

# OHRNET

SHABBAT PARSHAT VAYECHI · 14 TEVET 5776 - DEC. 26, 2015 · VOL. 23 NO. 12

## PARSHA INSIGHTS

### THE MORAL OF THE TALE

“G-d spoke to Yisrael in visions of the night...” (46:2)

As every amateur sleuth knows, 221B Baker Street is the London address of the world’s greatest detective, Sherlock Holmes.

When Conan Doyle wrote the Holmes stories there was no 221 Baker Street. Addresses in Baker Street did not go that high. Baker Street was later extended, and in 1932 the Abbey National Building Society moved into premises at 219–229 Baker Street. The thousands of letters addressed to the Conan Doyle’s fantasy now found their way to the desk of a full-time secretary employed to answer them. In 1990 a blue plaque was put up to signify 221B Baker Street as the home of Sherlock Holmes.

And typically, when a soap-opera hero is “killed off” and written out of a TV series, the relatives of the still-very-much-alive actor who played the hero receive thousands of letters of condolence.

We live in a world where the parable has become the moral of the tale. Or as it’s called in Hebrew — the *mashal* has become the *nimshal*.

In Pirkei Avot, Rabbi Yehuda says that someone walking along the road whose mind is focused on learning Torah, and who willingly breaks off from his learning to remark on a beautiful tree or a beautiful field, is considered guilty of a capital offense.

What is so terrible about enjoying the natural beauty of the world that it merits such a drastic response?

Let’s understand this with a parable:

Imagine two Jewish grandmothers sitting in the park, watching their grandchildren playing in front of them on the grass. One says to the other, “Sadie. *K’neine hora*, your grandchildren are gorgeous!” Says the other, “That’s nothing — you should see the photographs!”

The Zohar teaches that G-d looked into the Torah and

created the world.

The Torah is the “grandchildren”. The world is the “photograph”. The Torah is the Moral. The world is the Parable.

On one level this was the ideological battle between the Greeks and the Jews that we commemorate on the festival of Chanukah. The Greeks believed that “Truth is Beauty, Beauty Truth,” as John Keats put it. In other words, the Moral and the Parable are interchangeable. The Jew says that what is true is beautiful, but what is beautiful may not necessarily be true. The Parable only has value to the extent that it serves the Moral. If the Parable serves nothing but itself it inevitably leads to decadence and moral decay.

Drive down an avenue in any major city and you’ll see how successful the Greeks were: An eight story-high billboard with a male model with carefully crafted biceps bulging from a designer T-shirt. Eight stories of T-shirt.

The wellspring of the art of Greece comes from a verse in the Torah: “May G-d broaden Yafet, but he will dwell in the tents of Shem.” Thus it was that Noach blessed Yafet, his eldest son. However, the blessing of beauty comes with a condition: that Yafet will “dwell in the tents of Shem.”

*Yafet* comes from the same root in Hebrew as *yaffe*, “beauty.” *Yafet*’s fourth son was *Yavan*. *Yavan* is the Hebrew name for Greece. The Jewish People are the descendants of Shem. *Shem* mean “name.” In the Holy Tongue the name of something defines its essence. In all other languages a name is conventional but does not define essence. In the Holy Tongue the name of something expresses its essence, its connection to its spiritual root. Yafet, Beauty, Art — the ultimate Parable — finds its

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## GITTIN 16 - 22

*“A get may be written on anything: on an olive leaf; on the horn of a cow, and then he must give her the cow (for the divorce to be valid)...”*

This teaching in the *mishna* does not mention that he must give his wife the entire olive tree, despite it teaching immediately afterwards that he must give her the entire cow, even though he wrote the *get* only on its horn. This seems to imply that he wrote the *get* on the leaf after it was detached from the tree, and not while it was still connected, which is consistent with the Rashi’s commentary. One reason offered by the commentaries is that the *get* must be written on an object that is fit to be given to her “from hand to hand”. The basis for this is in understanding the wording of the verse in the Torah that mandates the procedure for divorce: “and he writes for her a bill of divorce and places it into her hand” (Devarim 24”). This wording implies that the *get* be an object that can be transferred from his hand to her hand, excluding a tree that is connected to the ground. (See the notes of the Rashash who suggests this explanation, and then proceeds to question it on the basis of other teachings, leaving the topic open for further study.)

