## LOVE OF THE LAND - THE MITZVOT

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

### MA’ASER RISHON

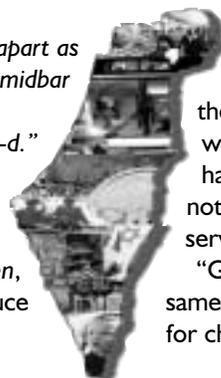
#### Torah Source

“For the tithe of the Israelites, which they set apart as a gift to G-d, I have given to the Levites.” (Bamidbar 18:24)

“And all the tithe of the Land... belongs to G-d.” (Vayikra 27:30)

#### Fulfillment

After *terumah* has been set aside for the *kohen*, ten percent of the remaining agricultural produce must be given to the Levite.



#### Reason

The tribe of Levi was chosen by G-d for serving Him in His Sanctuary and in His kindness towards them He arranged for them to be sustained in a dignified way. It is only fitting that those who serve a king should have their needs provided by others so that they should not need to exert themselves for anything other than the service of the king.

“Giving *ma’aser*,” say our Sages, “is a key to wealth.” (The same blessing, say many authorities, applies to tithing money for charitable purposes.)

### BEREISHET

1. Why does the Torah start with the account of Creation?
2. What happened to the light that was created on the first day?
3. Why isn't the word "good" associated with the second day?
4. How were the trees supposed to taste?
5. On which day were the sun and moon created?
6. Hashem blessed the birds to be fruitful and to multiply. Why did He not do so with the beasts?
7. In whose likeness was man fashioned?
8. What kind of food did Adam eat?
9. Why is "the sixth day" written with the definite article?
10. At the end of the sixth day what was the world still lacking?
11. Why was man made from dust gathered from the entire earth?
12. How is man superior to the animals?
13. Why was it not good that man be alone?
14. Where do we learn that one must not add to a commandment from Hashem?
15. What does it mean that Adam and Chava "knew that they were naked?"
16. Why did Hevel choose to be a shepherd?
17. What was the marital practice of the generation who lived before the flood?
18. What did Tuval-Cain invent?
19. Why did Chanoch die at a young age?
20. What was the sign that Shem was born with great propensity for righteousness?

### Answers to Bereishet's Questions!

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

1. 1:1 - So that when the nations accuse us of stealing *Eretz Canaan* from the Canaanites, we can respond that Hashem, as Creator, has the right to give the land to whomever He sees fit, and He gave *Eretz Canaan* to us.
2. 1:4 - Hashem saw that the wicked would be unworthy of it so He hid it for the righteous.
3. 1:7 - Because the work with the water wasn't completed until the third day. Anything that is incomplete is not "good."
4. 1:11 - The wood was to have the taste of the fruit.
5. 1:14 - They were created on the first day and suspended in the firmament on the fourth day.
6. 1:22 - He did not want the serpent, who was to be cursed, to receive a blessing.
7. 1:26 - In the likeness of the angels.
8. 1:30 - Vegetation.
9. 1:31 - "The" in Hebrew is the letter *hey*, which has a numerical value of five. Hashem created the world on the condition that it will endure only if the Jewish People accept the Five Books of the Torah.
10. 2:2 - Rest.
11. 2:7 - So that wherever he might die, the earth would receive his body.
12. 2:7 - He was given understanding and speech.
13. 2:18 - If he were alone, he would appear to be a god. The creation of woman emphasized man's dependence.
14. 3:3 - From Chava. Hashem commanded not to eat from the tree but she added not to touch it. Because she added to the command she eventually came to transgress it.
15. 3:7 - They had been given one commandment and they had stripped themselves of it.
16. 4:2 - Since the ground had been cursed he refrained from cultivating it.
17. 4:19 - They married two wives, one with whom to have children. The other one was given a potion which prevented her from bearing children.
18. 4:22 - Murder weapons.
19. 5:22 - Though he was righteous, he was easily influenced. Therefore Hashem took him before his time to protect him from sinning.
20. 5:32 - He was born already circumcised.

