

# OHRNET

SHABBAT PARSHAT BECHUKOTAI · 22 IYAR 5763 · MAY 24, 2003 · VOL. 10 NO. 31

## PARSHA INSIGHTS

### ISRAELI SECRET WEAPON UNMASKED! – SHH!

*“If you will follow My decrees...you will dwell securely in your land. I will provide peace in the land, and you will lie down with none to frighten...” (26:1-6)*

Can you keep a secret? Every year, nations spend billions of dollars on defense. Every country wants to have the latest secret weapon – a “smarter” bomb that can pin-point military headquarters and take it out without touching a hair on the heads of the babies in the maternity hospital that some beneficent dictator has built next door; a anti-missile missile that can discriminate one hundred percent between an enemy rocket and a planeload of tourists; a foolproof WMD detector, a super-snooper surveillance system that forewarns of global terrorist activity; the list goes on.

But there’s one weapon that beats all other secret weapons and (keep this to yourself and lean very close to the computer screen) *we have it!!!*

Shh! (I don’t want this article to be picked up by a web-crawler and find its way onto *Arabnet*, so you better delete it as soon as you have finished reading it, okay?!)

What is it about this weapon that beats all other secret weapons?

This weapon prevents your enemy from ever launching an attack on you in the first place.

And I don’t mean a deterrent. I mean a device that stops your enemies either thinking about attacking you or if they think about attacking you, it ingeniously stops them from being able to carry out the attack. The weather stops them, or their billion dollar research program turns up a dud, or their entire army gets the dysentery.

Not only does such a weapon exist, but we have that weapon.

It’s called...

Lean a little closer to your monitor so not everyone sees this, okay

It’s called...

Shh!

(the Torah!)

Okay? Mum’s the word – right?

The Talmud teaches that learning Torah is greater than saving lives.

How can that be? How can anything be greater than saving a human life?

The answer is that there’s one thing better than saving a human life and that’s preventing someone from getting into a life-threatening situation in the first place.

The power of Torah learning is that it is *magen u’matzil*– It doesn’t just save us from our enemies, it protects us as from them as well.

That’s our secret weapon.

Shh! Keep it a secret!

You promised.

• Source: *Shir Ma’on*; thanks to Rabbi C. Z. Senter

## PARSHA OVERVIEW

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 the details of *erachin* – the process by which someone vows to give the *Beit Hamikdash* the equivalent monetary value of a person, an animal or property.

## EARNING PEACE

Peace is the sweet dream of all Mankind. It has particular significance for the Jewish People whose history is filled with so much conflict, exile and persecution.

In the little more than half a century of its existence, the modern State of Israel has experienced half a dozen wars on its borders, and the threat of missile attacks in two wars beyond its borders. No wonder then that a special emotion will surge in the heart of the Jew who hears the Divine promise of "peace in your land" in this week's Torah reading.

Peace, however, cannot be achieved by simply dreaming of it or even fighting and negotiating for it. Peace, says the Torah, must be earned by the people who received the Torah as a guide for living their individual and national lives.

How does one earn the right to peace, without which all the blessings of economic prosperity listed at the outset of this week's Torah portion are meaningless?

The answer is clearly stated in the very first words of this

portion: "If you shall go in My statutes and observe My commandments".

"Go in My statutes," explain our Sages, "does not refer to the fulfillment of G-d's commandments which is explicitly mentioned. It refers rather to the additional need for the diligent study of Torah.

It is indeed tragic to witness the change of governmental attitude towards the support of *yeshivot* and *kolelim* in *Eretz Yisrael*. For virtually all the years of statehood there has been financial support for these institutions. Even though that support was considerably less than what was provided for universities and secular schools it did contribute significantly to the ability of the Torah world to persevere in its diligent study of Torah and earn Heavenly protection for a beleaguered land. When Jews hear the promise of peace this week and the conditions for this dream coming true they should offer a prayer that G-d opens the eyes of misguiding leaders who fail to see what protects Israel forever.

## THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

### WORKAHOLICS ANONYMOUS

It may come as a surprise to those who are critical of the industriousness of Israelis that Israel ranks number three in the world in the number of workaholics in its workforce. A local newspaper recently published the results of a global survey of work addiction. It found that 8.4% of the Israeli workforce is considered workaholics, working a min-

imum of 60 hours a week. This is presumably the result of the need of many Israelis to hold down two jobs in order to maintain a western-style standard of living.

