

OHRNET

THE OHR SOMAYACH TORAH MAGAZINE ON THE INTERNET

PARSHA INSIGHTS

HUMAN RIGHTS

“But if the household is too small for a lamb or kid, then he and his neighbor who is near his house shall take according to the number of people...” (12:4)

The Five Books of the Torah are the basis of the world’s major legal systems. What is considered “human rights” by international jurisprudence is based on the Torah of Moshe. And yet, if you look at the written Torah, you’ll be hard pressed to find a single mention of the word “rights.” Obligations — that the Torah is full of. The obligations of a child to his parents; of a pupil to his teacher; of a community to the poor; of the individual to the community; obligations to the orphaned, to the sick, to the convert; the obligations of man to G-d. “Rights,” however, are something that the Torah hardly mentions. Why?

The answer is — to the extent that I have obligations, you don’t need rights.

You can write a legal code that enumerates people’s rights: *“that all men are created equal and endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights...”* Or you can write a code which lists their obligations. Yet there is one big difference. When you talk about rights, you cast man in the role of a taker. But when you talk about obligations — you force him to realize that he has been put in this world to give.

Society reveals its nature through the choice of its metaphors. In English, we say “My duty calls.” Meaning, I start off unencumbered by obligation. My obligation calls to

me. I am over here and my duty is over there. In the Holy Tongue, we talk about a person being “yotzei chovaso” — “going out from his obligation.” The Jew starts off by seeing himself obligated. He doesn’t have to go anywhere to heed the call. Life and obligation are simultaneous.

In the above verse, the Torah instructs someone whose family is too small to consume an entire paschal lamb to find a neighbor to join his seder and help finish the

“...the individual commitment to G-d must precede the individual’s identification with the Jewish People.”

Pesach lamb. Obviously, such a neighbor must have been someone not eating his own lamb, probably someone poor. The Torah could just have easily have written: “If you don’t have a lamb yourself, go out and find someone who has too much food and eat at his table.” However, it chose to phrase the obligation in terms of giving rather than taking.

SELF-SACRIFICE

“They shall eat the flesh on that night — roasted over the fire — and matzos with bitter herbs shall they eat it.” (12:8)

A common misconception about Judaism is that it requires you to become a faceless automaton, mouthing the same prayers, performing the same actions, and dressed in the same clothes as everyone else.

Take a look around. Is there anything in this world more diverse than people? Everybody in this world is unique. No two people have the same face, the same ideas, the same talents, the same feelings or thoughts.

To think that Judaism requires conformity would be to accuse the Master of the world of extreme sloppiness (G-d forbid); after all, He created us all so palpably different. What a cosmic “waste of energy” to create such diversity, if all we’re supposed to be automatons doing the same thing!

Rather, G-d created us all very different. And He wants us to be different. He wants us to be unique and express our individuality. In fact, if we don’t use all the talents and gifts that we have been given, we will be called to task for this when we go before the “Supreme Court” when we leave this world.

The Pesach sacrifice was the first offering that the Jewish People were commanded to bring as a people. Whatever comes first contains the essence of all that follows. Just as DNA is the blueprint of a person’s body, this first sacrifice was the DNA

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Hashem tells Moshe that He is hardening Pharaoh's heart so that through miraculous plagues the world will know for all time that He is the one true G-d. Pharaoh is warned about the plague of locusts and is told how severe it will be. Pharaoh agrees to release only the men, but Moshe insists that everyone must go. During the plague, Pharaoh calls for Moshe and Aharon to remove the locusts, and he admits he has sinned. Hashem ends the plague but hardens Pharaoh's heart, and again Pharaoh fails to free the Jewish people. The country, except for the Jewish People, is then engulfed in a palpable darkness. Pharaoh calls for Moshe and tells him to take all the Jews out of Egypt, but to leave their flocks behind. Moshe tells him that not only will they take their own flocks, but Pharaoh must add his own too. Moshe tells Pharaoh that Hashem is going to bring one more plague, the death of the firstborn, and then the Jews will leave Egypt.

