

# OHRNET

THE OHR SOMAYACH TORAH MAGAZINE ON THE INTERNET

## PARSHA INSIGHTS

### KILLING MERCY

**“And you will do my ‘chukim,’ and my ‘mishpatim’ you will guard” (25:18)**

Everyone knows that Jews don’t eat pork. Why not?

The story goes that three thousand years ago, refrigeration hadn’t reached a very high level of sophistication and the contraction of trichinosis through eating pig was a threatening reality. Now, of course, since we all have double-fridges which produce ice cubes by the score and you can freeze a chop to last a year or two, there’s no need to hold yourself back from the gastronomic delights of “porc a la toit.” Or so the story goes.

The truth of the matter is that pork, like *shatnez* (wearing a garment with wool and linen woven together), is a *chok* — a law beyond the grasp of human understanding.

The laws which prohibit antisocial behavior in the Torah are called *mishpatim*. It is self-evident to all reasonable people that murder is evil and that theft is wicked. No civilized society in the world permits these acts.

To the Jew, though, murder is wrong because the Torah says it is wrong. Murder and wearing a jacket with *shatnez* share as their essence that they are both prohibited by the Creator. Hashem revealed to our logical grasp an understanding of why murder is wrong. He has not chosen to do the same with the prohibition of pork.

In the above verse, the Torah talks about “doing” the *chukim* (the supra-logical commandments), whereas when it refers to the *mishpatim* (the

seemingly logical laws like the prohibition of murder) it talks about “guarding.”

What’s the difference between *doing* and *guarding*?

The very essence of a *chok* is the *doing*. The challenge of the *chok* is to say to oneself: “The world is not bounded by my understanding of it. Just because I can’t comprehend something doesn’t make it not true.” Thus, the essence of the *chok* is to *do* it. That’s the challenge.

When it comes to the *mishpatim*,

“A Jew is on duty  
twenty-four hours  
a day, seven days a  
week...

We are the people  
G-d has chosen to  
serve Him.”

however, we are faced with a different challenge. If it’s self evident that killing and theft are wrong, what then is the test of fulfilling the *mishpatim*?

Several years ago a tragedy took place that tears at your heart. There was a woman who suffered from a terrible crippling disease. Day after day her husband watched her suffer. One day, beside himself with anguish,

he gave her an overdose of barbiturates.

The challenge of the *mishpatim* is to *guard* them; not to excuse murder and call it “mercy killing.” The One whose mercy is eternal decrees that we must not kill. Can we be more merciful than G-d, whose name is “The Merciful One”? The challenge of the “logical” commandments is not to tamper with them, not to pervert them to our own concepts of right and wrong.

Even when our hearts break in grief, when those close to us sicken and die, sometimes in great pain, the challenge of the *mishpatim* is to know that our minds can never grasp the ultimate logic of even that which seems logical to us.

### PARTNERS IN TIME

**“When you come to the land which I am giving to you, the land shall observe a Sabbath rest for Hashem” (25:2)**

When you look at the letterhead of some law firms, you might think you’re reading the New York phone book. It seems like everyone is a junior partner.

In a way, we too want to be junior partners. Junior partners with Hashem. We think: “Okay G-d, you run the world. You’re the Boss. I just want a little junior partnership over here to do what I want to do. I just want a little of my own space.”

How can you have your own space when “His honor fills the world”? How can you have a junior partnership with the One to whom there is

## PARSHA OVERVIEW

The Torah prohibits normal farming of the Land of Israel every seven years. This “Shabbos” for the land is called *shemita*. (5754 was a *shemita* year in Israel.) After every seventh *shemita*, the fiftieth year, *yovel* (Jubilee), is announced with the sounds of the shofar on Yom Kippur. This was also a year for the land to lie fallow. Hashem promises to provide a bumper crop prior to the *shemita* and *yovel* years to sustain the Jewish People. In the year of *yovel*, all land is returned to its original division from the time of Joshua, and all Jewish indentured servants are freed, even if they have not completed their six years of work. A Jewish indentured servant may not be given any demeaning, unnecessary or

excessively difficult work, and may not be sold in the public market. The price of his labor must be calculated according to the amount of time remaining until he will automatically become free. The price of land is similarly calculated. Should anyone sell his ancestral land, he has the right to redeem it after two years. If a house in a walled city is sold, the right of redemption is limited to only the first year after the sale. The Levites’ cities belong to them forever. The Jewish People are forbidden to take advantage of each other by lending or borrowing with interest. Family members should redeem any relative who was sold as an indentured servant as a result of impoverishment.