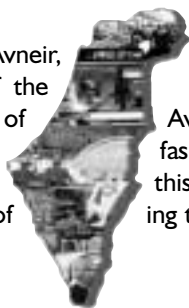
In first place was the U.S. with 12.7%, followed by Japan with 9.3%. After Israel came Belgium (6.7%) and the Netherlands (6.5%).

## LOVE OF THE LAND - THE PEOPLE

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

### MAMREI – THE FAITHFUL ALLY

Together with his brothers Eshkol and Avneir, Mamrei the Emorite was a faithful ally of the Patriarch Avraham. It was in the plains of Mamrei that Avraham established his home shortly after arriving in Eretz Yisrael and where he built an altar to G-d in gratitude for the Heavenly gift of



all of the land.

Mamrei was also the one who encouraged Avraham to go through with his circumcision in public fashion without fear from his enemies. In recognition of this G-d chose the Plains of Mamrei as the site for appearing to Avraham following his circumcision.

Published by Ohr Somayach Tanenbaum College

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## PERFECT AND IMPERFECT PLEASURE

**T**he potentate Bar Sheishach spent his holiday indulging in an extreme form of physical pleasure. When the Sage Rava brought him a gift on that day, Bar Sheishach tauntingly asked him if there was a pleasure so great as this in store for Jews in the hereafter.

There are a couple of passages which Rava could have cited to show that our pleasure will be greater than his. Rabbi Papi suggests that he could have quoted King David's prophetic vision of our royal grandeur expressed in "princesses shall honor you with their service" (*Tehillim* 45:10). Rabbi Nachman bar Yitzchak suggested a quote from the prophetic description of the rewards of the hereafter as being beyond human imagination for "no eye but Yours, Lord, has seen what You will do for those who await Your salvation." (*Yeshayahu* 64:3)

Rava, however, hesitated to respond to the nobleman's challenge with prophetic promises whose validity he could not hope to prove. He chose instead to deflate the quality of his pleasure by pointing to something which could be demonstrated. Rava therefore called attention to the vulnerability of even a high official like Bar Sheishach who is subservient to the arbitrary whims of his king, while Jews in the hereafter will be free from the yoke of any such power. No sooner had he haughtily denied any such subservience than Bar Sheishach was summarily summoned to abandon his indulging and to appear before the king.

Rava's gift to Bar Sheishach on his holiday and that of Rabbi Yehuda to Avidarna on his holiday are explained as being permissible because these sages were certain that the recipients of these gifts were not idol worshippers. The ban on dealing with idol worshippers on and around their holidays for fear that they would offer thanks to their idol did not, therefore, apply to them.

But if these holidays were not days with a religious significance for these non-Jews why did these sages find it necessary to pay homage to them on these particular days? Rabbi Yacov Emden suggests that the holiday referred to here was a New Year's celebration which idol worshippers treated as an occasion for idol worship but which Bar Sheishach and Avidarna related to as simply a day for feasting and one on which receiving gifts was considered a good omen for the year just begun.

• *Avoda Zara* 65a

## THE CASE FOR KASHERING

**A**fter their military triumph over the Midianites, the Israelite troops were instructed by the *Kohen Hagadol* Elazar what to do with metal cooking vessels which

were part of the spoils.

"Whatever was used for cooking with fire must be passed through fire in order to become pure." (*Bamidbar* 31:23)

This is the source for what we know as "kashering" vessels which have absorbed some non-kosher substance. If the substance was absorbed through boiling then boiling must be used to extract it and if it was in direct contact as in broiling then fire must be directly applied to it for removing the absorption.

What sort of vessels are referred to in the above passage?

Rabbi Shimon's position is that the need for kashering was limited to those vessels which had been so recently used for non-kosher cooking that not even a 24-hour period had passed. Once the absorbed substance has been there that long, he contends, the taste it will inject into the subsequent kosher cooking is considered spoiled and making a negative contribution which the Torah did not forbid.