• *Gittin 19a*

*Shmuel said. “If a man gave his wife a blank paper for divorce, she is divorced — since he may have written the get on the paper with (an ‘invisible ink’) called mei millin.”*

The *gemara* challenges this halachic statement of Shmuel from a *tosefta* that teaches that the *get* must have writing on it for it to be valid. The answer provided by the *gemara* on behalf of Shmuel is that the “blank” paper was in fact checked with a certain substance (called *maya d’nara*), and the text of the *get* appeared. (This substance is a type of dye that is put on the paper and causes the “invisible” letters that were written and absorbed into the paper to now come to the surface and appear to the eye — Rashi. Tosefot cites Rabbeinu Chananel and the Aruch as teaching that this substance is made from the peel of a pomegranate.)

Even if the text appears in this manner, asks the *gemara*, it was not apparent when the *get* was given to the wife — so why should Shmuel say she is indeed divorced? The *gemara* clarifies and concludes that Shmuel really meant that she is in a state called “doubtfully divorced”, and may not marry a *kohen*. The doubt is regarding how well the letters written there were absorbed into the paper, and, depending on this factor, whether or not to consider it a kosher *get*. This halacha is codified in Shulchan Aruch Even Ha’ezer 135:4.

Tosefot adds a novel twist. According to this conclusion that the divorce is only doubtful, this doubt exists even if the paper was not checked with the “litmus test”. We still have a concern that he wrote the *get* with an ink that was absorbed into the paper. However, Tosefot adds, if the paper is indeed checked and no text is found, it can clearly be concluded that the *get* is not valid beyond any shadow of a doubt.

• *Gittin 19b*

## LOVE OF THE LAND

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

## NECHEMIAH’S WALL

Remnants of a wall dating back to the time of Nechemiah have apparently been discovered in an archeological dig in Jerusalem’s ancient City of David.

In the Book of Nechemiah (6:16) it is recorded that this wall around the city to which Jews had returned from Babylonian captivity was completed in only 52 days despite the threats of hostile neighbors who had occupied the area around Jerusalem.



This part of the two and a half millennia-old wall is located outside Sha’ar Ha’ashpatot (Dung Gate) and the Old City walls facing the Mount of Olives. Based on rich pottery found during a dig under a previously uncovered tower, which had hitherto been assumed to date back to the Hasmonean period, it is now assumed that the tower was part of the wall built centuries before by Nechemiah.

## PARSHA Q&A ?

1. Why is kindness towards the dead called “*chesed shel emet*” — kindness of truth?
2. Give three reasons Yaakov didn’t want to be buried in Egypt.
3. How do you treat a “fox in his time” (i.e., a commoner who rules)?
4. “When I was coming from Padan, Rachel died on me... I buried her there on the way to Efrat...” Why did Yaakov say all this to Yosef?
5. Initially, why was Yaakov unable to bless Efraim and Menashe?
6. What does *pillalti* mean?
7. What does “*Shechem*” mean as used in this week’s parsha? (two answers)
8. Which individual is called “the *Emori*”? Why? Give two reasons.
9. What did Yaakov want to tell his sons but was unable to?
10. What privileges did Reuven lose due to his rash actions?
11. What congregation from Yaakov’s offspring did Yaakov not want to be associated with?
12. What did Yehuda do after he heard Yaakov rebuke Reuven, Shimon and Levi? Why?
13. What does milk do to teeth?
14. Why is Yissachar like a “strong-boned donkey”?
15. With what resource did both Yaakov and Moshe bless Asher?
16. In Yosef’s blessing Yaakov said, “They embittered him...” Who are “they”?
17. Which descendants of Binyamin “will divide the spoils in the evening”?
18. From whom did Yaakov buy his burial place?
19. What oath did Yosef make to Pharaoh?
20. Which two sons of Yaakov did not carry his coffin? Why not?