## PARSHA Q&A ?

### NOACH

1. Which particular sin sealed the fate of the flood generation?
2. Why did Hashem tell Noach to build an ark, as opposed to saving him via some other method?
3. The ark had three levels. What function did each level serve?
4. What indication do we have that Noach was familiar with the Torah?
5. Why did Hashem postpone bringing the flood for seven days?
6. Why did the first water of the flood come down as light rain?
7. What did people say that threatened Noach, and what did Hashem do to protect him?
8. What grouping of creatures escaped the punishment of the flood?
9. How deeply was the ark submerged in the water?
10. What did the olive branch symbolize?
11. How long did the punishment of the flood last?
12. A solar year is how many days longer than a lunar year?
13. When did humans receive permission to eat meat?
14. What prohibition was given along with the permission to eat meat?
15. Why does the command to “be fruitful and multiply” directly follow the prohibition of murder?
16. Name two generations in which the rainbow never appeared.
17. Why did Noach curse Canaan specifically? Give two reasons.
18. Why does the Torah call Nimrod a mighty hunter?
19. The sin of the generation of the dispersion was greater than the sin of the generation of the flood. Why was the punishment of the former less severe?
20. Why was Sarah also called Yiscah?

## PARSHA Q&A!

### Answers to Noach’s Questions!

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

1. 6:13 - Robbery.
2. 6:14 - So that people would see Noach building the ark and ask him what he was doing. When Noach would answer, “Hashem is bringing a flood,” it might encourage some people to repent.
3. 6:16 - The top level housed the people, the middle level housed the animals, and the bottom level, the refuse.
4. 7:2 - Hashem told him to take into the ark seven of each kosher-type animal, and two of each non-kosher type. “Kosher” and “non-kosher” are Torah concepts.
5. 7:4 - To allow seven days to mourn the death of Mesushelach.
6. 7:12 - To give the generation a chance to repent.
7. 7:13,15 - People said, “If we see him going into the ark, we’ll smash it!” Hashem surrounded it with bears and lions to kill any attackers.
8. 7:22 - The fish.
9. 8:4 - Eleven amot.
10. 8:11 - Nothing. It was a leaf, not a branch. (The olive leaf symbolized that it’s better to eat food “bitter like an olive” but which comes directly from Hashem, rather than sweet food provided by humans.)
11. 8:14 - A full solar year.
12. 8:14 - Eleven days.
13. 9:3 - After the flood.
14. 9:4 - The prohibition of eating a limb cut from a living animal.
15. 9:7 - To equate one who purposely abstains from having children to one who commits murder.
16. 9:12 - The generation of King Chizkiyahu and the generation of Shimon bar Yochai.
17. 9:22,24 - Because Canaan is the one who revealed Noach’s disgrace to Ham. And because Ham stopped Noach from fathering a fourth son. Thus, Noach cursed Ham’s fourth son, Canaan.
18. 10:9 - He used words to ensnare the minds of people, persuading them to rebel against Hashem.
19. 11:9 - They lived together peacefully.
20. 11:29 - The word “Yiscah” is related to the Hebrew word “to see.” Sarah was called Yiscah because she could “see” the future via prophecy. Also, because of her beauty, everyone would gaze at her.

- For what sort of water source can *pasei biraot* be made
- Fencing in an area with no residential facility
- Size of the *Mishkan* courtyard and its application to such an area
- Difference between sowing and planting in such an area
- Changing the status of such an area through construction
- Size of fenced in area and the lesson learned from Prophet Yeshayahu
- The courtyard neighbor who forgot to make an *eiruv*
- Which foods qualify for use as *eiruv*
- How to relate to generalities in the *Mishna*
- Which foods may be purchased with funds used for redeeming Second Tithe
- Halachic and medical status of certain plants
- The quantity of foods needed for use as *eiruv*
- Wine and beer in regard to *eiruv* and *mikveh*
- Absolute and relative nature and amount of food qualifying for *eiruv*
- Different levels of nourishment and satiation
- Beit Shammai's position on *eiruv techumim* requirement
- *Eiruv* in the graveyard
- What can and cannot be used for *eiruv techumim*
- Can we assume that an agent has carried out his mission?
- Committing a "little sin" to save another from a big one
- *Eiruv* on a tree, a pole or in a locked box
- The *eiruv* which became inaccessible or inedible but not sure when
- How to relate to halachic doubts
- Making an *eiruv* to cover multiple possibilities
- Expecting a Sage or expecting trouble

## WHAT IS CONSIDERED FOOD

Food plays a central role in regard to the making of an *eiruv chatzeirot* by all the neighbors contributing to food placed in one of the homes, which enables them to carry on Shabbat in their courtyard area, and for *eiruv techumim*, which enables one to walk on Shabbat beyond the normal limitation. In regard to *maaser sheini* (second tithe of crops which must be consumed in Yerushalayim or redeemed for money which must then be used for acquiring food in Yerushalayim), the funds must be spent only on something considered food.

