

O H R N E T

SHABBAT PARSHAT VAERA · FOR THE WEEK ENDING ROSH CHODESH SHVAT 5760 · JAN. 8, 2000 · VOL. 7 NO. 14

PARSHA INSIGHTS

FREEDOM FROM WORK

“So Moshe spoke accordingly to Children of Israel; but they did not heed Moshe, because of shortness of breath and hard work.” (6:9)

Everyone needs to work. Chicken doesn't grow out of dining-room tables. Our attitude to work, however, can be very revealing.

In Europe, before the war, they used to say “What do you do for a living?” Nowadays, we say “What are you?” This subtle change speaks volumes. What I do is *not* who I am. I may be in business, but I'm not a businessman. I may sweep the roads, but I'm not a roadsweeper. What I do doesn't define my essence. It doesn't define who I am.

The Jew defines himself in terms of his relationship with G-d. G-d created me for one reason only — to receive the ultimate goodness and pleasure. To be close to Him. That's who I am. Every Jew should think, “I am the centerpiece of this vast galactic ballet.” Every star is wheeling in the sky for me. Every fish is blowing bubbles for me. Every stone is silent for me. I am the center of Creation.

But I'm not the be-all and end-all of creation. That's who

G-d is.

We live in the Age of Man. The age in which Man sees himself as the center of the universe. Man is the idol-worship of the age. Twenty-first century man has written G-d out of his world. Man is the center of all. Thus my status — what I do — really is who I am.

“So Moshe spoke accordingly to Children of Israel; but they did not heed Moshe, because of shortness of breath and hard work” (6:9)

“Every star is wheeling in the sky for me.”

The expression “shortness of breath” (*kotzer ruach*) can also be translated as “narrowness of spirit.” The Jewish People in Egypt were steeped in idol worship. The ultimate idol is man himself. Pharaoh declared himself a god.

Hard work can bring a person to appreciation of G-d's beneficence. Or it can bring him to think, “With my own power and the strength of my hand I did all this.” Hard work can bring a person to a sense of self-esteem. Or it can fill him with self-importance. Hard work never killed anybody — but it can turn us into addicts. It can make us think we are the center of the universe.

The ultimate definition of a workaholic is someone who has confused what he does — with who he is.

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Hashem tells Moshe to inform the Jewish People that He is going to take them out of Egypt; however, the Jewish People do not listen. Hashem commands Moshe to go to Pharaoh and ask him to free the Jewish People. Although Aharon shows Pharaoh a sign by turning a staff into a snake, Pharaoh's magicians copy the sign, emboldening Pharaoh to refuse the request. Hashem punishes the Egyptians and sends plagues of blood and frogs, but the magicians copy these miracles on

a smaller scale, again encouraging Pharaoh's obstinance. After the plague of lice, Pharaoh's magicians concede that only G-d could be performing these miracles. Only the Egyptians, and not the Jews in Goshen, suffer during the plagues. The onslaught continues with wild animals, pestilence, boils and fiery hail. However, despite Moshe's offers to end the plagues if Pharaoh will let the Jewish People leave, Pharaoh continues to harden his heart and refuses.

SEIZE THE MOMENT

After a week of achieving and “making things happen,” Shabbat summons us to renew our ties to the Creator. With the cessation of creative activity we declare that it is G-d who created this beautiful world; it is G-d who “makes things happen.”

The New Moon too is a call to

renew our relationship with G-d, lest we become trapped in spiritual stagnation.

Yeshaya exhorts the Jewish people: They have desecrated the Temple with empty offerings, desecrated their prayers with lip-service. How many truly cared about G-d’s word and served Him with all their heart? Yeshaya envisions the future time when all will unite to declare G-d’s glory. At

every New Moon and at every Shabbat they will prostrate themselves before G-d, in free-willed devotion.

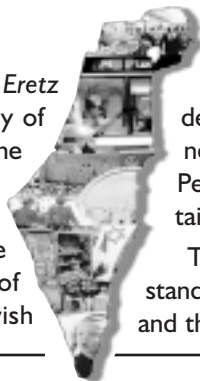
Every week we have an opportunity to renew our connection. Every month we have an opportunity for spiritual elevation. Such opportunities can not be allowed to slip away. The Torah gives the framework for a life of spiritual elation. All we have to do is to seize the moment.