## HAFTORAH: YIRMIYAHU 32:6-18

### THE ULTIMATE LANDLORD

The first verse of this week’s *Parsha* reminds us that the land of Israel is only on loan to the Jewish People. Hashem remains the Owner and Lord of it. The Jewish People acknowledged that Hashem was the ultimate “Landlord” of *Eretz Yisrael* by observing the laws of *shemita* and *yovel*.

The Haftorah presents a shattering picture. The Chaldeans are at the gates, poised for the final assault. All the admonitions to keep the Torah have

proved fruitless. Yirmiyahu, who had dared to tell the truth about the dire situation of the Jewish People, had been jailed by King Tzidkiyahu. In prison, Hashem tells him that he should now prophesy about the time of the return after the exile. For this purpose, he was to do something that was ostensibly absurd. He was to purchase a valueless field at full price, thus demonstrating the firm conviction that the impending destruction would ultimately pass.

• Rabbi Mendel Hirsch

**RIGHT AND RAMIFICATIONS**  
“Great of counsel and mighty of deed, Whose eyes are cognizant of all the way of humankind, to give each man according to his ways and the fruit of his deeds.” (32:19)

When someone is judged deserving of the death penalty in the Heavenly court, Hashem throws into the balance the tremendous grief that his innocent parents, his wife and children will suffer if the sentence is executed.

Therefore Hashem does not punish anyone until calculating whether this will cause undeserved punishment to one of his family members. That is the meaning of this verse: “Great of counsel and mighty of deed...” Only Hashem is capable of calculating the precise extent of a person’s due, that he should only be called upon to bear “according to his ways and the fruit of his deeds.”

• Rabbi Mahar’a Yitzchaki

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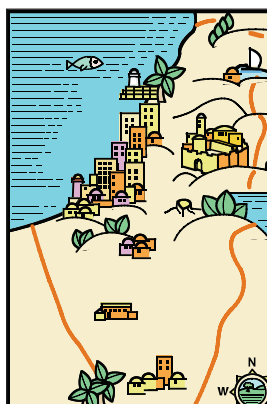
## LOVE OF THE LAND

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

### THE HEAVENLY GIFT

Three things were presented as gifts to the world — the Torah, the Heavenly luminaries and rain. Rabbi Tanchuma added *Eretz Yisrael* to this list, as it is written “He gave them the lands of the nations” (*Tehillim 105:44*). (*Bereishis Rabbah 6:5*)

There are some elements in the world which are indispensable to human existence and



which would be unattainable through any human effort or expense. But they have all been made available to mankind without charge, as a Heavenly gift. The addition of *Eretz Yisrael* to this list stresses the idea that it was not through military prowess that Israel acquired its homeland, but through the miracles which constituted a Heavenly gift.

no “two”? A Jew is on duty twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, from the cradle to the grave. We are the people G-d has chosen to serve Him.

But doesn't that sound terribly forbidding? I'm nothing more than a cipher? A mindless automaton filling instructions? Where is my space? Where is my individuality?

In reality, Hashem *has* given us a junior partnership. But it's not a partnership so we can slink off and play golf in the afternoons. It's a partnership in the very creation of time itself.

When Hashem created the world, He created it with two kinds of holiness which are expressed in Shabbos on the one hand and the Festivals on the other.

The holiness of Shabbos is fixed, immutable. Every seven days we enter a world called Shabbos. It requires no intervention on our part. Shabbos flows down from the upper worlds without our assistance and beyond our control.

The Festivals of Pesach, Shavuot and Sukkos are another matter. Hashem allows Man, as *Beis Din*, to establish the day on which the month begins, and thus the exact times of the festivals.

Regarding *shemita* (the Sabbatical year for the land) the Torah states “*The land shall observe a Shabbos for Hashem.*” Exactly the same expression is used in the account of the creation of Shabbos: “A Shabbos for Hashem.”

Just as there are two types of holi-

ness in the days and the months, Shabbos and Festivals, so too there are two types of holiness in the years themselves. The seventh year is a Shabbos of the land. Its holiness is “fixed” like Shabbos. The holiness of *yovel* (the Jubilee year) is like the holiness of the Festivals. Its holiness represents a partnership of G-d and Man. “For it is *yovel*; holy it will be to you.”