## PARSHA Q&A!

### Answers to this week’s Questions!

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

1. 47:29 - Because the giver expects no reward from the recipient.
2. 47:29 - a) Egypt’s ground was to be plagued with lice; b) At the time of the resurrection, those buried outside Israel will suffer; c) So the Egyptians wouldn’t make him into an idol.
3. 47:31 - Bow to him.
4. 48:7 - Yaakov thought Yosef harbored resentment since Yaakov had not buried Yosef’s mother, Rachel, in the *Ma’arat HaMachpela*.
5. 48:8 - The *Shechina* departed from him.
6. 48:11 - “I thought.”
7. 48:22 - a) The actual city of Shechem; b) A portion.
8. 48:22 - Esav. a) He acted like an Emorite; b) He trapped his father with words (*imrei pi*).
9. 49:1 - When *mashiach* will come.
10. 49:3 - Priesthood and Kingship.
11. 49:6 - Korach and his congregation.
12. 49:8 - He drew back. He was afraid that Yaakov would rebuke him for the incident with Tamar.
13. 49:12 - It makes them white.
14. 49:14 - Just as a donkey bears a heavy burden, so the tribe of Yissachar bears the yoke of Torah.
15. 49:20 - Oil-rich land.
16. 49:23 - Yosef’s brothers, Potifar and his wife.
17. 49:27 - Mordechai and Esther.
18. 50:5 - From Esav.
19. 50:6 - Yosef swore not to reveal Pharaoh’s ignorance of Hebrew.
20. 50:13 - Levi, because he would carry the *aron* (holy ark). Yosef, because he was a king.

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# Abarbanel

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## ON THE PARSHA

BY RABBI PINCHAS KASNETT

### Vayechi

Knowing that his death is imminent, Yaakov summons his sons and says, “Assemble yourselves and I will tell you what will befall you in the End of Days. Gather yourselves and listen, O sons of Yaakov, and listen to Yisrael your father.” (Ber. 49:1-2) Why does Yaakov have to mention the same thing twice, i.e. “assemble yourselves” and “gather yourselves”? What does he mean by “the End of Days”? Why does he refer to himself as “Yisrael your father”? It would have been sufficient to simply refer to himself as “Yisroel” or “your father”, but not both.

After having blessed Yosef and Yosef’s sons privately, Yaakov wanted to do the same to all of his other sons as well to ensure that there would not be another flare-up of jealousy between the brothers and Yosef. Yaakov was also aware that some of his sons might balk at coming to him, as they were loathe to be subjected to any criticism or reproach. As a result, he begins by enticing them with an opportunity to view the hidden secrets of the future, something which anyone would be anxious to know. After they are gathered together he informs them that they should not find his words and criticisms abhorrent. Instead, they should respect him and his advice and insights, both as their father and as “Yisrael”, the name which signifies the lofty spiritual level that he had attained.

Abarbanel is puzzled by the nature of these “blessings”. They are not what we would normally call blessings, and they are not uniform for each son. Rather, they are a diverse collection of prayer, personal characterizations, reproach and insights into the future, all unique to the individual son, and all couched in unusual metaphorical and poetic language.

Abarbanel says that Yaakov’s intent was to determine which of them would be fit for royalty and leadership. He focuses on specific aspects of their character and behavior only as they relate to their or their future progeny’s fitness for this task.