Hashem again hardens Pharaoh's heart, and Pharaoh warns Moshe that if he sees Moshe again, Moshe will be put to death. Hashem tells Moshe that the month of Nissan will be the chief month. The Jewish people are commanded to take a sheep on the 10th of the month and guard it until the 14th. The sheep is then to be slaughtered as a Pesach sacrifice, its blood put on their door-posts, and its roasted meat eaten. The blood on the door-post will be a sign that their homes will be passed-over when Hashem strikes the firstborn of Egypt. The Jewish People are told to memorialize this day as the Exodus from Egypt by never eating *chametz* on Pesach. Moshe relays Hashem's commands, and the Jewish People fulfill them flawlessly. Hashem sends the final plague, killing the first born, and Pharaoh sends the Jews out of Egypt. Hashem tells Moshe and Aharon the laws concerning the Pesach sacrifice, *pidyon haben* (redemption of the first born son) and *tefillin*.

HAFTORAH: YIRMIYAHU 46:13-28

THE BUCK STOPS HERE

"But you, be not afraid, My servant Yaakov, and be not frightened, O Israel, for I shall save you from afar, and your offspring from the land of their captivity, and Yaakov shall return and be tranquil, and secure, and none shall make him tremble." (46:27)

Neither the ovens of Europe nor the melting-pots of the New World have managed to obliterate the Jewish People. To be sure, in our days, we have witnessed massive casualties — a silent holocaust

— walking/talking bodies that conceal charred remnants of Jewish souls.

The mystical writings tell us that Yaakov never died. Yaakov is eternal. He is like the moon: Whether engulfed by fire or physicality, just when he seems about to disappear, he renews himself. The Jewish People, the seed of Yaakov, live on, so Yaakov himself lives on "*and Yaakov shall return and be tranquil, and secure, and none shall make him tremble.*"

• *Avnei Ezel in Mayana Shel Torah*

week, it is the Prophet Yirmiyahu who speaks of the judgment that will be executed on the Egyptians by the Babylonians.

The Haftorah also deals with the world-historic exile of the Jewish People, and inspires Israel with courage.

The prophet directs Israel to the only "good-luck charm" that will work in all times and all places. The name of that talisman is "*eved Hashem*" — "servant of G-d."

In spite of great suffering, the only sure protection against the storms of history will be to be a *servant of G-d*. For no one can be closer to the Master than he who is His servant at all times and in all places, unconditionally.

• *Based on Rabbi Hirsch*

GOOD-LUCK CHARM

In last week's Haftorah, the Prophet Yechezkel depicted the downfall of Egypt at the hands of the Babylonian king Nevuchadnetzar. This

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PARSHA INSIGHTS

of all other sacrifices; it contains a fundamental message about the nature of sacrifices themselves.

Actually, the word sacrifice is a misnomer. Sacrifice means giving something up. The common idea about Judaism is you have to sacrifice — you have to give up something of your own personality.

The offerings brought to G-d on the Holy Altar epitomize service of G-d. The *korban Pesach* (the Pesach offering) was unique because you got the animal back. All the meat was given back to the person who brought the offering, to be eaten at his own *seder* table.

The *korban Pesach* epitomizes the nature of “sacrificing” to G-d. G-d doesn’t want automatons. He wants our desire to serve Him with all *our* heart and with all *our* soul and with all *our* individuality. Not someone else’s heart, soul or individuality. Once we are prepared to do this, once we are prepared to give ourselves to G-d without reservation, G-d gives us back all of ourselves without reservation.

MARCH OF THE LIVING

“No uncircumcised male may eat of it.” (12:48)

It’s a sad fact that vastly more money is spent in America on Holocaust museums and memorials than on Jewish Education. The Holocaust is something that a Jew can identify with nationally, without having to inconvenience himself by having a relationship with G-d. It allows him to feel that he has paid his spiritual dues to Judaism by empathizing with his people. Then he can drive off to the Saturday afternoon game with a clear conscience.

One of the pre-requisites for eating the Pesach offering was *bris mila* (circumcision). What is the connection between the Pesach offering and *bris mila*?

A *bris* is a covenant. It comes from the root word “bar” meaning “to exclude.” We have the same word in English, “to bar.” A covenant implies a desire to enter into a unique and exclusive relationship. Only those who are part of the covenant are to

share in this special relationship. Others are “barred.” Both *bris mila* and the *korban Pesach* were *brisos* — the establishment of a special relationship between G-d and the Jewish People. But there’s a difference. *Bris mila* is the covenant between G-d and the individual Jew. The *korban Pesach* is the covenant between G-d and the Jewish People as a nation.