A parallel is drawn in the *mishna* (26:6) between the food matters which qualify for making an *eiruv* and which may be purchased with the funds used for redeeming *ma'aser sheini* crops. Nevertheless subtle differences do arise.

One of them is in regard to the status of salt water. The *mishna* states that neither water nor salt qualifies as food for *eiruv* or Second Tithe purposes. Rabbi Yitzchak, however, states that if salt and water are combined and some oil is added, this mixture can be used for the purpose of the *ma'aser sheini* funds. The *gemara* posits that he will certainly consider such a combination as qualifying for an *eiruv* because the requirements there are

less demanding.

*Tosefot* challenges this assumption by pointing out that mushrooms can be purchased with *ma'aser sheini* funds and yet cannot be used for an *eiruv*. His resolution is to distinguish between the requirements in either category. There is no question that a lower degree of food is necessary for making an *eiruv* but it must be food that is edible at the beginning of Shabbat when the *eiruv* takes effect. Although uncooked mushrooms, because of their inedible nature in the raw, cannot be used for an *eiruv*, they qualify as food for *ma'aser sheini* purposes since they are edible after cooking. The salt water-oil combination which is readily usable for consumption qualifies not only for Second Tithe but surely for an *eiruv* as well.

• *Eiruv* 27

## HOW RELIABLE THE AGENT

If one wishes to walk on Shabbat beyond the 2,000 *amot* (cubits) *techum* (boundary) past his city limits, he can do so only if he makes an *eiruv techumim*. He does so by placing before Shabbat enough food for two meals somewhere within the *techum*, and this is considered as if he set up his home there for Shabbat and he is permitted to walk 2,000 *amot* from there on Shabbat.

Much of the *perek* we are now studying deals with the kind and quantity of food which must be used and in what manner it must be placed. There also arises a question as to whether one who has delegated an agent to place his *eiruv* can rely that he has carried out his mission.

There is a consensus that one can rely on the agent having done so in regard to the matter of an *eiruv* since it is only a rabbinic law that one cannot walk beyond the above-mentioned limit unless he makes an *eiruv*. When it comes to matters of Torah law, however, there is a difference of opinion between Rabbi Sheisbes who holds that even there we can rely on the agent's performance and Rabbi Nachman who limits such reliance to rabbinical law.

Of the several places in the Talmud where this question arises perhaps the best known is the case of a man who delegates an agent to betroth a woman for him without making any specification. If the agent subsequently dies without reporting whether he carried out his mission and with whom, the one who sent him is forbidden to marry any woman in the world, for she may be a sister of the woman to whom he is legally married. An attempt to deduce from this ruling that we rely on an agent carrying out his mission is rejected by the *gemara* (*Mesechta Gittin* 64a) because this may only be a stringent procedure applied because of our doubt that the agent may or may not have done his job.

*Tosefot* states that there is a difference of opinion between the commentaries as to whether we rule like Rabbi Nachman of Rabbi Sheisbes.

• *Eiruv* 32a

## PRE-CREATION

**From: Sarah in Atlanta**

Dear Rabbi,

I have heard that the term "Bereishet bara Elokim" does not mean as is commonly translated, "In the beginning G-d created", but rather "In the beginning of G-d's having created". This is supposed to imply that rather than existence coming into being at the time described in the Creation story, there was some form of existence "pre-existing" creation. What was this primordial existence?

Dear Sarah,

Rashi on the first verse of the Torah goes to great lengths to prove your very point: that the Torah does not intend to reveal the chronology of creation, but rather to describe certain dimensions of the creation. He masterfully brings many verses throughout Torah to support this usage of "Bereishet bara". In addition, he suggests a simple logical proof as well: If the Torah's intention is to chronicle the creation of first heaven then earth, where does water fit in, which is mentioned later both as a component of heaven and appearing before earth?