In support of this position Rabbi Shimon cites the passage forbidding the consumption of an animal whose death was not caused by the ritual slaughter of *shechita*. "To the stranger (a non-Jew who has abandoned idol worship) shall you give this carcass for him to eat." (*Devarim* 14:21) Only something which is fit for the stranger to eat is forbidden, concludes Rabbi Shimon, to the exclusion of something which is not fit because it is spoiled, which includes food absorbed in a vessel for more than 24 hours. It should be noted, however, that kashering of such vessels is still required by rabbinical law, which forbids the consumption of even such spoiled substances and only permits the use of food which has unintentionally been cooked in such vessels.

• *Avoda Zara* 67b

## The Weekly Daf

by RABBI MENDEL WEINBACH

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## PARSHA Q&A ?

1. To what do the words “*bechukotai 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. The northern tribes were exiled after how many years of transgressing the Torah in the Land of Israel?
11. In verse 26:42, the name Yaakov is written with an extra “*vav*.” From whom did Yaakov receive this extra letter and why?
12. What positive element is implied by the words “and I will bring them into the land of their enemies?”
13. In verse 26:42, why is the word “remember” not used in connection with the name of Yitzchak?
14. Why does the Torah say in 26:46 “*Torot*” (plural) and not “*Torah*” (singular)?
15. What happens when a poor person dedicates the value of a man to the *Beit Hamikdash* and doesn’t have sufficient funds to fulfill his vow?
16. If a person says “The leg of this animal shall be an *olah* offering” the animal is sold and sacrificed as an *olah* offering. What is the status of the money received for the animal?
17. If a person dedicates his ancestral field to the *Beit Hamikdash* and fails to redeem it before *yovel* what happens to the field?
18. Where must “*ma’aser sheini*” be eaten?
19. When a person redeems “*ma’aser sheini*” what happens to the food? What happens to the redemption money?
20. How does a person tithe his animals?

## PARSHA Q&A!

### Answers to this Week’s Questions!

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

1. 26:3 - Laboring in Torah learning.
2. 26:4 - At times when people are not outside (e.g., Shabbat nights).
3. 26:5 - You will only require a little bread to be completely satisfied.
4. 26:6 - No foreign army will travel through your land on their way to a different country.
5. 26:4 - Two thousand.
6. 26:4 - 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 *mitzvot*, denying the existence of G-d. They are listed in this order because each transgression leads to the next.
8. 26:32 - No enemy nation will be able to settle in the Land of Israel.
9. 26:35 - 70 years. Because the Jewish People violated 70 *shemita* and *yovel* years.
10. 26:35 - 390 years.
11. 26:42 - In five places in the Torah, Yaakov’s name is written with an extra “*vav*” and in five places the name Eliyahu is missing a “*vav*.” Yaakov “took” these *vavs* as a pledge that Eliyahu will one day come and announce the redemption of Yaakov’s children.
12. 26:41 - G-d Himself, so to speak, will bring them into their enemies’ land. This means that even when the Jews are in exile, G-d will supply them with leaders who inspire them to keep the Torah. This guards the Jews from assimilating into the host culture.
13. 26:42 - Because the image of Yitzchak’s ashes (who was prepared to be brought as an offering) upon the altar is always before G-d.
14. 26:46 - To teach that both the Written Torah and the Oral Torah were given to Moshe on Har Sinai.
15. 27:8 - The person whose value was donated goes before the *kohen*, who sets the obligation according to the poor person’s ability to pay.
16. 27:9 - The money is “*chullin*,” meaning it does not have “holy” status, except for the value of the animal’s leg which does have “holy” status.
17. 27:16 - It becomes the property of the *kohanim* who are on rotation at the beginning of *yovel*.
18. 27:30 - In Jerusalem.
19. 27:31 - The food becomes permissible to him outside of Jerusalem. The redemption money must be brought to Jerusalem and used to purchase food to be eaten there.
20. 27:32 - He passes them through a door individually and every tenth animal he marks with a rod smeared with red dye.

## CROSS ON THE GREEN - NOT IN BETWEEN

**Question:** As a “professional pedestrian” who must contend with a large number of traffic lights along the route I walk to and from work, there are always occasions when I face a red light although the street before me is completely free of oncoming cars. Is there anything wrong with ignoring the light and dashing across to save precious time?

