

# OHRNET

SHABBAT PARSHAT NASSO · 4 SIVAN 5768 · JUN. 7, 2008 · VOL. 15 NO. 35

## PARSHA INSIGHTS

### OUT OF DARKEST AFRICA

*“May G-d illuminate His countenance for you and be gracious to you...” (2:22)*

There was a young Israeli who grew up in North Tel Aviv. That’s about as far from B’nei Brak spiritually as it is close geographically.

After serving his time in the army, this young man went abroad on his *de rigueur* tour of the world. He traveled through Europe to Sweden where he met, fell in love with, and married a non-Jewish girl. She was a diplomat who worked for the Swedish Foreign Ministry, and shortly after their marriage they were posted to the embassy in one of the central African nations in what used to be know as Darkest Africa.

The Foreign Minister held a reception to welcome the new Swedish consulate, and he was introduced to this Swedish girl and her Israeli husband. The Minister saw that the husband didn’t look very Swedish and asked from where he came,

“I am from Israel,” replied the husband.

“You are Jewish!” exclaimed the Minister, his eyes widening.

“Yes...” he replied rather sheepishly.

With a loud and commanding voice, the Minister summoned his entire entourage, “Everyone come here immediately! G-d has sent us one of His holy people — and from His Holy Land!”

The polite consular chitchat fell silent as all eyes turned to this fellow, who was praying (probably for the first time in his life) that the floor would mercifully open at his feet and swallow him.

His prayers seemingly went unanswered, and the Minister proceeded to ask him how he came to be in his country and many more questions about the Land of Israel.

A few months later, the wife received her transfer orders to the embassy in Ankara. Before they left however, the Foreign Minister arranged a farewell reception. As the reception drew to a close the Minister made a small speech. Again he impressed on the crowd the tremendous honor that they had enjoyed having one of “G-d’s holy people” in

their midst. At this point he took an ancient book from one of his aides. Addressing the Israeli fellow he said:

“We have had this book in the Ministry for many years, no one is quite sure how long. None of us can read the book since it is in a foreign language. We are not sure, but we think it is in the Holy Tongue. If it is, we would like to present it to you as a mark of our esteem and honor for the time you have spent among us.”

With a polite acceptance speech, the Israeli received the ancient tome, and sure enough, it was a Hebrew book — The Kuzari by Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi.

The couple had decided to see something of the continent of Africa and had planned to spend a month motoring up to Turkey. Needless to say, the husband had no interest in reading The Kuzari, but seeing as the nearest copy of Maariv was more than a thousand miles away, he made do with the only Hebrew literature that he had.

He started to read Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi’s account of how the King of Kazars, a tribe in Central Asia, had invited the representatives of Judaism, Islam and Christianity to present their claims to being the true faith. After hearing the arguments of each he had chosen to convert, along with his entire people, to Judaism.

By the time the couple reached the Bosphorous, they were no longer a couple. The Israeli flew back to Tel Aviv, took a taxi to B’nei Brak, and stopped a black-hatted man on the street, announcing, “I want to learn Torah.”

He got remarried in Bnei Brak just before Pesach this year.

“G-d has many agents,” and we can never know but the tiniest fraction of them. How a copy of the Kuzari found its way into the middle of darkest Africa remains deeply in the world of speculation. But what I would really like to know is in which, or in whose, merit did this particular *Yiddishe neshama* merit to be blessed with the verse, “*May G-d illuminate His countenance for you and be gracious to you*”?