So what existed before Creation?

On one level, the answer is simple: G-d. However, this is also one of the deepest topics discussed in Kabbalah. Referred to as *tzimtzum* (constriction, withdrawal), it describes the inner dimension of what transpired between what you call "pre-existence" and creation. I'll paraphrase this idea as described by the Arizal:

Before all things were created, the Supernal Light was complete and perfect. It filled all existence. Since everything was filled with the simple Light of the Infinite, there was no empty space that could be considered space, emptiness or void. There was no concept of beginning or end. All was one unified, undifferentiated Infinite Light.

When it arose in His Will to create all the spiritual and physical worlds, He withdrew His Infinite Essence (1) from

His Infinite Light (2), resulting in what would become the center point of the space about to be created. He then withdrew His Essence even further, to the extremities around this center, leaving a Vacated Space (3) in the midst of the Infinite Light, for all that was to be emanated, created, formed and completed (4).

He then drew a single, straight line (5) down from His Infinite Light into the Vacated Space. The upper extremity of this Ray was connected with the Infinite Light surrounding the Space, while its lower extremity descended toward the center of the Vacated Space. It was through this Ray, serving as a conduit for the Infinite Light, that Divine energy was drawn down to create and sustain the universes.

The Arizal goes on to explain that the Ten Sefirot are located in this Ray of Divine Light emanating down from the Infinite into creation. In this way, the array of the Sefirot is like a prism refracting the simple, undifferentiated Divine Light into the components necessary to generate the multiplicity of creation.

This process of *tzimtzum* is represented in the four-letter name of G-d, through which He is made known in the world. The letter "yod", which hovers above and points in all directions, corresponds to the Infinite Light. The first "Heh", which defines within itself a space differentiated from the "yod", corresponds to the boundaries of the withdrawn Infinite Light and the resulting Vacated Space. The letter "Vav", comprised of a straight line and which literally means 'connector', corresponds to the Ray of Light flowing straight down from the Infinite toward what would become the center point of creation. The last "Heh" represents the space expanded within that center point in which all spiritual and physical worlds were created.

Sources:

*Etz Chaim, Drush Igulim v'Yosher 1:2*

(1) *Ein Sof*

(2) *Or Ein Sof*

(3) *Chalal Panui*

(4) *Atzilut, Beriyyah, Yetzirah, Asiyah, respectively*

(5) *Kav*

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## WHAT THE Sages SAY

“We cannot assume from a general rule stated in the *mishna* that there are no exceptions to that rule, and even when some exceptions are explicitly named, there may still be others.”

• Rabbi Yochanan - Eiruvim 27a

“It can be assumed with certainty that a Torah scholar will not leave incomplete anything that he has to do regarding halachic matters.”

• Rabbi Chanina Chozooch - Eiruvim 32a

## WHAT'S THE RIGHT THING TO DO?

REAL-LIFE QUESTIONS OF SOCIAL AND BUSINESS ETHICS

### SOFT SELL RE CELLPHONE NUISANCE

**Question:** Here I am sitting on a bus and someone sits down next to me, places a call on his cellphone and begins a loud, disturbing conversation with someone on the other end of the line. What is the right thing for me to do in such a case?

**Answer:** Until the transportation authorities finally get around to banning long and loud cellphone conversations just as they ban smoking, you have a problem shared by many passengers. Since you can never be sure that the call disturbing you is not of an emergency nature, you must be very gentle in handling the problem.

How about just turning to your cellphone-calling neighbor

and softly saying, “Pardon me, but your conversation is disturbing me. If you must carry on with it, I will have to change my seat.”

Most people will react in a positive way by either cutting short the conversation or by themselves finding themselves a place on the bus where no one will complain. (Preferably a place where they have to compete with the noise from other cellphone callers!)

If you want to be even more subtle, you might try asking the caller if he has any earplugs you could borrow. The main thing is to remember that not everyone is aware that their talking disturbs you, so don't get upset. Use your imagination as to the best way to get your message across.

## THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

### WHO IS THE GUEST?

Studying a rare volume in the Judaica section of the Royal Library in Vienna was none other than the rabbi of the Brod community, Rabbi Eliezer Landau. This famed Torah scholar, who authored the *Yad Hamelech*, was interrupted in his reading by a stranger who asked him who he was. When he identified himself as the rabbi of Brod, the stranger expressed his pleasure at meeting him and promised to look him up when he next visited his city.

