

# OHRNET

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## PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

### The Scrapbook of Eternity

Leafing through an ancient family album, I came across some photos I had completely forgotten about. Moments long-presumed lost smiled up at me from the yellowing pages. Others had not fared so well; abducted from their rightful place in history their memory was preserved by a faded oblong and four browning “photo corners.”

History is so selective. This moment survived; this one didn't.

How many photographs do I possess of my parents as young children? Very few. And even fewer of their parents and siblings. A few smiling faces have survived, and so many other smiles captured for eternity will smile no more. And how many of the myriad dedicated pixels of our own life will endure the ruthless editing of time?

And more: when I look back at the photographs of my youth, of my parents' lives in black and white excursions to the Kursaal in Westcliff or Canvey Island, I think the same. How many moments there are that I never saw, of which I will never know, that have vanished!

There are two worlds. The world in which we live each and every moment of our daily lives – and then there are those few moments which will be eternalized as scrapbook memories.

The name of this week's Torah portion is “Vayechi” which means, “And Yaakov lived.” You might think the title a bit ironic because it is in this week's

portion that Yaakov's dies. In similar fashion, Sarah, the mother of the Jewish People, passes from this world in the weekly portion entitled “The Life of Sarah.”

If the word for life in Hebrew is a plural noun. it's not by coincidence. There are two lives. The life we live in this world – and the life that we live in the next world.

This world is called in Hebrew *Olam Haze*, and the next world is *Olam Habah*. Grammatically, the corollary of *Olam Haze* – “This World” – should be *Olam HaHoo* – “That World.” Why then is the next world called *Olam Habah*? *Habah* literally means “that comes.”

The World-to-Come is just that – a world that comes as a direct result of what we do in this world. Nothing can exist in the World-to-Come that was not done in this world.

This life is like a factory. A factory has no other purpose than to produce. This life has only one purpose: To produce. To produce the next life. The biggest mistake one can make in this life is to mistake the factory for the product.

The fact that the death of Yaakov and Sarah are found in Torah portions whose titles mention life teaches us a lesson. It teaches us that the essential life of a righteous person is not in this world but in the World-to-Come, for the righteous take every moment in this world and paste it into the scrapbook of eternity.

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# Q & A

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## Questions

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 Ephraim 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?

## Answers

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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# WHAT'S IN A WORD?

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by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

## Through the Grapevine

**O**n his deathbed, Jacob prophesied of a time when the Land of Judah will produce plentiful wine, as if a spring of wine flows from their territory. He foretold of so much wine being produced that: “He will tie his donkey to the grapevine (*gefen*), and his jennet to the grapevine (*sorekah*)” (Gen. 49:11). While the word *gefen* plainly refers to a grapevine, the meaning of *sorekah/sorek* is somewhat unclear. Another word coupled with *gefen* is *shdeimah*. On Moses’ deathbed, the prophet saw the Jews’ not-so-pleasant future as idol worshippers who might share a fate similar to the destroyed societies of Sodom and Gomorrah: “For from the grapevine (*gefen*) of Sodom is their grapevine, and from the *shdeimot* of Gomorrah” (Deut. 32:32). Rabbi Shlomo of Urbino, in his lexicon of Hebrew synonyms *Ohel Moed*, claims that the words *gefen*, *sorek*, and *shdeimah* all refer to “grapevines.” This essay explores the possibility of this trio of words functioning as synonyms, and also tries to pin down their respective etymologies and exact meanings.

Let’s start from the most common of these words and work our way to the most obscure. Cognates of the word *gefen* appear 55 times in the Bible, making it the most common of the three terms in discussion. In contrast, cognates of the word *shdeimah* appear only 6 times in the Bible (Deut. 32:32, Isa. 37:27, 16:8, Hab. 3:17, Jer. 31:39, II Kings 23:4), and *sorek/sorekah* only appears thrice (Gen. 49:11, Isa. 5:2, and Jer. 2:21).

The early grammarians (i.e., Menachem Ibn Saruk, Yonah Ibn Janach, and the Radak) unanimously trace the word *gefen* to the trilateral root GIMMEL-

PEH-NUN, defined as a “grapevine.” However, Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim of Breslau (1740-1814) – the strong proponent of biliteralism that he is – argues that the root of *gefen* can be traced to the biliteral root GIMMEL-PEH, whose core meaning he sees as “outward protrusion/expansion.” In that sense, the word *gaf* refers to the “side” of something that protrudes outwards (see Prov. 9:3), as well as to the “wing” of a bird that likewise protrudes outwards. Accordingly, Rabbi Pappenheim argues that *gefen* connotes the wing-like shoots and buds that protrude from a grapevine.

Other words that Rabbi Pappenheim sees as derived from the two-letter root GIMMEL-PEH include: *guf* (“body”), which refers to the outward, physical projection of one’s person (as opposed to his soul, which is his inner person); *mageifah* (“plague”), which refers to the sort of disease that “spreads out” via person-to-person contact; and *agaf* (“flank”), which refers to a formation of troops who spread out over a specific area (like the outstretched wings of a bird). In Modern Hebrew, *agaf* refers to a specific “department” within the greater structure of an organized body, such as within a government or a corporation.