LOVE OF THE LAND

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

TIFRACH

The name of this settlement in the south of Eretz Yisrael comes from a passage in the prophecy of Yeshaya (35.1) describing the revival of the desert that will accompany the redemption of the Jewish



People. It means “to blossom” and refers to the desolate Holy Land “blossoming like a rose.” The nearby settlements of G’ilat, Ranen, Maslul and Pedium also took their names from words contained in that prophecy.

Tifrach is a charedi community famous for its outstanding yeshiva that attracts students from all of Israel and the world.

OHRNET

THE OHR SOMAYACH TORAH MAGAZINE ON THE INTERNET

Published by
OHR SOMAYACH
 TANENBAUM COLLEGE
 POB 18103, Jerusalem 91180, Israel • 02-581-0315

General Editor:
Rabbi Moshe Newman
 Editorial & Web Advisor:
Rabbi Reuven Lauffer
 Associate Editors:
Rabbi Mordechai Becher,
Rabbi Reuven Subar
 Contributing Writers:
Weekly Daf, Love of the Land:
Rav Mendel Weinbach
 Insights, Overview:
Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

Web Production: **Eli Ballon, Michael Treblow**

Produced and Designed by the Office of Communications
Rabbi Eliezer Shapiro, Director

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I DIDN'T KNOW THAT!

“And G-d said to Moshe, ‘Come to Pharaoh...’ ”(9:1)

G-d commanded Moshe to enter Pharaoh's palace without even asking permission. Despite the armed guards, lions and guard dogs that protected Pharaoh's palace, Moshe was able to enter unhindered, and this itself was a great miracle.

• *Ohr Hachayim Hakadosh*

YIDDLE RIDDLE

<Name@Withheld.com> wrote:

Someone just asked me this riddle. Question: In Hebrew, if you subtract 30 from 30 you get 60. How is this?

Answer next week....

THE TEN-YEAR DEADLINE

The daughter of Rabbi Chisda married the Sage Rava after ten years of widowhood. When she became pregnant it caused a stir amongst Rava's colleagues, because Rabbi Yochanan had stated a law of nature that a woman who remains unmarried for ten years after her first marriage is no longer capable of bearing children.

Rava's wife cleared up the mystery by informing him that during her widowhood she had in mind to marry him, and the rule stated by Rabbi Yochanan had been qualified by Rabbi Nachman who declared that if the woman had in mind to get married she could conceive even after ten years.

The background for this dialogue is supplied by Tosefot on the basis of an incident related in Mesechta Bava Batra (12b) to illustrate that since the destruction of the *Beit Hamikdash*, prophecy was removed from the prophets and allocated to fools and children. Rabbi Chisda's little daughter sat in his lap as two of his disciples, the Sages Rava and Rami bar Chama sat before him. "Which of these two do you want to marry?" he asked the child. "Both," she announced, to which Rava quickly responded "and me last."

She did indeed marry Rami bar Chama first, and after his death she was certain that her childhood prophecy would be fulfilled and that she would marry Rava. The latter, however, had a wife already and she had to wait ten years until that woman died. Having her mind on eventually marrying Rava during all these years saved her from losing her ability to bear children.

On the basis of the rule and qualification found in our *gemara*, the Midrash thus explains a passage from the Book of Ruth (1:12). In it, Naomi discourages her widowed daughter-in-law from accompanying her to *Eretz Yisrael* in the hope of someday marrying other sons she may eventually bear. "I have grown too old to marry a man," she told them, "and even if I said that I have hope, and even if tonight I would marry a man and then give birth to sons, would you wait until they grow up?"

Naomi explained that, since it was ten years short a day since the death of her husband, her ability to bear children in a new marriage would depend on one of two things:

1) "I said that I have hope" — that she had her hopes set on marriage; 2) "If tonight I would marry a man" before the ten years came to an end.

• *Yevamot 34b*

THE PREFERRED MITZVAH

Should a man die childless, the Torah made it a *mitzvah* for his brother to perform *yibum* by marrying the widow. The Torah thus put aside the prohibition on a man marrying his brother's wife even after his death in order for this *mitzvah* to be done.