Upon returning the book the rabbi asked the librarian who it was that had so greeted him. “That was the emperor!” replied the surprised librarian.

The emperor kept his promise and eventually arrived unannounced at the rabbi's home. The excitement of receiving such an honored guest and of making the special blessing on seeing a king caused the rabbi to forget to invite the emperor to sit down. “Is it some sort of Jewish custom,” asked the laughing emperor, “to refrain from inviting a guest to sit down?”

The quick-witted response of the rabbi was:

“According to Jewish tradition whenever the emperor comes he becomes the host and all are his guests. We are therefore waiting for the emperor to invite us to sit down.”

*continued from page one*

weddings, *Yamim Tovim*, *Brit Mila* and other events in Jewish life. Jews seem to have no problem combining wine with an essentially sober lifestyle.

What is the secret of this combination of wine and wisdom?

In this week's portion, after Noach emerged from the ark he planted a vineyard and subsequently became drunk. The Torah describes Noach's action as "*Vayachel*". This word is from the root '*chol*' meaning the opposite of holy. Rashi explains that Noach made himself 'un-holy' for he should have involved himself in planting something other than a vineyard. Rashi's words here need some explanation. Why was Noach's 'unholiness' connected with his failure to plant some other species than the grape?

In the language of the spiritual masters the word 'wine' is synonymous with 'pleasure'. This is why the ultimate pleasure of being close to the Divine Presence in the future world is described as "*the wine preserved from the grapes of the Six Days of Creation.*" Before we experience the wine of the world to come, however, we must first cultivate something other than the vineyard. Here we

must labor to raise the level of the un-holy, the *chol*, to the level of the holy – not the other way around as did Noach.

In this world, our experience of wine must always be connected to holiness, for we exist in neither the place nor the time that the wine can be experienced in itself. The Talmud tells us that there is something in this world that no eye has seen except for G-d. It is beyond our eyes to see. It is a secret, hidden. That is what is meant by "*the wine preserved from the grapes of the Six Days of Creation.*" The gematria (numerical equivalent) of *Yayin* (wine) is 70 - the same as *Sod* - which means 'secret'.

If we spend our life seeking the "wine" of this world we will find our end in degradation, but if we connect to the wine that is hidden in the grape, the future world that is promised to the righteous, then we will enjoy the ultimate closeness to G-d.

Sources:

*Midrash Tanchuma, Rabbeinu Bachya, Sanhedrin 70, The Midrash Says*

### BELIEVING IN MIRACLES

**E**hud is driving in Jerusalem. He's late for a meeting. He's looking for a parking place and can't find one. In desperation he turns towards Heaven and says, "G-d, if you find me a parking space, I promise that I'll eat only kosher, respect Shabbat and all the holidays."

Miraculously a place opens up just in front of him. He turns his face up to Heaven and says, "Never mind, I just found one."

Yigal is climbing a mountain in Nepal after completing his military service. He loses his footing and begins a fall to certain death. A small branch jutting out of the side of the cliff provides him with temporary relief, but he realizes that in a moment it will break under his weight. In desperation he looks towards Heaven and asks: "Is there anyone up there to help me?"

A voice from above responds:

"Let go of the branch and you will be saved!"

Yigal thinks for a moment, looks up again and asks:

"Is there anyone else up there?"

Two imaginary stories with the same message. In desperation most people will turn to Heaven for help but when it comes many of them are reluctant to assume the responsibilities that come with it. This is why the headlines of secular newspapers can shout that a "miracle" happened when a terrorist attack is thwarted in time but so few of their readers see in this miracle the hand of G-d who is the true "Guardian of Israel".

The survival of the Jewish People throughout history is one great miracle, and the survival of the Jewish State is a modern miracle. As we begin this Shabbat a new year of Torah reading in the synagogue, let us hope that the account of Creation in this week's portion will awaken all of our people to the realization that the Divine Author of nature is the One who makes the miracles that enable us to survive and that He expects us to fulfill our responsibilities as the Chosen People so that we will be worthy of His miraculously protecting Israel forever.