If the shofar is not blown at the beginning of the *yovel* year then the year is not *yovel*. If the slaves are not set free, the year is not *yovel*. If the fields do not return to their original owners, the year does not have the status of *yovel* and it is permitted to reap and sow like an ordinary year.

The year of *shemita* is different. Its holiness is fixed, independent of Man. Even if the years have not been counted, even if *Beis Din* fails to sanctify the year as a *shemita* year and there has been no cessation of sowing and reaping, it is *shemita* nevertheless.

It is for this reason that *shemita* is called “*a Shabbos for Hashem.*” *Shemita*, like Shabbos, allows for no junior partnerships.

## THE FATHERS OF INVENTION

“On Mount Sinai...” (25.1)

**A**n imaginary conversation: “Sol, let's invent a religion. In this religion we tell people that every seven years they have to stop working the fields, down tools, do no

planting or harvesting. But we promise them that they'll miraculously get a bumper crop the previous year, the sixth year, which will keep them going for that year, the next year *and* the eighth year. Because, of course, seeing as nothing was grown in the seventh year, there will be nothing to harvest in the eighth year.”

“Irv! Are you crazy?! How can you predict the future?! Your religion is going to fall flat on its face in the first seventh year when everyone starts starving and there's no bumper crop and nothing to eat!”

This week's *Parsha* starts with the words “*And Hashem spoke to Moshe on Mount Sinai.*” Why, specifically, does the Torah record that it was on Mount Sinai that Hashem told Moshe about the mitzvah of *shemita*? Weren't all the *mitzvos* told to Moshe on Sinai?

The reason that the Torah connects Mount Sinai specifically with the mitzvah of *shemita* is to tell us that just as *shemita* provides a verifiable test of the Torah's veracity — for it would be impossible to invent a religion with such a commandment — so too the rest of the Torah, which was given on Sinai, is authentic in both its generalities and specifics.

Sources:

**Killing Mercy** - Rabbi Yissachar Frand  
**Partners In Time** - Toras Kohanim, Rosh Hashana 9, Rambam Hilchos Shemita and Yovel Chap. 26, Meshech Chochma in Iturei Torah

**The Fathers of Invention** - Rashi, Chasam Sofer, Rav Yehuda HaLevi - Kuzari

## I DIDN'T KNOW THAT!

“A Shabbos of rest will be for the earth, Shabbos for Hashem.” (Vayikra 25:4)

**Rashi:** “Just as is said regarding the weekly Shabbos.”

Every day, the sun appears to go around the earth from east to west. This is caused by the earth spinning on its axis like a *dreidel*.

However, the sun's *essential* motion — from the earth's perspective — is a yearly circle from west to east. This is caused by the earth circling the sun once a year. This yearly motion of the sun is considered a day, because during the year the sun circles the earth once.

This is what the Torah refers to as “*y'mai ha'aretz*” — “Earth days,” i.e., the sun's motion from the earth's perspective (not from the perspective of a human who is *on* the spinning earth).

Therefore, the parallel between the weekly Shabbos day and the Sabbatical year is striking and exact: Both are based on a cycle of six days followed by a seventh day of rest.

• Malbim, 19th Century

## WEEKLY DAF

ERUVIN 7 - 13

### A VOICE FROM HEAVEN

The “*bas kol*” — voice from Heaven — announcing that in halachic disputes between Beis Hillel and Beis Shammai the ruling is like the former, twice echoes in the pages of our weekly section. It is first mentioned regarding the *beraisa* which states that one may follow either the ruling of Beis Hillel or Beis Shammai. One approach of the *gemara* is that this applies even after the *bas kol* ruled in favor of Beis Hillel, because the *beraisa* follows the opinion of Rabbi Yehoshua that no *bas kol* can influence a halachic decision. Once Hashem told us in His Torah that “It (the Torah) is not in heaven,” contends Rabbi Yehoshua, there can be no Divine intervention in the halachic process which is left entirely to the Torah Sages.

The second time we hear this echo is in the statement of Rabbi Abba in the name of the Sage Shmuel (13b). There, a three-year long dispute between Beis Hillel and Beis Shammai was climaxed by a *bas kol* declaring that even though both opinions were “words of the Living G-d,” the halacha is like Beis Hillel. If both opinions were so in tune with the Divine Will, asks the *gemara*, why did Beis Hillel merit to have the Divine ruling in their favor? Because of their gentleness and tolerance, the *gemara* answers, as demonstrated by their always quoting the opposing opinion of Beis Shammai, and sometimes even stating it before their own.