But what if the brother is not motivated to marry her for the sake of the *mitzvah* but only because of her beauty or some other ulterior motive? The Sage Abba Shaul viewed this as bordering on a violation of the ban on marrying a brother's wife, and he even considered the idea that a child born from such a marriage would be a *mamzer*. The other Sages disputed this approach and held that regardless of the motive, the *yibum* was a valid fulfillment of the *mitzvah*.

These two conflicting opinions determine whether today we encourage *yibum* or its alternative, *chalitzah*. The *mishna* in Mesechta Bechorot (13a) quoted in our *gemara* declares that in earlier generations when people had the right attitude and did *yibum* for the sake of the *mitzvah*, it was preferable for *yibum* to be done. Since in later generations people began to perform *yibum* for different reasons and not for the sake of the *mitzvah*, it is preferable to do *chalitzah*. This is clearly in line with the view of Abba Shaul.

The Sage Rami bar Chama, however, quotes Rabbi Yitzchak as stating that this position of endorsing the view of Abba Shaul was subsequently abandoned in favor of the view of the other Sages which makes *yibum* preferable even today.

There is a major debate amongst the commentaries as to whether we rule like Abba Shaul or the other Sages. Rabbeinu Alfis (Rif) cites the statement of Rami bar Chama as support for the view of the other Sages and therefore concludes that *yibum* is preferable. Rabbeinu Tam of the Tosefists and Rabbeinu Chananel rule like Abba Shaul and conclude that *chalitzah* is preferable.

The accepted practice in virtually every Jewish community today is to avoid *yibum* in favor of *chalitzah*.

• *Yevamot 39b*

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PARSHA Q&A ?

1. Did Hashem ever appear to Avraham and say “I am Hashem?”
2. What cause did the forefathers have to question Hashem?
3. How was Moshe commanded to act towards Pharaoh?
4. How long did Levi live?
5. Who was Aharon’s wife? Who was her father? Who was her brother?
6. Why are Yitro and Yosef both referred to as “Putiel?”
7. After which plague did Hashem begin to “harden Pharaoh’s heart?”
8. Why did Pharaoh go to the Nile every morning?
9. Give two reasons why the blood was chosen as the first plague.
10. How long did the plague of blood last?
11. Why did the frogs affect Pharaoh’s house first?
12. What did Moshe mean when he told Pharaoh that the frogs would be “in you and in your nation?”
13. What are “*chamarim*.”
14. Why didn’t Moshe strike the dust to initiate the plague of lice?
15. Why were the Egyptian sorcerers unable to bring about lice?
16. What were the Egyptians likely to do if they saw the Jews slaughtering lambs?
17. Why didn’t the wild beasts die as the frogs had?
18. The *dever* killed “all the cattle of Egypt.” Later, boils afflicted their cattle. How can this be?
19. Why did Moshe pray only after leaving the city?
20. What was miraculous about the way the hail stopped falling?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week’s Questions!

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

1. 6:9 - Yes.
2. 6:9 – Although Hashem swore to give them the land, they never actually had control over it.
3. 6:13 - With the respect due a king.
4. 6:16 - 137 years.
5. 6:23 - Elisheva, daughter of Aminadav, sister of Nachshon.
6. 6:25 - Yitro fattened (*pittem*) cows for idol worship. Yosef scoffed (*pitpet*) at his evil inclination.
7. 7:3 - After the sixth plague — *shechin*.
8. 7:15 - To relieve himself. Pharaoh pretended to be a god who did not need to attend to his bodily functions. Therefore, he secretly used the Nile for this purpose.
9. 7:17 - a) Because the Nile was an Egyptian god.
8:17 - b) Because an invading army first attacks the enemy’s water supply, and Hashem did the same.
10. 7:25 - Seven days.
11. 7:28 - Pharaoh himself advised the enslavement of the Jewish People.
12. 7:29 - He warned that the frogs would enter their intestines and croak.
13. 8:10 – Piles.
14. 8:12 - Because the dust protected Moshe by hiding the body of the Egyptian that Moshe killed.
15. 8:14 - The Egyptian sorcerers’ magic had no power over anything smaller than a barley kernel.
16. 8:22 - Stone the Jews.
17. 8:27 - So the Egyptians would not benefit from their hides.
18. 9:10 - In the plague of *dever* only the cattle *in the fields* died. The plague of *shechin* affected the surviving cattle.
19. 9:29 - Because the city was full of idols.
20. 9:33 - The hailstones stopped in mid-air and didn’t fall to the ground.