By implicitly invoking the interchangeability of GIMMEL and KAF, *Shoresh Yesha* relates the root GIMMEL-PEH-NUN to KAF-PEH-NUN, which means “famine.” In doing so, he sees this root-word as an allusion to the Talmudic assertion that drinking wine makes a person hungry (see *Pesachim* 107b-108a). In other words, the very word *gefen* connotes this specific property of the grapevine’s foremost product.

Interestingly, in Ugaritic/Canaanite mythological texts, the *gefen* is deified and becomes the name of an idolatrous god named Gapnu, who was understood to be a messenger of Baal.

When it comes to the word *shdeimah*, not everybody agrees that this refers to a “grapevine.” For example, Rashi (to Deut. 32:32, Isa. 16:8, and Hab. 13:17) consistently explains that *shdeimah* denotes a field in which grains are grown. However, in explaining Deut. 32:32, Rabbeinu Bachaya (1255-1340) writes that the Torah uses a double verbiage to mean the same thing, arguing that *shdeimah* and *gefen* are actual synonyms. Indeed, Ibn Janach (*Sefer HaShorashim*), Ibn Ezra (to Isa. 16:8), and Radak (in *Sefer HaShorashim* and in his comments to Isa. 16:8) all explain *shdeimah* as a synonym for *gefen*.

Rabbi Pappenheim does not define *shdeimah* as specifically referring to a “grapevine,” nor does he follow Rashi in explaining this term as “grain-field.” Instead, Rabbi Pappenheim simply explains *shdeimah* as referring to any grounds that are especially conducive for nourishing flora. He traces this word to the biliteral root SHIN-DALET, whose core meaning is “abnormality.” Derivatives of this core root can be broken up into three groups:

One group of words includes *shoded* (“pirating” or “commandeering”), which involves accruing property in an unusual way or re-appropriating something for a purpose other than its normal, intended use. Another group of words derived from this root include *sheid* (“demon”), which is an evil spirit that is said to disrupt the natural order. Rabbi Pappenheim also includes the terms *shidah* and *shidot* (Ecc. 2:8) in this category, explaining that they refer to women who were “expert dancers,” such that they could move as swiftly as *sheidim*. Thirdly, Rabbi Pappenheim traces the word *shad/shadaim* (“nipples”) to this core root, noting the bizarre nature of the mammary glands that secrete nourishing milk as a departure from the normal function of other body parts.

Rabbi Pappenheim identifies three corollaries derived from this last meaning of the SHIN-DALET root: *shod* (Isa. 16:4, 60:16) and *leshad* (Ps. 32:4) refer to the nourishing nature of mother’s milk (also borrowed in reference to manna, see Num. 11:8); *eshed* (Num. 21:15) refers to the convergence of rivers in a way that mimics the convergence of the various fluids that make up human milk; and finally, *shdeimah* refers to a juicy “field” that provides the nourishment needed for plant growth.

*Ohalei Yehuda* and *Shoresh Yesha* argue that *shdeimah* actually refers to a lower-quality field, explaining the word’s etymology as a portmanteau of *sadeh* (“field”) and *mah* (“what”), and seemingly invoking the interchangeability of the letters SHIN and SIN. They also adduce the negative aspect of *shdeimah* by noting that the letter MEM can be interchanged with a PEH, thus associating the root SHIN-DALET-MEM with SHIN-DALET-PEH (“wind-blasted”). [A similar point is made by Ibn Janach and Radak concerning Isa. 37:27, but not all instances of *shdeimah*.]

Finally, the last word for “grapevine” is *sorek*. Targum Yonatan (to Isa. 5:2 and Jer. 2:21) translates the Hebrew word *sorek* into Aramaic as *gafna/gefen bechira* – “a choicy grapevine.” Ibn Janach (in his *Sefer HaShorashim*) and Radak (in his *Sefer HaShorashim*, as well as in his comments to Isa. 5:2, 16:8) write that *sorek* refers to the choicest type of grapevines, with Radak adding in the name of Rabbi Yitzchak Ibn Ghiyyat (1030-1089) that this refers to vines that yield grapes that do not have pits.

Rashi offers two more explanations of the word *sorek*, writing that it refers to shoots of a grapevine that are especially good for planting as trunks in their own right (Rashi to Isa. 5:2), and also writing that it refers to a grapevine’s especially long tendrils (Rashi to Gen. 49:11). Elsewhere, Rashi (to Jer. 2:21) seems to follow the approach cited earlier by explaining *sorek* as shoots from a “good *gefen*.”