It’s significant that the Torah prohibits someone who does not have *bris mila* from partaking of the *korban Pesach*. The message is that the individual commitment to G-d must precede the individual’s identification with the Jewish People. It’s not enough to say: “I’m Jewish. I identify. I cry over the Holocaust. I send money to Israel.” If we don’t first commit ourselves to G-d, we lack an authentic commitment to the Jewish People as well.

Sources:

Human Rights - Rabbi S.R.Hirsch, *The Lehmann Haggada*, Rabbi Uziel Milevsky, Rabbi Mordechai Perلمان

Self-Sacrifice - Rabbi S.R.Hirsch, Rabbi Mordechai Perلمان

March Of The Living - Rabbi Dovid Kaplan, Rabbi Uziel Milevsky

LOVE OF THE LAND

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

BEIT SHE’ARIM

Catacombs, the ruins of a synagogue and an ancient olive press are all that remain of this ancient city which was an important town in Israel and once served as the seat of the Sanhedrin.

In reference to the Torah’s command “Justice, justice shall you pursue” the Talmud advises “follow Rebbi (Rabbi Yehuda Hanassi, the compiler of the



Mishnah) to Beit She’arim.” During his illness this great sage was moved to the healthier climate of Tzipori, but a grave was reserved for him in Beit She’arim. Inscriptions found on graves in the catacombs indicate that two of his sons were also buried there.

The synagogue, whose remains indicate that it was among the largest in the country, was destroyed by the Romans in the fourth century as a punishment for the resistance of the town’s residents to Roman rule.

I DIDN’T KNOW THAT!

“At approximately midnight I go out amidst Egypt, and every first born will die...” (11:14)

Hashem’s ‘clock’ is set to Jerusalem. The plague of the first-born took place at exactly midnight, Jerusalem time. But because Egypt is west of Jerusalem, midnight there occurs later. When Moshe said the plague would be at ‘approximately midnight,’ he was referring to local, Egyptian time.

• Kehillas Yitzchak; thanks to Rabbi Sholem Fishbane

WEEKLY DAF

YOMA 16 - 22

THE DOUBLE AGENT

During the period of the second *Beis Hamikdash* the *Sanhedrin* tried to ensure that the *kohen gadol*, who was suspected of being a *tzaduki* with alien ideas, would not deviate from the Yom Kippur service according to the rabbinic tradition. After the elders of the *kohanim* had instructed him in the manner which the incense should be offered, they impressed upon him an oath of allegiance which began:

“Honored *kohen gadol*, we are the agents of the court, and you are our agent and an agent of the court.”

This is posed as a challenge to the ruling of Rabbi Huna the son of Rabbi Yehoshua who stated that *kohanim*, in their service in the *Beis Hamikdash*, act as agents of Heaven. His reasoning is that they *cannot* be considered agents of the Jews whose sacrifices they are offering, because one cannot halachically act as an agent for someone who is *himself* ineligible to perform that act. Since a non-*kohen* cannot perform the sacrificial service, the *kohen* cannot be considered *his* agent, and must therefore be the agent of Heaven for this matter.

The above challenge to Rabbi Huna’s ruling is refuted with an explanation that it is not the issue of *agency* which is being addressed by the elders in their charge to the suspicious *kohen gadol*. Rather it is a warning that in the oath he is taking he is committing himself to what they and the *Sanhedrin* have in mind, rather than to any devious thoughts he may entertain.

Tosefos points out that in another *mesechta* (*Nedarim* 35b) the question is raised as to whether *kohanim* are our agents or the agents of Heaven. The ramification being, whether a particular *kohen* may perform the sacrificial service for someone who is prohibited by a vow from deriving any benefit from this *kohen*. If *kohanim* are *our* agents, then this *kohen* would not be allowed to offer his sacrifice for him, as he is not allowed to benefit him by acting as his agent. But if the *kohen* is Heaven’s agent, there is no problem. Rabbi Huna’s logical proof that the *kohen* must be Heaven’s agent and not ours is not cited among the proofs presented in *Mesechta Nedarim*, because the issue there is not whether the *kohanim* are agents of Heaven but whether they are *also* our agents. The fact that they are indeed Heaven’s agents enables them to perform the service even though we are unable to do so. Rabbi Huna’s point is that we cannot consider them *only* our agents. Therefore, if a person bringing a sacrifice declares that he does not want a particular *kohen* who is on duty that day to perform the service he cannot prevent him from doing so, since he is first and foremost an agent of Heaven.