Yaakov begins with Reuven, his firstborn. He makes it clear that he and his offspring will be characterized by rash impetuosity, a quality which precludes effective and balanced leadership. Shimon and Levy are disqualified on two counts. First of all there is the violent and wrathful nature that they demonstrated with the men of Shechem. Secondly, they would be scattered amongst the other tribes. Levy of course would be scattered amongst 48 different cities. The tribe of Shimon also would not be found in one distinct contiguous region, but would be scattered amongst the tribe of Yehuda. To lead effectively the ruler must have a solid and unified base.

Abarbanel then proceeds to describe the four characteristics of Yehuda that made him uniquely fit for royalty. First of all, his brothers agreed to acknowledge him as their leader, without any trace of jealousy. This was unusual, since in most cases a perception of equality amongst brothers leads to more jealousy when one is singled out.

Secondly, his progeny, namely King David, would demon-

strate success in battle. Royalty requires the respect that comes from military prowess and success. Thirdly, he did not have the impetuosity of Reuven or the violent character of Shimon and Levy. This is evident from the way Yaakov describes him, “A lion cub is Yehuda; from the prey, my son, you have elevated yourself...” (Ber. 49:9) What he means is that like an immature lion, Yehuda has the potential for “predatory action”, but he keeps it under control; he has elevated himself above predatory behavior. Finally, he has the permanent, self-assured strength and power of the mature lion: “He crouches, lies down like a lion, and like an awesome lion, who dares rouse him?” (Ber. 49:9)

Proceeding to the younger sons, Abarbanel continues to demonstrate how each is unfit for royal leadership:

Zevulun is a merchant; it is not becoming for a king to be involved in commerce.

Yissachar labors in the fields. Again, this is not a profession fit for a king. (According to the Talmudic opinion that the tribe of Yissachar provided the Torah scholars, the disqualification still applies as they would not have sufficient time to engage in statecraft.)

Even though the tribe of Dan provided the great judge and warrior Shimshon, Dan is described as a serpent, meaning that he does not confront his enemies head-on but rather waits in ambush. A king must have the strength and prestige to confront the enemy directly.

Similarly, Gad will also be a warrior, but with a weakness: “It will retreat on its heel” (Ber. 49:19), meaning that he will only be in the rear echelons.

Asher, with his rich land, will be the supplier of the kings: “...his bread will have richness, and he will provide kingly delicacies.” (Ber. 49:20)

Naftali, the “hind let loose who delivers beautiful sayings”, would serve the king as his chief communicator, bringing relevant news from country to country.

Even though Yosef’s strengths and character are described at length and in glowing terms, he could never be accepted by his brothers as their leader. Their jealousy was too entrenched. As King David says (Psalms 78:67-69): “He rejected the tent of Yosef, and the tribe of Ephraim He did not choose...He chose the tribe of Yehuda...and he chose David, His servant.”

Binyamin also is described as a “predatory wolf” who will “distribute spoils”. Again, a king who goes to war does not set his sights on the spoils.

Finally, the Torah summarizes and emphasizes that despite their differences, they were all considered the tribes of Israel, all of them important and all of them derived from a holy source: Israel, their father: “All these are the tribes of Israel...he blessed each according to his appropriate blessing.” (Ber. 49:28)

## THEATER IN JUDAISM

**From: Ian**

*Dear Rabbi,  
It seems to me that in addition to literature in the form of instructive stories, there is a fair representation of music and other artistic forms mentioned in the Torah, and applied in the service of G-d in the Temple, and on other occasions. But it strikes me that theater doesn't seem to be mentioned or practiced in ancient, or Orthodox Judaism, despite the fact there are so many ethical or educational stories, events or ideas that could be set to the stage. Is this so? And if so, why?*

Dear Ian,

I think you are right. Theater hasn't played a major role in Judaism.

A few obscure, minor examples come to mind, but none occupy center stage.

One example is Yaakov's dressing up and acting the part of Esav. But this role-play was hardly play and can't even be considered a skit. On Purim we find the custom to wear costumes and mimic the character portrayed, but this can hardly be considered drama. And even the traditional Purim *shpiel* is at most a skit that is more of a comic spoof than actual theater.