The position of Rabbi Yehoshua in the first reference has its source in the classical dispute between Rabbi Eliezer and his colleagues, led by Rabbi Yehoshua, over the halachic status of a particular oven. Although he was outnumbered by his colleagues, Rabbi Eliezer refused to abide by the majority ruling mandated by the Torah in such a case, and called for Divine intervention to prove that he was right. The miracles he invoked in reversing the nature of a carob tree, a stream of water and the *Beis Midrash* walls did not impress his colleagues. Even when he finally succeeded in having a *bas kol* announce that “the halacha is always like Rabbi Eliezer,” a resolute Rabbi Yehoshua led the opposition by standing up and proclaiming “It is not in heaven” — once the Torah was given to us, we pay no attention to voices from Heaven in regard to the halachic process.

Rabbi Yehoshua’s sweeping rejection of any intervention by a *bas kol* leads our *gemara* to conclude that he would reject even the Heavenly voice that ruled in favor of Beis Hillel, therefore leaving the option to follow Beis Shammai’s ruling. The mainstream approach of our Sages does, however, view that *bas kol* as the final word in deciding between the two opinions, and the halacha is therefore clearly like Beis Hillel, with no option to follow Beis Shammai’s ruling.

If we accept the *bas kol* in regard to Beis Hillel, asks Tosefos, why did all the Sages — not only Rabbi Yehoshua — reject its intervention on behalf of Rabbi Eliezer? Two resolutions are offered. One is that a *bas kol* can indeed be considered, but in the case of Rabbi Eliezer who invited Heavenly intervention, it was clear both from the nature of the request and the language of the message that it was intended only as a tribute to his scholarly greatness and not as a halachic decider. The other resolution is that a *bas kol* cannot upset the ruling of a majority since the Torah told us to abide by majority rule. In Rabbi Eliezer’s case he was in the minority but in Beis Hillel’s case they were the majority. The only reason a *bas kol* was needed

was to do away with Beis Shammai’s argument (*Yevamos 14a*) that majority rule applied only when the disputants were of comparable intellectual status, but not in this dispute because Beis Shammai was sharper. The *bas kol* clarified that this was not a consideration, but rather that majority decision must always determine the halacha.

• *Eruvin 7a*

### SHAKING WORDS, SHAKING WORLDS

When Rabbi Meir came to Rabbi Yishmael to learn Torah he was asked:

“What is your profession, my son?”

“I am a scribe” was the reply.

“Be very careful in your work, my son” cautioned Rabbi Yishmael, “because yours is a Heavenly profession. Should you delete even one letter from the Sefer Torah you write, or add one letter, you destroy the world.”

Rashi offers examples of how the addition or deletion of a single letter can lead to a blasphemous or heretical reading of the Torah. Tosefos, however, cites only examples of addition but not of subtraction.

Maharsha explains that only in regard to adding a letter is there a need to point out the danger this can bring to the world by allowing for a heretical reading. In regard to deleting a letter, however, there is an obvious danger even if that deletion does not affect the meaning of the word. This is because of our tradition that the letters of the Torah form the sacred Names of Hashem in the way they appeared before the creation of the world as black fire upon white fire. These letters were employed by the Creator in creating His world, and it is through them that He sustains it. The deletion of even one letter of this sustaining force therefore threatens the existence of the world.

Without referring to our *gemara*, the great Biblical and Talmudic commentator Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman (Ramban), who lived several centuries before Maharsha, elaborates on the same concept in his introduction to his commentary on Chumash. He utilizes this concept of the letters forming holy Names to explain why a Sefer Torah is disqualified if it has one letter more or less than the prescribed text, even if that letter does not at all affect our understanding of the true meaning of the word. (For example, the word “*osam*” appears 39 times in the Torah with the letter “*vav*” in it. Although we would read it exactly the same way without the “*vav*” because of our tradition of vowelization, the deletion of this letter disqualifies the Sefer Torah. The same is true if one adds a “*vav*” where the prescribed text does not call for one.)