KASHA! (KASHA MEANS “QUESTION”)

“And Pharaoh’s sorcerers did this as well (turning water into blood)...and Pharaoh’s heart was hardened.” (*Exodus*, 7:22)
“And the sorcerers did this as well, and the frogs came upon the land of Egypt.” (*Exodus* 8:3)

Name@Withheld wrote:

I always thought the plagues were supposed to prove that Moshe was sent by G-d, because only G-d had the power to make such plagues. If so, what was the purpose of the first

two plagues, blood and frogs, which Pharaoh’s sorcerers were able to duplicate? If they could also do it, what did it prove?

Answer:

Although Pharaoh’s sorcerers could do the first two plagues, they couldn’t *un-do* them. Only Moshe was able to turn the blood *back* into water and to make the frogs go away.

Do you have a **KASHA**? Write to kasha@ohr.org.il with your questions on any Parsha!

MISSION CONTROL

Andrew Merrill
<a@amerrill.freeseve.co.uk>
wrote:

Dear Rabbi,
One of my work colleagues asked me yesterday why Jews do not missionize, and Christians do. To me it just seems obvious that we would not, but it is difficult to explain this intrinsic notion to him. Could you help me out?

Dear Andrew Merrill,

Jews do not missionize among non-Jews. There are two reasons for this. First of all, we believe that when a non-Jew keeps the seven Noachide laws, he merits a portion in the World-to-Come, and therefore there is no imperative for him to become Jewish. If, like many Christians and Moslems, we believed that those of other religions are condemned to damnation, then we would also desire to convert people. However, we believe that a person can be completely righteous and merit the World-to-Come without conversion, by adhering to the basic moral laws revealed to Noach. Therefore we feel no compulsion to convert others, unless they show a true desire to convert.

Secondly, since sincerity is one of the criteria for conversion, we can determine that the candidate is sincere by discouraging him from converting. If he persists and does so for the love of Judaism, we accept him with open arms.

KOSHER COSTS

<Name@Withheld> from the UK
wrote:

Dear Rabbi,
How does a Jew like myself feed my disabled daughter kosher food on such a low income? The place where they sell kosher food is usually one place in a community. This is true here where I live in

the UK. All kosher food is always extensively more expensive than non-kosher food. I therefore will suffer in eternal afterlife as the greed of the people who sell kosher meat know quite well that we can only get kosher meat at their place, so they charge extra, as do their wholesalers, and the Rabbis whom charge for doubling the price of sugar at Pesach (Passover) just to say a blessing.

Dear Parent,

The price of kosher products can be frustrating, and your anger is understandable. And if one is indeed in great financial difficulty, G-d takes that into account in judging the person. A low-income, however, is not a reason to eat non-kosher food. Perhaps a reader willing to offer you some concrete help or advice could contact us via e-mail: info@ohr.org.il

The economic reality is such that in order to produce kosher food, greater care, supervision and manpower is required, as well as different and sometimes more expensive ingredients and processes.

Here's one example: Gelatin is made from non-kosher animal bones — very available, and very cheap. Kosher food substitutes "agar-agar," a seaweed extract that is not as common and therefore more expensive. In addition, a supervisor must be paid to make sure no unkosher ingredients are "snuck" in.

Another factor is the small size of the kosher market relative to the greater market. Producing in bulk brings down costs, so unkosher products can sometimes be produced for less.

Kosher meat has its own special requirements, from the specially trained slaughterer to the inspection for *treifot* (lesions, etc.) These inspections are stricter than government standards, and animals that don't pass inspection cause a monetary loss. A special process is required for the removal of many parts, as well as salting to remove the blood. All these

processes require salaried manpower.

Regarding Passover, the Rabbi does not bless the sugar. What actually happens is that a Rabbi or a supervisor oversees the production to ensure that no leavened products come in contact with the sugar. Or the machines at the sugar plant (which may also be used to process other substances not kosher for Passover) may need to be cleaned. Again, such supervision requires paying someone a salary to do it.

Furthermore, since Passover is only once a year, many Passover supervision jobs are short term, for only a few weeks or months, and require long hours. As such, few people want such jobs, so owners must offer higher salaries.

There are many foods that are kosher on the general market that can be bought at any supermarket and are not more expensive than regular products. For a complete list, I suggest that you contact the London Beth Din for their "Really Kosher Food Guide," which should be available in any Jewish bookstore.