An example of a serious-minded skit with more educa-

tional character might be the custom among some Sefardi communities to integrate into the Pesach seder a mini-enactment of the departure from Egypt. Interestingly, it seems that the well-known thinker-kabbalist Ramchal did actually write a few meaningful plays, but if they were performed at all, it was only in a very limited way.

So why has Judaism seemed to close the curtain on theater?

One major reason might be due to repulsion for the idolatrous context and content of ancient Greek plays, coupled with values which were unacceptable to Judaism. But this wouldn't necessarily preclude Jews from using this art form in a Jewishly educational or uplifting way.

Another possible reason might be Judaism's general disinclination to personify. Perhaps "sculpting" a character that appears on stage smacks of making images. Insofar as the play may enact stories portraying G-d or revered personages, there would certainly be a reluctance to personify these holy figures.

Conversely, there is a certain reluctance to ascribe a particular, physical form to G-d or these revered ancestors, because doing so diminishes their veneration by quantifying them and thereby limiting our reverence for them.

But either of these concerns wouldn't preclude using plays to convey stories or messages which wouldn't have these problems.

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## PARSHA OVERVIEW

**A**fter 17 years in Egypt, Yaakov senses his days drawing to a close and summons Yosef. He has Yosef swear to bury him in the Machpela Cave, the burial place of Adam and Chava, Avraham and Sarah, Yitzchak and Rivka. Yaakov falls ill and Yosef brings to him his two sons, Ephraim and Menashe. Yaakov elevates Ephraim and Menashe to the status of his own sons, thus giving Yosef a double portion that removes the status of firstborn from Reuven. As Yaakov is blind from old age, Yosef leads his sons close to their grandfather. Yaakov kisses and hugs them. He had not thought to see his son Yosef again, let alone Yosef's children. Yaakov begins to bless them, giving precedence to Ephraim, the younger, but Yosef interrupts him and indicates that Menashe is the elder. Yaakov explains that he intends to bless Ephraim with his strong hand because Yehoshua will descend from him, and Yehoshua will be both the conqueror of *Eretz Yisrael* and the teacher of Torah to the

Jewish People. Yaakov summons the rest of his sons in order to bless them as well. Yaakov's blessing reflects the unique character and ability of each tribe, directing each one in its unique mission in serving G-d. Yaakov passes from this world at age 147. A tremendous procession accompanies his funeral cortege up from Egypt to his resting place in the Cave of Machpela in Chevron. After Yaakov's passing, the brothers are concerned that Yosef will now take revenge on them. Yosef reassures them, even promising to support them and their families. Yosef lives out the rest of his years in Egypt, seeing Efraim's great-grandchildren. Before his death, Yosef foretells to his brothers that G-d will redeem them from Egypt. He makes them swear to bring his bones out of Egypt with them at that time. Yosef passes away at the age of 110 and is embalmed. Thus ends Sefer Bereishet, the first of the five Books of the Torah. *Chazak!*



## THE WEAPON OF PRAYER

**T**he prophet Isaiah proclaims in the name of G-d, “Fear not, O worm of Yaakov, O men of Israel, for I help you.” (Yeshayahu 41:14) We also find that King David refers to himself as a worm: “But I am a worm and not a man”. (Tehillim 22:7) Why are King David and the Jewish People referred to as a “worm”? Isn’t this a grave insult?