• Yoma 19b

COUNT-LESS KOHANIM

The familiar taboo on counting Jews finds expression in the lottery determining which *kohen* would gain the privilege of performing a particular service. The *kohen* in charge of the lottery would ask all the candidates to extend a finger so that he could count them, and award the privilege to the *kohen* whose finger coincided with a predetermined number.

The fact that he did not count heads is cited as a proof to Rabbi Yitzchak’s ruling that it is forbidden to count Jews even for the purpose of a mitzvah. Two historical sources are mentioned for the practice of not counting heads but rather counting in a different manner. One source is the census of soldiers conducted by King Saul (*Shmuel I* 11:8) in preparation for the battle of Ammonite forces besieging Yavesh Gilad. He determined that he had 330,000 soldiers by asking them to place before them clay shards which he counted.

The second census was also conducted by Saul, this time in preparation for a war with Amalek. In this account (*Shmuel I* 15:4), familiar to us from the Haftorah of Parshas Zachor read on the Shabbos before Purim, the king determined that he had 210,000 troops by counting the lambs which he ordered each one of them to take from the royal flocks and bring to the point of assembly.

Why, asks Maharsha, does the *gemara* not cite the earliest and most obvious precedent, the Torah command to count the Children of Israel through their contributions of half shekel coins? His answer is based on a closer look at the passages (*Shmos* 30:12-15) containing this command. Jews were commanded to give these coins “to achieve atonement for their souls.” We might therefore interpret the need to contribute coins not as a way of avoiding counting heads but as a form of atonement for the sin of the Golden Calf. The phrase “so that there shall be no plague when they are counted” could be understood not as a warning that counting heads invites a plague, but rather as a prescription for avoiding the plague resulting from their sin.

Only in the censuses conducted by King Saul, where there is no mention of atonement, and where the nature of the items counted obviously precludes any such assumption, is it clear that he avoided counting heads because it is forbidden to do so and can even invite a plague, as it did in the days of King David (*Shmuel II* 24).

• Yoma 22b

PARSHA Q&A ?

1. What was Pharaoh's excuse for not releasing the Jewish children?
2. How did the locusts in the time of Moshe differ from those in the days of Yoel?
3. How did the first three days of darkness differ from the last three?
4. When the Jews asked the Egyptians for gold and silver vessels, the Egyptians were unable to deny ownership of such vessels. Why?
5. *Makas bechoros* took place *exactly* at midnight. Why did Moshe say it would take place *approximately* at midnight?
6. Why did the firstborn of the animals die?
7. How did Moshe show respect to Pharaoh when he warned him about the aftermath of the plague of the firstborn?
8. Hashem told Moshe "so that my wonders will be multiplied" (11:9). What three wonders was Hashem referring to?
9. Why did Hashem command the mitzvah of *Rosh Chodesh* to Aharon, and not only to Moshe?
10. Up to what age is an animal fit to be a *Pesach* offering?
11. Prior to the Exodus from Egypt, what two *mitzvos* involving blood did Hashem give to the Jewish People?
12. Which parts of the *Pesach* offering (as distinguished from other offerings) were the Jewish People forbidden to eat?
13. Why were the Jews told to stay indoors during *makas bechoros*?
14. What was Pharaoh screaming as he ran from door to door the night of *makas bechoros*?
15. Why did Pharaoh ask Moshe to bless him?
16. Why did the Jewish People carry their *matzah* on their shoulders rather than have their animals carry it?
17. Who comprised the *erev rav* (mixed multitude)?
18. What three historical events occurred on the 15th of Nissan, prior to the event of the Exodus from Egypt?
19. What is the source of the "milk and honey" found in *Eretz Yisrael*?
20. The only non-kosher animal whose firstborn is redeemed is the donkey. What did the donkeys do to "earn" this distinction?

SHERLOX

"The new butler from the Shirewood estate disappeared along with thousands in cash and jewels," said Watstein.

"Well," said world famous detective Sherlock Holmes, "I imagine we'll find him in Grampa Hastings' apartment."

"Grampa Hastings? The sickly man who took an apartment in Shirewood last year, who lies in bed all day with his curtains drawn?"

"Ever had a close look at him?"

"His doting spinster sister never lets anyone too near."

"Curious how his room is always so dimly lit, isn't it?" said Sherlock.

"Are you suggesting that he and the missing butler are ..."

"One and the same. It's remarkable what dim light can reveal."