The black fire on white fire of the pre-creation Torah allowed for reading its letters either in combinations which formed the sacred Names or as the words which make up the accounts and *mitzvos* we are familiar with. Hashem gave Moshe the Torah to be recorded in the latter fashion and orally instructed him in how to read those same letters as combinations forming the Names. The Divine energy implicit in those letters cannot be tampered with by adding or deleting a single letter, and such an error can have serious ramifications both for the Sefer Torah and the entire universe.

• *Eruvin 13a*



## PARSHA Q&A ?

1. Why does the Torah specify that the laws of *shemita* were taught on *Har Sinai*?
2. If one possesses *shemita* food after it is no longer available in the field, what must he do with it?
3. The Torah commands, "You shall sanctify the fiftieth year." How is this done?
4. Which two "returns" are announced by the shofar during *yovel*?
5. From where does the *yovel* year get its name?
6. What prohibitions are derived from the verse "v'lo sonu ish es amiso — a person shall not afflict his fellow"?
7. What is the punishment for neglecting the laws of *shemita*?
8. If *shemita* is observed properly, how long is the crop of the sixth year guaranteed to last?
9. After selling an ancestral field, when can one redeem it?
10. Under what circumstance may one sell ancestral land?
11. If a home in a walled city is sold, when can it be redeemed?
12. What does the word "days" mean in this week's *Parsha*?
13. What is considered a walled city?
14. What is the definition of a "ger *toshav*"?
15. To what is one who leaves *Eretz Yisrael* compared?
16. Why does Rashi mention the plague of the firstborn in this week's *Parsha*?
17. List three prohibitions which demonstrate the dignity with which one must treat a Jewish indentured servant.
18. Who supports the family of the Jewish indentured servant during his years of servitude?
19. If a Jew is sold as a servant to a non-Jew, does he go free after six years?
20. Where is it permitted to prostrate oneself on a stone floor?

## BONUS QUESTION?

*Rashi never just comments; something in the text always impels him to do so. Rashi's comments are answers to unspoken questions and difficulties arising from a thoughtful reading of the Torah. Therefore, anyone who wants a true understanding of Rashi's classic Torah commentary must always ask "What's Bothering Rashi?"*

In the mahogany study sat Dr. Watson, hunched over an open volume. On the table before him lay a plate of crumpets and a tea, cold from neglect. "Hard as brick," Watson muttered.

"Burnt crumpets again?" said world famous detective, Sherlock Holmes.

"Mr. Holmes, I didn't hear you come in," said Watson. "No, crumpets are delicious."

"What's wrong then?" asked Sherlock.

"Define the words *walled city*."

"Why, a city with a wall," Sherlock said.

"How old is the wall? When was it built?" asked Watson.

"You haven't told me. It could be new as the Eiffel Tower, or old as the Great Wall of China!" Sherlock said.

"Then how does Rashi know!" Watson asked. "Listen to this verse: 'And a person who sells a house in a wall city... (*Vayikra* 25:29),' Rashi comments: 'A city that was walled from the time of Joshua....' Why doesn't Rashi explain as you did, Mr. Holmes? 'A city with a wall, regardless of its age?'"

"Stop beating your head against the wall, Watson. Just read carefully the exact text over again."

*What does Sherlock mean?*

answer on page eight

## PARSHA Q&A!

### Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

1. 25:1 - To teach us that just as *shemita* was taught in detail on *Har Sinai*, so too, all the *mitzvos* were taught in detail on *Har Sinai*.
2. 25:7 - Remove it from his property and declare it ownerless.
3. 25:10 - At the beginning of the year the Beis Din declares, "This year is *kadosh* (sanctified)."
4. 25:10 - The return of the land to its original owner, and the "return" (freedom) of the slave from slavery.
5. 25:10 - From the sounding of the shofar. A ram's horn is called a *yovel*.
6. 25:17 - One may not intentionally hurt people's feelings, nor give bad advice while secretly intending to reap benefit.
7. 25:18 - Exile.
8. 25:21,22 - From Nissan of the sixth year until Sukkos of the ninth year.
9. 25:24 - After two years following the sale, until *yovel*. At the beginning of *yovel* it returns to the family automatically.
10. 25:25 - Only if one becomes impoverished. 11. 25:29 - Only within the first year after the sale. Afterwards, even in *yovel*, it does not return.
12. 25:29 - The days of an entire year.
13. 25:29 - A city that has been surrounded by a wall since the time of Yehoshua.
14. 25:35 - A non-Jew who lives in *Eretz Yisrael* and accepts upon himself not to worship idols.
15. 25:38 - To one who worships idols.
16. 25:38 - The prohibition against taking interest is accompanied by the phrase, "I am Hashem your G-d who took you out of Egypt." Rashi explains that just as Hashem discerned in Egypt between those who were firstborn and those who were not, so too will Hashem discern and punish those who lend with interest, pretending they are acting on behalf of others.
17. 25:39-43 - a) Do not make him perform humiliating tasks; b) Do not sell him publicly; c) Do not make him perform unnecessary jobs.
18. 25:41 - His master.
19. 25:54 - No. If he is not redeemed with money, he must wait until the *yovel* to go free.
20. 26:1 - In the *Mikdash*.