LEFTOVER TURKEY

Zev Schwartz
<nurev@starpower.net> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,
In a follow up to your Thanksgiving question (Ohrnet Vayeitze), one of your readers praised America as "A country where Jews can live free from daily fear of persecution. A country where the constitution protects us with freedom of speech, press and religion. The safest country, except for Israel, for Jews to reside in....Without this country most of us would not be alive today."

What if the United States of America was an evil empire by Jewish standards? What if the USA was comparable to Rome in the days of our forefathers? What if American foreign policy would cause the destruction of Israel, or the metamorphosis of Israel from a Jewish

State into a Democratic Multiethnic Entity? What if American culture caused the loss of more than 51% of America's Jews every generation? Would it then be permissible for Jews to lavish such praise on a country that does us such devastating harm just because it lets us worship our religion, and make a few bucks?

Dear Zev Schwartz,

Comparing the United States to ancient Rome seems a bit of a stretch of the imagination. Rome was an extremely evil empire who tortured our Rabbis to death, murdered, plundered, destroyed our country and our Temple and sent us into the exile we are still in till today.

Regarding assimilation, is the United States to blame?

While it is true that many sectors of the Jewish population are sadly assimilating in America, others are thriving. For example, Torah institutions, Yeshivot, Jewish day schools and centers for outreach and Torah study have burgeoned in the US over the last 50 years. So blaming the US for those who assimilate is simply an attempt to shift the burden of guilt.

But to answer your question: Yes, you are allowed to praise even an evil country for its good acts. As an extreme example, Rabbi Yehuda B'rabbi Ilai in the Talmud praised the Romans for all their beneficial deeds, such as building roads, bridges, sanitation facilities, and markets, even though ancient Rome was an extremely evil empire.

Sources:

- *Talmud Tractate Shabbat 33b*

PUBLIC DOMAIN

Comments, quibbles and reactions concerning previous "Ohrnet" features

Re: Words from the Heart: (Ohrnet Vayechi):

Thank you. Your response to "words from the heart," specifically your anecdote about the Chafetz Chaim, answered a related question: In Parashas Vayigash, Yehuda "spoke into Joseph's ear" — but why? In the previous Parasha we are told that the brothers did not know that Joseph understood *Lashon Hakodesh* (Hebrew) because an interpreter was present? Therefore, Yehuda must have taken this opportunity to speak "words from the heart" that would enter Joseph's heart no matter what the language, just as the Polish official understood the Chafetz Chaim as he pleaded from his heart on behalf of Poland's Jews.

- *Howard Kravitz, Skokie, IL, USA*

Rabbi Berel Wein relates the following story heard from his father-in-law, Rav Lazar Levine of Detroit: Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan — the "Chafetz Chaim" — attended the convention of the Va'ad Hayeshivot in Warsaw in the early 1930's. When asked to address the crowd of 5,000 people, he declined. Already in his 90's, the Chafetz Chaim claimed that his voice was too weak to be heard past the first few rows of the vast assemblage. "We'll set up a 'turgeman' — a person to stand beside you and loudly relay your words to the people," they said in an effort to convince him.

"For words from the heart," said the Chafetz Chaim, "There can be no turgeman."

- *An Ohrnet reader*

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE STORY

Giving People the Benefit of the Doubt

Judging favorably needn't end with people. Situations, too, can be judged favorably by looking for the good within them. This is beautifully illustrated in the following:

I am thankful for:

- The mess to clean after a party because it means I have been surrounded by friends,
- the taxes I pay because it means that I'm employed.
- the clothes that fit a little too snug because it means I have enough to eat.
- my shadow who watches me work because it means I am out in the sunshine.
- a lawn that needs mowing, windows that need cleaning and gutters that need fixing because it means I have a home.

- the parking spot I find at the far end of the parking lot because it means I am capable of walking,
- all the complaining I hear about our government because it means we have freedom of speech.
- my huge heating bill because it means I am warm.
- the man behind me in synagogue who sings off key because it means that I can hear.
- the piles of laundry and ironing because it means my loved ones are nearby.
- the alarm that goes off in the early morning hours because it means that I'm alive
- weariness and aching muscles at the end of the day because it means I have been productive.

- *Submitted by Barbara Mandelbaum*