• Source: Story heard from Rabbi Y. Abramov

## PARSHA OVERVIEW

The Torah assigns the exact *Mishkan*-related tasks to be performed by the families of Gershon, Kehat, and Merari, the sons of Levi. A census reveals that over 8,000 men are ready for such service. All those ritually impure are to be sent out of the encampments. If a person, after having sworn in court to the contrary, confesses that he wrongfully retained his neighbor's property, he has to pay an additional fifth of the base-price of the object and bring a guilt offering as atonement. If the claimant has already passed away without heirs, the payments are made to a *kohen*. In certain circumstances, a husband who suspects that his wife had been unfaithful brings her to the Temple. A *kohen* prepares a drink of water mixed with dust from the Temple floor and a spe-

cial ink that was used for inscribing G-d's Name on a piece of parchment. If she is innocent, the potion does not harm her; rather it brings a blessing of children. If she is guilty, she suffers a supernatural death. A *nazir* is one who vows to dedicate himself to G-d for a specific period of time. He must abstain from all grape products, grow his hair and avoid contact with corpses. At the end of this period he shaves his head and brings special offerings. The *kohanim* are commanded to bless the people. The *Mishkan* is completed and dedicated on the first day of *Nisan* in the second year after the Exodus. The prince of each tribe makes a communal gift to help transport the *Mishkan*, as well as donating identical individual gifts of gold, silver, animal and meal offerings.

## ISRAEL Forever

### SHAVUOT, SINAI AND SECURITY

As Jews throughout Israel and the world prepare for the Festival of Shavuot as the "Season of the Giving of the Torah", it must be remembered that we do not merely *remember* the historic event that took place at Mount Sinai but try our best to *relive* it.

One of the lessons we must learn from such an experience is connected with the unusual name of the mountain where the Torah was given. *Sinai*, our Sages point out, is similar to *sinah*, the Hebrew word for hatred, which refers to the hatred of the nations. An original interpretation of this point was offered by the martyred *rosh hayeshiva* of Yeshivat Beranovitch, Rabbi Elchanan

Wasserman.

When our ancestors declared their willingness to accept the Torah, they were set aside from all the nations who had refused to do so and they embarked on a road of no return. Their unique identity as the chosen people would be preserved either by a *Sinai* adherence to Torah or by the *sinah* of the nations whose hatred would remind them of their unique mission.

May this Shavuot return all of our people to Sinai and bring an end to the suffering from the *sinah* of the nations so that we can enjoy security in Israel forever.

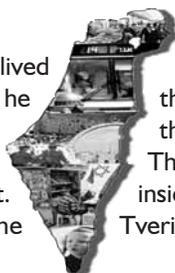
## LOVE OF THE LAND - THE PLACES

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

### RAMBAM- LEGEND OF A BURIAL

Although Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon (RaMbaM) lived most of his life in Egypt, tradition has it that he was buried in Tveriah.

A report of this burial is found in a sixteenth century source that describes the events leading up to it. Bandits attacked the company transporting the



Rambam's casket to Eretz Yisrael and tried to throw the casket into the ocean. Although these more than thirty villains tried to lift the casket they did not succeed. This led them to the conclusion that a holy man was inside and they accompanied the casket to burial in Tveriah.

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## PARSHA Q&A ?

1. What is the significance of the number 8,580 in this week's *Parsha*?
2. Besides transporting the *Mishkan*, what other service performed by the *levi'im* is referred to in this *Parsha*?
3. On which day did Moshe teach the command to send those who are *teme'im* (ritually impure) out of the camp?
4. Name the three camps in the desert.
5. Who was sent out of each of the camps?
6. A person stole from another and swore that he was innocent. If he later confesses his guilt, what are his obligations?
7. Who determines which *kohen* receives the gifts that must be given to the *kohanim*?
8. What does the Torah promise a person who gives *matnot kehuna*?
9. Why are the verses about *matnot kehuna* followed by the verses about the *sotah*?
10. Why is the *sotah* given water from the holy basin?
11. What does the *kohen* do to the hair of a *sotah*?
12. When a *sotah* who is guilty of adultery drinks the water, she dies in a very specific fashion. What happens to the adulterer?
13. Before the Name of G-d is erased, the *sotah* has the option either to admit guilt or to drink the water. Does she have a third option?
14. What are *chartzanim*? What are *zagim*?
15. What sin does a *nazir* commit against himself?
16. Where was the cut hair of a *nazir* placed?
17. A *kohen* should bless the people "with a full heart." What word in the *Parsha* conveys this idea of "a full heart?"
18. What is the meaning of the blessing "May G-d bless you and guard you"?
19. What is the meaning of the blessing "May G-d lift up His countenance upon you"?
20. The tribe of Yissachar was the second tribe to offer their gifts. Why did they merit this position?