"Speaking of dim light," said Watstein, "Can you explain this text: 'There was pitch darkness in all the Land of Egypt for three days; A person couldn't see his brother, and a person couldn't stand from his place for three days...'" (Shemos 10:22-3).

"For the first three days the Egyptians couldn't see, and for the next three days they couldn't even move. Miraculous, but is it harder to understand than the other plagues?" asked Sherlock.

"My question exactly!" said Watstein. "Why, then, does Rashi comment? Rashi says: *Why did G-d bring darkness on the Egyptians? Because among the Jews there were some wicked ones; they died during the three days of darkness so the Egyptians wouldn't see their downfall. Also so that the Jews could search for the Egyptians' precious vessels.*"

"Good reasons for darkness" said Sherlock.

"But Rashi doesn't spell out the reason for the *other* plagues. Why does he need to explain the reason for *this* plague?"

"It's remarkable what dim light can reveal," said Sherlock.

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

1. 10:11 - Since children don't bring sacrifices there was no need for them to go.
2. 10:14 - The plague brought by Moshe was composed of one species of locust, whereas the plague in the days of Yoel was composed of many species.
3. 10:22 - During the first three days the Egyptians couldn't see. During the last three days they couldn't move.
4. 10:22 - During the plague of darkness the Jews could see and they searched and found the Egyptians' vessels.
5. 11:4 - If Moshe said the plague would begin exactly at midnight, the Egyptians might miscalculate and accuse Moshe of being a fake.
6. 11:5 - Because the Egyptians worshipped them as gods, and when Hashem punishes a nation He also punishes its gods.
7. 11:8 - Moshe warned that "All these servants of yours will come down to me" when, in fact, it was Pharaoh himself who actually came running to Moshe.
8. 11:9 - The plague of the firstborn, the splitting of the sea, the drowning of the Egyptian soldiers.
9. 12:1 - As reward for his efforts in bringing about the plagues.
10. 12:5 - One year.
11. 12:6 - Circumcision and *Korban Pesach*.
12. 12:8 - The bones and the sinews.
13. 12:22 - Since it was a night of destruction, it was not safe for anyone to leave the protected premises of their homes.
14. 12:31 - "Where does Moshe live? Where does Aharon live?"
15. 12:32 - So he wouldn't die, for he himself was a firstborn.
16. 12:34 - Because the commandment of *matzah* was dear to them.
17. 12:38 - People from other nations who became converts.
18. 12:41 - The angels came to promise that Sarah would have a son, Yitzchak was born, and the exile of the "covenant between the parts" was decreed.
19. 13:5 - Goat milk, date and fig honey.
20. 13:13 - They helped the Jews by carrying silver and gold out of Egypt.

DIET KOSHER

Joshua Kaplan
<jkaplan@rics.bwh.harvard.edu>
wrote:

Dear Rabbi,
As a doctor I run into an issue similar to the one raised by a recent questioner. I treat many patients who are Jewish but do not keep kosher, and I have to order diets for them. I try to avoid the problem by never asking what a patient's religion is, but if I know a patient is Jewish, am I not halachically obligated to order a kosher diet for them, even if they don't want one? Thanks.

Dear Dr. Joshua Kaplan,

It's prohibited to be the direct cause of a sin, because of the Torah's prohibition against "placing a stumbling block before the blind." Therefore, you are not allowed to provide a Jew, even a non-observant Jew, with non-kosher food.

Your case, however, isn't a case of causing a Jew to sin, as you aren't providing the food. Rather, your case might involve the Rabbinic prohibition of *encouraging* or *assisting* a sin; if the diet you suggest contains several choices of foods, some kosher and some not, this reduces the level of your assisting in sin.

I asked your question to Rabbi Moshe Shternbuch, *shlita*, of the Jerusalem Beth Din. He said that it would be sufficient to write on the diet plan something like this: "Those interested in observing the Jewish dietary laws (kashrut) should consult with me and their Rabbi regarding this diet."

Sources:

- Leviticus 19:14
- Tractate Avodah Zarah 6b

GOLD STAR

Kevin Woodhouse from New Zealand
<shalom@ihug.co.nz> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,
I have a couple of gold nuggets. I want to take one of them to the jeweller and have him make me a Magen David (Star or Shield of David). The question is, can I have inscribed upon it the Shema Yisrael prayer?