**Answer:** This question, equally relevant to motorists, invites a takeoff on an old Ogden Nash verse about an epitaph for a driver and his rights:

*Here lies the body of Jumpy Jimmy Dean  
Who couldn't wait for the light to turn green  
He felt right, dead right, as he dashed along  
But he's just as dead as if he would've been wrong.*

Laws for public safety are intended not only for the individual situation but also as methods of educating people to exercise caution for their protection and the protection of

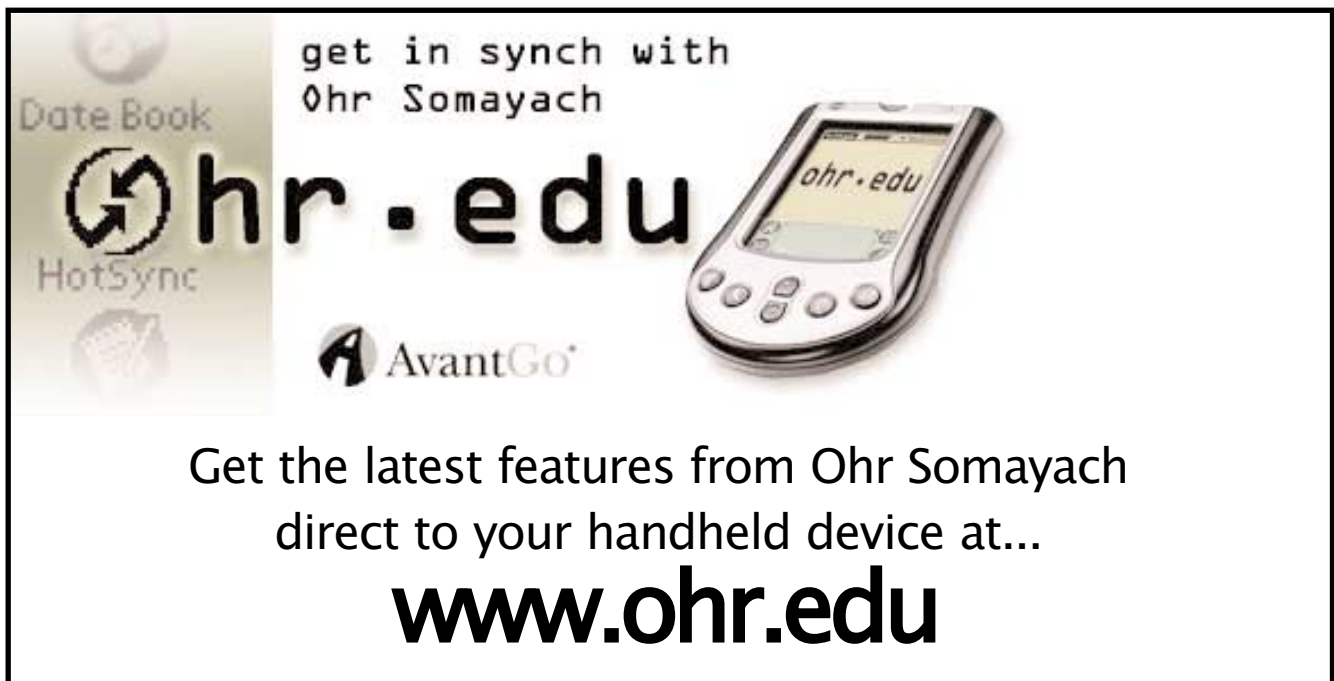
others. When one develops a respect for the warning of a red light, even when he sees no reason for it at the moment, he is less likely to take the risk of crossing when he thinks he can beat the oncoming car and ends up instead like the “hero” of our verse. The large number of pedestrian deaths each year as a result of jaywalking or crossing against the light tragically testifies to how many times a gamble to save a little time ends up with an irreplaceable loss.

The Torah exhorts every person to be extremely careful in guarding the life entrusted to him by his Creator. Just as in regard to religious law each performance of a Divine command develops a person spiritually, so too does each exercise of patience and restraint in waiting for the light to change develop in him a greater regard for life.

Add to this the bad example you would show for those watching you, people younger or less careful than you, who will extend your defiant attitude to truly dangerous situations. The conclusion must be “Cross on the green, not in between”.