## PARSHA Q&A!

### Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

1. 4:47-48 - It is the number of *levi'im* between ages thirty and fifty.
2. 4:47 - Singing and playing cymbals and harps to accompany the sacrifices.
3. 5:2 - The day the *Mishkan* was erected.
4. 5:2 - The camp of the *Shechina* was in the center, surrounded by the camp of Levi which was surrounded by the camp of *Yisrael*.
5. 5:2 - A *metzora* was sent out of all three camps. A *zav* was permitted in the camp of *Yisrael* but excluded from the two inner camps. A person who was *tamei* from contact with the dead had to leave only the camp of the *Shechina*.
6. 5:6-8 - He pays the principle plus a fifth to the victim, and brings a *korban asham*.
7. 5:10 - The giver.
8. 5:10 - Great wealth.
9. 5:12 - To teach that someone who withholds the gifts due the *kohanim* is deserving of eventually bringing his wife to the *kohanim* to be tried as a *sotah*.
10. 5:17 - The holy basin was made from the mirrors of the righteous women who left Egypt; the *sotah* strayed from the example set by these women.
11. 5:18 - He uncovers it.
12. 5:22 - He dies a similar death.
13. 5:27 - Yes, she can refuse both: She can refuse to admit guilt and also refuse to drink the water. (After the Name of G-d is erased, she loses this option.)
14. 6:4 - *Chartzanim* are seeds. *Zagim* are peels.
15. 6:11 - He abstains from enjoying wine.
16. 6:18 - It was placed on the fire under the pot in which the *nazir's shelamim* offering was cooked.
17. 6:23 - "Amor."
18. 6:24 - "May G-d bless you" that your property may increase, "and guard you" from robbery.
19. 6:26 - "May He suppress His anger."
20. 7:18 - The Tribe of Yissachar was well versed in Torah. Also, they proposed the idea that the *nesi'im* should offer gifts.

- The dust used for *Sotah* portion
- Three cases of oral tradition changing meaning of a Torah passage
- When it is necessary for dust, ashes, saliva and blood to be discernible
- The order of placing dust and water in the *Sotah* potion
- Text and parchment of the scroll written for the *Sotah* potion
- The double *amen* said by the *Sotah*
- The ritual of the *Sotah*'s mincha flour offering and when it is performed
- If the *Sotah* refuses to drink her potion
- Rabbi Meir's career as a scribe

- The impact of the potion on the *Sotah* and why it is sometimes delayed
- The comparison between the power of Torah study and performance of *mitzvot*
- Women's role in the study of Torah
- Foolish piety, clever wickedness and other destructive behavior
- Definition of an *am ha'aretz*
- What Rabbi Yochanan learned from a young girl and from a widow
- Seven kinds of *parush*
- If merit of *Sotah* affects the impact of the potion

## DUST AND ASHES, PAST AND FUTURE

“I am but dust and ashes,” humbly excused himself the Patriarch Avraham as he pleaded for G-d to spare the wicked people of Sodom. (*Bereishet* 18:27)

In the merit of this humility, stated the Sage Rava, Avraham's descendants were given the mitzvah of the purifying ashes of the Red Heifer and the mitzvah of dust in the potion of the *Sotah*.

The connection between these two substances and the purpose of these two mitzvot can thus be explained:

Ashes have a past but no future, while the dust of the earth has no past but has a future since things can be plant-

ed in it.

The purpose of the Red Heifer's ashes is to wipe out the past — the ritual contamination arising from contact with the dead.

The purpose of the dust placed in the potion the *Sotah* drinks to prove her innocence is to ensure a future of peaceful relations between the woman and her suspicious husband.

It may be added that it was the expressed humility of our forefather that made us worthy of possessing the power to transform impurity to purity and suspicion to harmony, transformations so supernatural that they are merited only by a people humble enough to recognize that there is a Creator who can make magic from dust and ashes.