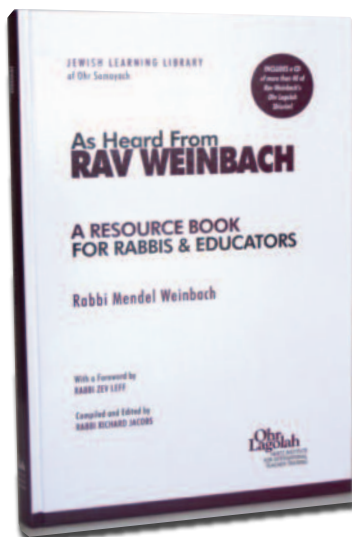
Our Sages explain that just as a worm does not have anything other than its mouth for its defense, so too, the Jewish People’s only strength is in the prayers offered with the mouth. (Midrash Shocher Tov 22:7) Thus, the implied message of the above verse is that the Jewish People need not fear their enemies when they use their greatest strength, i.e. prayer, since in the merit of this prayer G-d will surely help them to defeat their enemies.

Accordingly, our Sages teach in connection to the verse, “The voice is the voice of Yaakov, and the hands are the hands of Esav,” that when the voice of the Jewish nation is heard in prayer they will be protected from the hands of Esav, from the enemy’s sword. (Midrash Rabbah 65:20)

The Torah relates to us Moshe’s final battle before he died: “Moshe spoke to the people saying, ‘Arm men from

among you for battle... A thousand from each tribe, a thousand from each tribe from all the tribes of Israel shall you send to the battle’.” (Bamidbar 31:3-4) We are taught that the reason why the Torah repeats the command to send a thousand soldiers from each tribe is that there were actually two sets of a thousand from each tribe. One set of soldiers went out and fought the enemies on the battlefield, while the other set stayed in the camp, doing their fighting by means of their prayers. (Bamidbar Rabbah 22:2)

We see that even though the second set of thousand men stayed back, the Torah states that they too were sent to the battle. This teaches us the great importance of prayer. As much as the soldier wielding the sword was considered part of the battle, so too was the person who prayed for him. Thus we find that prayer is likened to a bow and arrow, weapons of war in Targum Onkelus (Ber. 48:22). In fact, the Talmud relates that while the Romans laid siege to the city of Beitar for three and a half years, they were unable to conquer it as long as the holy elder Elazar the Modai prayed for its welfare. (Talmud Yerushalmi, Ta’anit 4:5)



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## IN MEMORIAM — RABBI EPHRAIM ORATZ זצ"ל

How do you start to describe the one person most responsible for launching you on the path that has defined you for nearly a quarter century?

I never had any great desire to be a classroom teacher until I found myself under the tutelage of Rabbi Ephraim Oratz, whose unparalleled pedagogic genius and vast reservoir of Torah knowledge inspired me to embark upon my career as a *rebbe*. Whatever I have accomplished in the field of Torah education is primarily because of him.

Rabbi Oratz was — if I may be permitted to use the term — the ultimate Torah-Renaissance man. He possessed the passion of the Amshinover *chassidim*, the *yekishe* precision of the German Jews, the academic discipline of the Lithuanian scholars, and the worldly nobility of Rabbi Samson Rafael Hirsch, all rolled up — as Rabbi Shraga Feivel Mendelovitz would say — into one selfless, total servant of the Almighty.

Rabbi Oratz was truly of the “old school”, with countless stories about growing up in the post-depression years, about learning and teaching in the old American day school system, about playing stickball on the streets of New York. He told me once how his father had to go out every Monday morning to find new employment, because his Sabbath-observance cost him his job, time and time again. More incredibly, Rabbi Oratz didn’t learn of this until years later; his parents kept the children in the dark so they wouldn’t feel insecure.

“Coddling” was a word absent from Rabbi Oratz’s educational lexicon. He understood with every fiber of his being that self-esteem is not given; it is acquired by learning discipline and discovering the joy that comes from struggle and success. He never acknowledged good work with exuberant cries of “excellent”, “fantastic”, or “well done”. Instead, he responded with a silent nod, a quick smile, a short “nu, nu” or, on one extraordinary occasion, with “not bad, not bad at all”. That was high praise indeed.

There weren’t many things Rabbi Oratz didn’t understand. In two years of classes I never heard him unable to answer a question, although he could hold his tongue indefinitely when he wanted us to come up with the answers on our own.