## DMINE TEST

**Yonatan Amit from Kohav-Yair, Israel** <Yoniamit@netvision.net.il> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,  
Can G-d make me pass the bagrut [matriculation] exams? Please respond as soon as possible. Thanks in advance.

Dear Yonatan Amit,

Yes, G-d can do anything.

But G-d doesn't "like" doing miracles very often. G-d made natural laws and wants us to follow these laws. The word "ha-olam" (the world) is related to the word "he'elem" (concealment). G-d made the world as a place in which to "hide," and it is our job to find G-d. Open miracles take away our free will to do this, because they make G-d's existence too obvious.

So, if someone wants G-d to do a miracle, he has to pray for G-d to do a hidden miracle. In your case, for example, you need to study very hard, study for as much time as you have, and pray for G-d's help. Then, if G-d does perform a miracle, no one will know! You yourself may not even realize it!

So, study hard, pray hard, and let me know what happens.

## A GRAIN OF SALT

**Sandra Block from Scottsdale, AZ** <rancher@phnx.uswest.net> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,  
I would like to know: Why do we put salt on bread? Is it on all types of bread or just challah? Do we say the hamotzi blessing before eating all types of bread or only over challah? Thank you!

**Nancy Gomes from Toronto, Ont.** <nancy@sierra-inc.com> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,  
Every Kabbalat Shabbat (Friday night) after hamotzi, we put salt on our challa and still don't know how this tradition came to be?

**Roi Levine Garshoni** <RoiGar@aol.com> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,  
Shalom. The Torah speaks of salt on the sacrifices. My grandfather, may he rest in peace, would always put salt on the bread in the prayer of hamotzi. What significance is salt to a Jew? Is this the reason Lot's wife was turned to salt? Toda Raba.

Dear Sandra Block, Nancy Gomes and Roi Levine Garshoni,

There are two reasons for dipping bread in salt after saying the blessing on the bread. One is that people sometimes put salt on their bread to give it flavor. This is a matter of taste, not Jewish law. So, if you are going to dip your bread in salt throughout the meal, you should certainly dip the first piece in salt. This is a way of honoring the blessing, by making sure that the piece of bread you eat after saying the blessing is delicious. This follows the Torah idea that physical pleasure can be used as a vehicle in the service of Hashem.

Another reason we dip our bread in salt is that when we had the Temple and brought offerings on the altar, salt accompanied every offering. The significance of salt is that it completes other foods and enhances their taste. Also, it preserves things which would otherwise spoil. For these two reasons, the Torah tells us to salt our offerings: To offer a completed offering, and to symbolize that our offerings help preserve our relationship with Hashem.

We no longer have the altar to atone for us. Now, our table is our "altar," because we share our food with the needy, and this atones for us. Since our table is like the altar, we try to keep salt on the table all the time. And we dip our bread in salt the entire week, not only Friday night.

Lot's wife turned into salt because she was stingy towards the needy. Lot himself was a generous person, always inviting guests. His wife resented guests and discouraged them. One trick of hers was not to provide salt, a small thing which makes a big difference to guests. Therefore, she was punished by means of salt, measure for measure.

And to answer Sandra's last ques-

tion, we say hamotzi on all types of bread, not only on challah.

## PASSING PASSING

**Judith Finkelstein from Northridge, CA** <jfinkels@lausd.k12.ca.us> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,  
I attended a Jewish funeral today, and the rabbi had each person shovel 3 shovels-full of dirt into the grave. The tradition included his instructions to specifically put the shovel back in the dirt when finished and let the next person proceed. Is there a certain significance in "putting the shovel back into the dirt" instead of passing it directly to the next person in line (the next person to shovel dirt)?