Dear Kevin Woodhouse,

If you have the *Shema Yisrael* engraved on your Magen David it will be forbidden to take it into an unclean place (e.g., bathroom). If you want to have something engraved on it, why not your Hebrew name (in English letters)?

EDEN FOR YIDDEN

Igor Doon from Moscow, Russia
<igordoon@mtu-net.ru> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,
I am a Jew in Russia and I have one question for you that has interested me for a long time. What happens with a Jew after death? I know a non-Jewish concept about hell and heaven, but I know that such concept doesn't exist in Jewish tradition. Please explain me the point of view, that Jewish tradition provides. Thank you beforehand.

Dear Igor Doon,

Jews believe in life after death. We call it the World to Come. *Gehinom* — a purification process — is part of the World to Come. When a person dies, his soul gets a chance to "think objectively" about his lifetime spent on earth. Depending on how the person spent his life, this can be a painful process in which the soul mourns its bad deeds, lost opportunities and wasted potential.

Ultimately, the *gehinom* process is temporary, and eventually enables the person to enjoy the benefits of all the good things he did during his lifetime.

Nevertheless, Judaism emphasizes life in *this world*. Here's a parable to explain: A wealthy man goes on a cruise ship. The ship sinks, and he finds himself afloat in a tiny rubber raft. This raft is his only hope of arriving safely to his family, his mansion and all his wealth. Judaism looks at this world like a raft. By following the survival manual — the Torah — this little raft can bring us safely to the World to Come.

Sources:

- Mishna Eduyot 2:10
- The Aryeh Kaplan Reader p. 179 citing Sefer Ha'ikrim 4:33

BURYING AND SWEARING

Alana Jacob from Silver Spring, MD
<alanzo@juno.com> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,
In Parshat Vayechi, why does Yaakov make Yosef swear to bury him in Eretz Yisrael (the Land of Israel)? It seems a little extreme to make him swear. Shouldn't Yaakov have just believed Yosef and trusted him?

Dear Alana Jacob,

Yaakov trusted Yosef. But he didn't trust Pharaoh. Yaakov was concerned that unless Yosef made an oath, Pharaoh would not allow Yaakov's body to leave Egypt.

Rabbi Eliyahu Munk explains why it was so important that Yaakov not be buried, even temporarily, in Egypt. Yaakov wanted to establish the fact that the Land of Israel should be the focal point of the Jewish People. Merely *asking* Yosef would not have had the same impact as to the importance of the message for all future generations. Thus, he asked Yosef to take an oath.

THREE TIMES DRY

Victor Rodriguez from Thornhill, Ontario
<yaakov@cpol.com> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,
From the Artsroll Gemara, book Tractate Shabbat, I would like to ask you the following question: On page 108b and under Rashi's comments #46 it says "An evil spirit called bat melech rests on the hands in the morning." Where does this spirit come from? Why the name 'princess' and not any other name? Why do the hands need to be washed three times each, and not two or four times for that matter?

Dear Victor Rodriguez,

"Bat melech" or Princess is the name of a certain "evil spirit," a type of spiritual impurity, which rests on a per-

son's hands in the morning. The name "bat melech" connotes some sort of prominence this spirit enjoys among other spirits.

This impurity rests on a person during sleep because the person is as if dead, not moving or performing *mitzvot* with the accomplishing tools, the hands. Thus, when we wake in the morning, we remove this impurity by pouring water over our hands three times. Water symbolizes Torah, and the number three symbolizes the three aspects of Torah — *Torah*, *Nevi'im* and *Ketuvim* (The Pentateuch, the Prophets, and the Writings). Torah study has the power to fend off any impurity, as it causes you to meditate on G-d's omnipotence and helps you to understand that the "spirit" has no power of its own if not for the will of G-d.

Sources:

- Aruch, Bat Chorin

PUBLIC DOMAIN
Comments, quibbles and reactions concerning previous "Ohrnet" features

Re: Deluge of Email:

I cannot believe the deluge of email I've been getting since you published my riddle. I even met (in cyberspace) a member of my extended family who recently became *frum* and lives far away. Keep up the good work.

- Zvi Freund <miltonf@villagenet.com>

Re: Tribal Lineage (Ohrnet Vayechi):

In a recent "Ask the Rabbi" Gabriella asked: "My real mom's last name was Levin. What tribe would I be from?" I think it would have been noteworthy to mention that her tribe is determined by her paternal lineage.