There’s nothing more inspirational than witnessing a true

master do something as well as it can be done. Watching Rabbi Oratz teach made me want to be a teacher. That was it. My course in life was set, without prompting, without a sales pitch, with just enough encouragement to convince me that I could succeed if I put my heart into it. And I wanted nothing more than to do what he could do, even if I did it only half as well he could.

“If you aren’t devoted to *chinuch* (teaching Torah)”, he once said to us, “please find a different profession. You can make more money doing almost anything else, and there’s no telling how much damage you might do if you go into teaching for the wrong reasons.”

He also taught me my signature phrase. “Of course it makes sense; you just don’t understand it.”

Then there was his distinctive way of dealing with latecomers. When a student came in during class, Rabbi Oratz would stop mid-sentence and follow the offender with his eyes until he had taken his place, pause for one beat, then continue where he had left off. Most memorable was the time a student came in only moments after he had explained this technique, allowing him to demonstrate to (almost) everyone’s delight,

and to the latecomer’s consternation.

Rabbi Oratz did allow a shadow of emotion to creep over his face when he talked about the resistance to fire drills. “They all have the same rationale,” he would say. “Torah is a *shemira* (protection). I tell them they can say that after they’ve had to shepherd a class of little children down from the third floor of a smoke-filled building.”

When my first book, *Dawn to Destiny*, was in pre-production, Judaica Press contacted Rabbi Oratz and asked him to edit it. The publisher later told me that he was initially less-than-enthusiastic. But when he heard that the author was a former student, he agreed immediately. Several weeks later I called him to discuss his critique. He began by raising an objection to the first sentence of the introduction. *This is going to be a long phone call*, I told myself. And it was. But the finished product came out so much the better for having gone through Rabbi Oratz’s “trial-by-fire”.

It took me 17 years to get back to Israel after completing Ohr LaGolah. At my earliest opportunity I went to see Rabbi Oratz and thank him for all he had done for me. His



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Rabbi Ephriam Oratz continued from page seven

response was completely in character. “Adaraba,” he said. *Just the opposite.*

And it was especially sweet when my daughter went off to learn in Israel at Darchei Binah seminary in Jerusalem. There’s something indescribable about having your child learn from your *rebbe*. I imagine that it’s even sweeter to teach the children of your students.

*A generation comes and a generation goes; the sun also rises, and it sets.* Rabbi Oratz returned to the *yeshiva d’rakiya* on Shabbat Vayislach, moving on to enjoy the rewards of a life

devoted to the children of his people. And our world has grown darker as we try to carry the torch and safeguard the light of Torah for the generations yet to come.

May his *neshama* have an *aliyah*, and his family be comforted among the mourners of Tzion and Yerushalayim.

*An alumnus of both Ohr Somayach and Ohr Lagolah, Rabbi Yonason Goldson currently teaches in the Block Yeshiva High School in Missouri, and has authored a number of sefarim.*

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Theater in Judaism continued from page five

Accordingly, another possible objection to the venue of theater, even for educational purposes in a way that doesn’t have the problem of physically portraying revered characters, might stem from the idea that doing so limits the quality or depth of the message as originally portrayed in the written Torah source. This may be due to the playwright’s particular interpretation of the message, or the audience’s impression of his expression. This would be akin to the all-too-common phenomenon, “The movie is not as good as the book”.

Additionally, in a tradition where supplementary commentary is so essential to a proper understanding of the original text, the play might not fully encompass the vast wealth of commentaries on any given story or teaching, and therefore be inaccurate, misleading or even untrue to the source.

But both of these concerns could theoretically be allayed by a sensitive and conscientious study by the playwright of all the relevant sources in order to present a comprehensive and accurate representation of the ideas or events. In any case, they would not seem to preclude using theater at least to present authentic Jewish teachings through the venue of new stories, not directly based on Torah texts.