Dear Judith Finkelstein,

There are two reasons for the custom not to pass the spade from one to the other. The first is that on the day that a person is buried, it is not considered correct behavior for a person to pass something to another. One of the messages to the participants at a funeral is to understand that on the day of death we are all equal. This idea is amplified by placing the spade into the earth and not passing it straight to the next person, as it denotes a certain dominance over the person who is receiving the spade. The second reason is that the time of the burial is a time of great anguish and to pass the spade from one to the other would be symbolic of passing the anguish.

Sources:

- Ta'amei Haminhagim 489:1025

## FOLK MUSIC

**Chana Rudnick from Chattanooga, TN** <kgrudnick@juno.com> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,  
I play folk instruments and have been thinking of trying to get a job playing for people. My main thought is to see if any hospitals could use me. When I visited my mother in the hospital and played for her, the

nursing staff thought that would be something that many other patients might enjoy. I also thought it might go over well with children. Is it permissible to play music between Pesach and Shavuot if you are hired to do so?

Dear Chana Rudnick,

The period from Pesach until Shavuot is a somewhat sad

period due to historical tragedies which occurred during this time. I asked your question to Rabbi Yisrael Pesach Feinhandler, *shlita*. He said yes, you may play music between Pesach and Shavuot under these circumstances because you are doing so for work, not for your own personal enjoyment. May you continue to bring joy and gladness to the hearts of many.

## PUBLIC DOMAIN

Comments, quibbles and reactions concerning previous "Ohrnet" features

**Re: "The Worst Seder in History" (Ohr Somayach Internet Archives: <http://www.ohr.org.il/Pesach>):**

Beautiful story about the "Worst Seder." Brought tears to my eyes.

• *Tsiyya* <[tsiyya@usa.net](mailto:tsiyya@usa.net)>

**Re: Medicine on Shabbat, and Pigeons as Hepatitis Treatment (Ohrnet Tazria-Metzora):**

It is absolutely necessary to continue taking antibiotics throughout the Shabbat, even if you feel fine. There is a small but very real danger that interrupting the regimen (usually 10 days) will lead to the development of drug resistant bacteria. What is less clear (to me) is the rule regarding pills for control of blood pressure which should be taken every day but present no obvious danger due to skipping a dose. Regarding hepatitis, I can hardly accept that pigeons work; but my daughter from Bnei Brak assures me that they do.

• *Edward Simon* <[esimon@bilbo.bio.purdue.edu](mailto:esimon@bilbo.bio.purdue.edu)>  
*Professor of Biology (Microbiology) Purdue University*

**Re: Daf Yomi Origins (Ohrnet Vayakhel):**

Please print the following about Rabbi Moshe Menachem Mendel Spivak creating the Daf Yomi?

Rav Eliezer Katzman wrote in the *Jewish Observer* (October 1997) an article entitled "An unsung hero — Rabbi Moshe Menachem Mendel Spivak — The Martyred Originator of the Daf Yomi Concept, who Steered the Folio-a-day Plan From a Dream to Reality."

Rabbi Katzman wrote: "Everyone knows that Rabbi Meir Shapiro proposed the Daf Yomi idea at the first Knessia Gedolah in Vienna in 1924, but few are aware

that the idea was actually proposed in an Agudath Israel Publication in December 1920. One of the first issues of *Digleinu* (vol. I #7) contained his proposal to organize a world-wide "Chevra Shas" involving business men, laborers and workers alike to study a blatt Gemora together... His appeal fell on deaf ears... Rabbi Spivak did not give up and approached Rabbi Meir Shapiro to broach the subject... When Rabbi Shapiro finally presented the Daf Yomi proposal in the electrified atmosphere of the Knessia Gedolah... In the excitement of the moment, he neglected to mention Rabbi Spivak's name as the originator of the idea. Rabbi Shapiro later wrote to Rabbi Spivak apologizing for the fact that he did not give him due recognition."

• *Marc I Spivak* <[spivakm@juno.com](mailto:spivakm@juno.com)>

**Re: Yizkor on Yom Tov (Ohrnet Shemini/Pesach):**

In your recent article pertaining to *yizkor* you attempt to explain why we recite it on Yom Tov. I wish to bring to your attention that the reciting of *yizkor* on Yom Tov is questionable, in spite of the common practice to do so. The *Machzor Vitri* (1:312 pp. 344-5, 1:353 p. 392) states emphatically that *yizkor* should only be said on Yom Kippur and not on Yom Tov. The reason being that since Yom Tov is a day of *simchah* one should not arouse feelings of grief.