• *Sotah* 17a

## What the SAGES Say

“Even though women are not obligated to study Torah they nevertheless share the reward of the children they bring to their Torah school and of the husbands whom they permit to study away from home.”

• *The Sage Ravina - Sotah* 21a

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## HAFTARA, HALF-TORAH?

**From: Marge in Louisville, KY**

*Dear Rabbi:*

*In anticipation of our son Sam's bar mitzvah, I was wondering why he won't be reading from the Torah, but rather from the haftara. In general, I guess I'm wondering what's the source for the haftara reading as well. Thank you for your insights.*

Dear Marge,

First, let me wish your family a heart-felt mazal tov on Sam's upcoming bar mitzvah.

For reasons I'll explain shortly, it has become customary to read from both the weekly Torah portion and a thematically relevant portion from the Prophets each Shabbat. Of course, the Torah portion is primary, while the haftara is of secondary importance.

All communities have a bar mitzvah boy called up to the Torah on public reading days [not necessarily Shabbat] as a way of introducing the boy as a new adult member of the community. Most do so on Shabbat. Of those who call the boy up on Shabbat, some do so on the Shabbat *before* his actual birthday, while others do so on the Shabbat *after* his birthday. Herein lies a practical difference.

If the boy makes his "aliya" (going up to the Torah) on

the Shabbat before he turns 13, he is not yet eligible to be included in the primary Torah reading and therefore reads the secondary haftara. If his aliya is on the Shabbat after he's turned 13, he's called up as one of the seven for the actual Torah reading. [If the birthday itself is on a public Torah reading day other than Shabbat, such as Monday and Thursday, some do the aliya then, and not necessarily on Shabbat, since he becomes privileged with the *mitzvot* on that very day.]

Regarding the source for the haftara reading in general, the Talmud relates that during the second century B.C.E, the Syrian-Greek rulers over Israel prohibited Jews from reading the Torah. Since only reading of the Five Books of Moses was prohibited, selections from the prophets that were thematically similar to some aspect of the weekly Torah portion were read instead. Eventually the decree was nullified and the Torah reading was reinstated, but the selection from the Prophets continued to be read after the conclusion of the Torah portion.

This is probably the source for the term "haftara" which means either "that which comes after" or "conclusion". The person called for haftara also reads what's called "maftir" which is a repetition of the last few verses of the Torah portion. This is done to honor the haftara person with a symbolic reading from the Torah while serving as a transition between the Torah and haftara portions.

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## WHAT NOT TO SAY

**Question:** While paying a condolence visit to a mourning neighbor I was somewhat disturbed to hear one of the comforters say, "What can you do?" Although I am sure that he said this as a way of expressing his empathy with the mourner, it struck me as being inappropriate. What is the right thing to do?

**Answer:** Your intuition is correct!

The halacha (see Rama in *Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Dei'ah* 376:2) rules as follows:

"One should not say to a mourner 'What can you do; it is impossible to undo death' because this smacks of

blasphemy by implying that if one could do something he should (even though this against the will of Heaven), but should rather encourage him to accept the Heavenly decree with love."

While it may not be the proper setting for publicly correcting the comforter, you can undo the damage by stressing to the mourner the positive aspect of lovingly accepting what Heaven has decided is best for him and for the deceased.

May we know only of joy in our lives and be spared the need to comfort mourners.

## THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY \_\_\_\_\_

### A RELIABLE GUARANTOR

"I desperately need a loan for a half year," said the newcomer to Yeshaya Jochovitzer. "Since I am new here I cannot provide any guarantor. Only G-d knows that I am an honest person and He can be my guarantor."

"There is no better guarantor," said Yeshaya as he extended the requested loan.

Half a year later the borrower smilingly returned to

repay the loan, adding that the money had helped him to succeed in his business. But Yeshaya refused to accept the money, explaining that the Divine Guarantor had already repaid the loan by blessing him with an unexpected profit in the exact amount of the loan.

(A similar tale regarding Rabbi Akiva is found in the commentaries in the *Mesechta Nedarim* 50a.)

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