In cases such as these, perhaps the reluctance to use theater as an educational or inspirational venue might be due to

*bitul* Torah, meaning diverting oneself from the mitzvah of engaging oneself in active, personal Torah study. This reason would apply even to a play which is very true to the sources, since one should learn the sources himself rather than passively view a theatrical rendition of them. All the more so this reason would seem to apply to a message distinctly divorced from the sources, even if it’s true to Torah.

But arguably, this may not be so different than attending a Torah lecture, where the members of the audience, instead of using their time and mental energies to be personally and actively involved in the traditional format of Torah study, rather passively absorb the Torah message distilled by the rabbi on stage at the podium.

Thus, a final possible reluctance to use theater for Torah is that after qualifying its expression based on all the aforementioned objections, there results a fine line between theater for education and theater for recreation. And even though some Torah lectures are also entertaining, the very venue of a lecture or class ensures that it will be entertaining education; while the venue of theater is likely to be, at best, educational entertainment, which could easily devolve into being “purely” entertainment. And entertainment for entertainment’s sake is discouraged by Judaism.

## PLEASE JOIN US...

...in saying Tehillim/Psalms and a special prayer to G-d for the safety and security of all of Klal Yisrael in these times of conflict and conclude with the following special prayer:

*“Our brothers, the entire family of Israel, who are delivered into distress and captivity, whether they are on sea or dry land – may G-d have mercy on them and remove them from stress to relief, from darkness to light, from subjugation to redemption now, speedily and soon.”*



continued from page one

correct place in the scheme of things when it “dwells in the tents of Shem”; when it expresses essence, when it reveals the Moral. For when Yafet leaves the tents of Torah, when he leaves the world of essence, of Shem, and focuses on himself, then art becomes narcissistic, corrupt and corrupting.

Several key events that epitomize the relationship between Jerusalem and Athens, between Shem and Yafet, take place in the months of Kislev and Tevet. The festival of Chanukah, which starts on the 25th of Kislev and finishes in the first days of Tevet, is the most conspicuous. However, a few days later, there is a day of great sadness for the Jewish People that reveals another side to the symbiotic relationship between Shem and Yafet.

On the eighth of Tevet three days of spiritual darkness descended on the world when King Ptolemy took 72 great Torah Sages, locked them in separate cubicles, and ordered them to translate the Torah into Greek. The lion that had been roaming free was locked in a cage. The Torah, the blueprint of all existence, was “caged” in a foreign tongue. It became just another book on a shelf. Now the nations of the world could come and say, “Oh yes, we know your Torah. We have it on the shelves of our university library. It’s over there in the philosophy / religion /

new age section.”

What was the symbolism of putting the Sages into separate cubicles? A cubicle is like a tent. When Ptolemy the Greek took the Sages of Israel and locked them into separate cubicles it signified Shem being made to sit in the “tent” of Yafet. When the Torah was translated into Greek it was made to sit in the halls of academia, the tent of Yafet, just like any other book. Essence was made to serve form. The internal world was made the servant of the external. The world was turned upside down.

*“G-d spoke to Yisrael in visions of the night...” (46:2).*

Of all the challenges to Judaism, the one most connected to the darkness of night is the philosophy of the Greeks and their ideological heirs to this day.

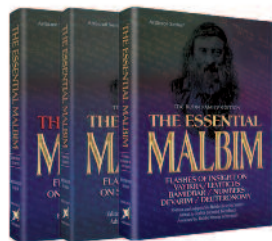
This verse is the only place where the Torah describes a vision as a “vision of the night”. As Yaakov was about to descend into Egypt, into the matrix of all of the exiles that the Jewish People would suffer, G-d speaks to him in a vision of the night to symbolize that however dark is the exile, however upside down the world seems, however much the Parable seems to have usurped the Moral, eventually beauty will submit to Truth.

• Sources: *Hemek Davar*;  
story heard from Rabbi Moshe Carlebach

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