• *Chaim Ozer Chait* <[ybte@netvision.net.il](mailto:ybte@netvision.net.il)>

## WHAT I DO WITH OHRNET

I'm the Lay Leader for over 100 military and civilian personnel here in Okinawa. I have an E-mail group comprised of most of the people in the community. I send Ohr Somayach's Ohrnet out as everyone's "weekly dose of Judaism."

• *TSgt Carl Vetter* <[vetterc@emh.kadena.af.mil](mailto:vetterc@emh.kadena.af.mil)>

What do YOU do with OhrNet?

Let's hear your feedback!

Write to: [whatido@ohr.israel.net](mailto:whatido@ohr.israel.net)

When people betray our high expectations of them, we need to search for explanations which exonerate their behavior. It's a mitzvah, and besides, we'll feel better about others and about ourselves. Want to avoid a lot of needless aggravation? Always remember...

WHEN SOMETHING'S A MISS,  
SOMETHING'S AFOOT

Gloom pervaded Chaim's lonely car. He had cut his date short, dropped the young lady off at her house and headed home. He'd heard such wonderful things about the young lady, too. "Such wonderful

character traits, such personality, so refined," the matchmaker had said. Chaim had been looking forward to a wonderful evening. Instead, his evening was filled with annoyance and resentment provoked by a very unpleasant smell, an odor that entered the car when she did, which followed them to the cafe, and which lingered in the air even after he dropped her off. What kind of person was this who didn't know enough to shower before a date? What kind of parents did she have? Chaim was angry at everyone, especially at the matchmaker for suggesting he meet such a person. As Chaim walked into his house, he heard his sister call out: "Chaim, the rug! Look what you're tracking in onto the rug!" Chaim looked down. In horror he discovered a piece of refuse stuck to his shoe. He must have acquired it when he first walked his date from her house to his car!

YIDDLE RIDDLE

**Last week we asked:** Women customarily light two Shabbos candles every Friday afternoon before sunset. The *Mishnah Berurah* (263:7) says that if a women forgets to light Shabbos candles, she has to light an extra Shabbos candle for the rest of her life. So, if she forgot to light candles the first week, she would have to light three candles the next week. If she forgot the next week as well, then she would need to light four candles the third week. If this continues over a period of 10 weeks, what is the total number of candles she will have used during this 10 week period?

• Riddle submitted by Lev Seltzer <levs@virtual.co.il>

**Answer:** None.

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BONUS ANSWER!

"The phrase 'ir choma' is unique," said Sherlock. "Such an expression referring to a walled city appears nowhere else in Tanach. Literally, 'ir choma' means a 'wall city,' not a 'walled city'."

"What's the difference?"

"Let me give you an example. What's the difference between a 'locked box,' and a 'lock box?'"

"Hmm. A locked box describes the current state of the box but doesn't tell you what type of box it is. A lock box, on the other hand, tells you the type of box, regardless of whether it's currently locked or not."

"Exactly! Here too, a walled city is one currently walled, without telling you what type of city it is. But a 'wall city' is a city whose wall defines the very character — the halachic definition — of the city. Therefore, we need to search beyond the simple definition; we need to look for a city whose wall changes the character of the city. The only possible definition is a walled city sanctified as such when Joshua conquered the Land. Understand?"

"I think so," said Watson, "although my skull feels a bit like the walls of Jericho when Joshua conquered the land."

• Based on *Malbim*

Recommended reading: Dr. Avigdor Bonchek's new book "What's Bothering Rashi?" Feldheim Publishers

RECOMMENDED READING LIST

**RAMBAN**

25:3 First Six Years  
25:9 Two Kinds of "Shofar"  
25:10 The Word "Yovel"  
25:20 Three Year Blessing  
25:23 Ban on Perpetual Sale

25:36 Two Kinds of Usury  
26:1 Commitment in Hostile Environment

**SEFER HACHINUCH**

330 Counting until Yovel  
331 Call of the Shofar

337 Unfair Profit  
342 National Land  
343 Usury

**SFORNO**

25:4 "A Shabbos to Hashem"