- Rabbi Chaim Y. Schreiner <bcys@netvision.net.il>

Re: Why the Talmud Starts on Page Two (Ohrnet Vayigash):

Ever noticed how each tractate assumes that you have already learned all of the other tractates? I remarked once to Dr. Gershon Miles, head of the Technology Management & Marketing department of the Jerusalem College of Technology, that I like to study in an orderly fashion, rather than just jumping into the middle of things. Dr. Miles suggested (tongue-in-cheek) that the reason

each tractate starts with page two is that in Talmud, it doesn't matter where you start, you've jumped into the middle.

- Haim (Howard) Roman, Jerusalem College of Technology <roman@beitza.jct.ac.il>

The reason I learned in Yeshiva was that "derech erez kadma l'Torah" — before you learn Torah you must first learn *derech erez* — proper interpersonal relations. That's the first page.

- Dovid Papoff, Toronto <dpapoff@canada.com>

Re: "Seasons of the Moon" (Tevet 5759):

I read your publication "Seasons of the Moon" by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair. I loved every word, it was inspiring and captivating. What a wonderful gift that Hashem gave him. I enjoyed reading it so much.

- Danny Freedman Johannesburg, South Africa <dfreedman13@hotmail.com>

Re: Simcha's Torah Stories:

This is so lovely to get your "Simcha's Torah Stories." I have not seen something so perfect for kids, and how healthy and easy they are. The article about smiling is so good for everyone. We kids smile more than the big people, maybe they should learn from us. Keep up the great work. I know a lot of kids here, and this way every kid can get into your stories, and learn thru enjoying and not get bored. Shalom. PS: Every one calls me by the name *Bli'neder* — in Hebrew it means "without a promise" or something like that — because I say it all the time.

- Bli'neder from Miami, Florida <Blineder@aol.com>

GIVING PEOPLE THE BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT

Judging favorably isn't just a good idea; it's a command from the...

TREE OF LIFE

A friend of mine had a “sheila” — a halachic query — but he didn't know which Rabbi to ask. After inquiring, he was

referred to a certain Rabbi. Entering the Rabbi's house, he found the Rabbi at the table cutting out pictures of trees and pasting them on a paper. He therefore decided not to ask his question from this Rabbi, who had nothing better to do than to cut out pictures of trees and make a scrapbook. Later, to his surprise, he found out

that this Rabbi was writing a “sefer,” a halachic treatise, on a topic concerning trees and therefore needed these pictures to illustrate the sefer. So the Rabbi was not doing arts and crafts, but preparing his sefer.

• S.W., Jerusalem
Concept based on “The Other Side of the Story”
by Yehudis Samet, ArtScroll Series

YIDDLE RIDDLE

One Friday eve recently, I said the first paragraph of *Shema* five times, and each time it was for a different reason. How did this occur?

• Riddle Submitted by Benjie Gerstman, Jerusalem <gerstbpg@netvision.net.il>

Answer next week...

continued from page five

SHERLOX ANSWER!

“Rashi isn't explaining the reason for the darkness,” said Sherlock.

“He's not?” asked Watstein.

“No. He's explaining why the darkness changed intensity in the middle of its duration.”

“Yes, the darkness was unique in that sense. The first three days were of less intensity — ‘for three days a person couldn't see his brother’ — and the last three days were of greater intensity — ‘and a person couldn't stand from his place for three days.’ We don't find this phenomenon regarding any other plague; no other plague changed intensity in the middle of its duration.”

“Rather odd,” said Sherlock.

“Indeed,” said Watstein. “Therefore, Rashi explains the reason for the different levels of darkness: The first three days hid the demise of the recalcitrant Jews, while the latter, thick darkness allowed the Jews to search the Egyptian households free from any resistance, even from the slightest groping of the owners, who couldn't even move.”

“Brilliant, dear Watstein.”

• Based on *Maskil L'David, Sherlock* by Reuven Subar
Inspired by “What's Bothering Rashi” by Rabbi Avigdor Bonchek

RECOMMENDED READING LIST

RAMBAN

10:14 Locusts and Crocodiles
10:23 A Different Darkness
12:2 Jewish Months
12:3 Symbolism of the *Korban Pesach*
12:31,51 Timetable of the Exodus

13:5 Five and Two – Seven Canaanite Nations

SEFER HACHINUCH

7, 16 Eating Like Kings
18 Recognizing Hashem's Gifts
21 The Significance of the Exodus

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