## DID YOU KNOW THAT... \_\_\_\_\_

...JLE (Jewish Learning Exchange) in London, and Ohr Somayach in Johannesburg, two of the most successful outreach centers in the world, are Ohr Somayach extensions headed by Ohr Somayach alumni Rabbi Danny Kirsch and Rabbi Larry Shain respectively.



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## PALM READING

**From: Chaya**

Dear Rabbi,  
Has palm reading ever been a part of Orthodox Judaism? If so, how does it work? If not, why not?

Dear Chaya,

While I don't have hands-on experience in palm reading, I can tell you what our sources say about it. Moses was told to select judges over the people, "And you shall discern (literally "see") from among the entire people, men of accomplishment, G-d-fearing people, men of truth, people who despise money, and you shall appoint them leaders" (Exodus 18:21). The Zohar notes that Moses was told to choose the judges by "seeing" them, from which the Zohar learns that Moses was to perceive their qualities in the appearance of their hair, forehead, countenance, eyes, lips and lines in their hands.

In reality, although Moses possessed this lofty wisdom, he didn't need to use it. The Zohar relates that whenever necessary, the Divine Presence would rest upon him and reveal to him through prophecy more than he would have seen by reading the face or palm: "Moses said, when they [the people] have a matter, it [the Divine Presence] comes to me". Nevertheless, the Zohar reveals that the Torah gives credence not only to palm reading, but also to reading facial features and even the hair. In fact, Ramban (1195-1270) went one step further by asserting that this wisdom is actually found in the Torah: "every field of knowledge – whether it be science, agriculture, medicine or palmistry – can be learned from the Torah".

From the Tannaitic (1st – 6th century) through the Gaonic era (7th – 11th century), sages who knew the Torah's secrets also knew how to read faces and palms, and they passed their knowledge down from one to another. However, like the other secrets of the Torah, the wisdom of reading faces and palms has been lost. One notable exception was the Arizal (1534-1572) who approached the level of the Tannaim and could see on a person's forehead what he had transgressed, how many reincarnations his soul had been through, and what he had come to this world to rectify. Nevertheless, the Arizal refused to teach even his main

disciple, Rabbi Chaim Vital, the wisdom of palm reading. Needless to say, the physiognomists and palmists of today have turned a lofty wisdom into a trivial pursuit.

According to the Kabbalah, the way palm reading works is that when a soul is garbed in a body, it becomes imprinted in the body, particularly in the face and hands, and its nature can thereby be revealed. One who knew how to read the face and palms could use this knowledge to determine who is suitable for leadership, as in the Zohar's account of Moses' choice of judges, or to discern who was worthy of learning the Torah's secrets. Face and palm reading could also be used to expose the soul's flaws so that they could be rectified through repentance and good deeds, as did the Arizal.

It is important to stress that in Judaism, reading the face and palm was used only to help ascertain whether one was worthy of a certain position or knowledge, or to help improve oneself. However, reading the face and palms in order to tell the future is a violation of the prohibition against divining auspicious times (Leviticus 19:26), and the commandment to have perfect faith (Deuteronomy 18:13). Someone once sent a letter to the renowned Torah luminary, Rabbi E. M. Shach of blessed memory:

It is known that the lines of a person's hand reveal his future, and I have seen on others that it comes true. After reading books on the subject, I looked at my hand and saw that the lines of marriage reveal a dark future. What I have seen gives me no rest, especially now that I have come of marriageable age.

Rabbi Shach replied:

It is absolutely forbidden to read palms [to see the future] or to believe what is seen in them. The Torah states, "You shall be perfectly faithful to Hashem your G-d". We must rely only on G-d. All else is nonsense. Do not worry about what you saw in your palm. You were simply shown what you wanted to see, for "in the path that a person wishes to go, he is led".

Sources:

- Zohar, Parshat Yitro, 78a
- Ramban, Introduction to Commentary on the Torah
- Responsa of the Geonim, 122
- Ramban, Derush Torah Temimah
- Chida, Midbar Kedemot, 8:17
- Toldot Ha-Arizal
- Or HaChama on the Zohar, Parshat Yitro
- Lechem Mishneh, Avoda Zara 11:19

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