An earlier explanation of *sorek* is proposed by Rabbi Shmuel ben Chofni Gaon (998-1034), who wrote in his commentary to Gen. 49:11 that *sorek* refers to the *softest* branches of a vineyard, noting that this is the meaning of the word *al-sarik* in Syrian Arabic (possibly Sirac/Syrac grapes, which are now known as Syrah/Shiraz grapes).

Menachem Ibn Saruk in *Machberet Menachem* defines the word *sorek* as *sarig*, possibly based on the interchangeability of the letters KUF and GIMMEL. The word *sarig* appears but twice in the Pentateuch (Gen. 40:10, 40:12), both when the Pharaoh's disgraced butler dreamt of a grapevine (*gefen*) that had three *sarigim* ("tendrils"). The word is used one more time in the Bible (Yoel 1:7), and seems to be related to the root SIN-REISH-GIMMEL (used in Iyov 40:17 and Lam. 1:14), which means "entangling." Ibn Saruk also defines *shdeimah* as a *sorek*, so go figure. Perhaps all of these different explanations of *sorek* are somehow actually describing the same thing.

A *sarak* tree in Mishnaic Hebrew refers to a non-fruit-bearing tree (*Kilayim* 6:3, 6:5, *Sheviit* 1:3, *Sotah*

8:3, *Bava Batra* 2:7, and *Bechorot* 4:8). In describing the future abundance with which the Holy Land will be blessed in Messianic times, the Talmud (*Ketuvot* 111b) expounds the word *sorekah* (spelled with an initial SIN) in Gen. 49:11 as though it were related to *sarak* (spelled with an initial SAMECH). A literal reading of the Talmud as it appears before us reads that in the future, even non-fruit-bearing trees in the Holy Land will yet bear fruit. But this has seemingly nothing to do with grapevines, so why is this related to the word *sorekah*?

Rabbi Shmuel Eidels (1555-1631), better known as the Maharsha, explains that in this case the rabbis expounded on the word *sorek* as though it were spelled with a SAMECH in an allusion to a *sarak* tree, even though he concedes that the simple reading of the verse that the Talmud expounds speaks about grapevines, not other types of trees. Alternatively, Rashi's son-in-law Rivan (there, see also *Shitta Mekubetzet* there in the name of Rashi) explains the Talmud as saying that even grapevines that would otherwise be considered "barren" will still yield a plentitude of grapes.

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# COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

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by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

## THE BLESSINGS OF THE SHEMA (PART 12)

“The most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched  
- they must be felt with the heart.”  
(Helen Keller)

**T**he third blessing continues: “You alone are the Helper of our forefathers, forever; Shield and Savior for their children after them in every generation... Praiseworthy is the person who listens to Your commandments and takes to heart Your teaching and Your word.”

Our blessing describes G-d as being the “Helper” of our forefathers. However, G-d is then described as being the “Shield and Savior” for “their children.” Rabbi Tzvi Elimelech Spira of Dinov (1783-1841), one of the most prolific Chassidic Rebbis of his generation, more commonly known as the Bnei Yissachar after his most popular work, explains the reason for the different descriptions. He says that our forefathers were completely righteous and pure, and thus G-d helped them even before they prayed to Him. We, however, “their children after them,” are not on such a lofty level, and in order to merit Divine intervention we must first call out to Him to beseech Him, and only then will He intercede. This is why G-d is described as being the “Shield and Savior” – His support comes only after we have asked for it.

The Talmud (*Yevamot* 42a) teaches that when the phrase “their children after them” (or similar variations found in other prayers) is mentioned, it refers to children who follow the spiritual lifestyle of their parents. However, the reference is not just for biological children. Rather, all who accept G-d’s Majesty upon themselves and live their lives according to the dictates of the Torah are included in the description of being among the children of

the forefathers. For this reason the prayer continues with the words, “Praiseworthy is the person who listens to Your commandments.”

Fascinatingly, the word used here for “listen” is not in the present tense. Rather, it is “*sheyishma*,” which means “will listen” – in the future. According to Rabbi Shimon Schwab, the inference of the word “*sheyishma*” is that it indicates a person who currently is not living their life according to the Torah but who has made a commitment to do so from now on.

What is the “word” that is mentioned in the blessing? According to Nachmanides (*Vayikra* 10) the term “word” is not limited to be referring to a specific statement that G-d spoke. Rather, it can also mean that G-d communicates with people through the difficulties they undergo in life. Nachmanides is introducing us to an astonishingly liberating thought. It is precisely during those *darker* moments that we experience G-d connecting with us in the most intimate and personal way possible. Praiseworthy is the person who recognizes G-d’s “words” at the most difficult of times. Praiseworthy is the person who can identify within their distress the “word” of G-d being transmitted to them. And praiseworthy is the person who feels G-d’s loving embrace in their times of suffering.

But there is more. Our blessing is teaching us that regardless of what a person may have done in the past, the ability to atone is always extant. G-d always awaits our repentance. The infamous Elisha

ben Avuyah, who despite being one of the greatest scholars of his generation in an era that included the greatest scholars in the annals of Jewish history, shocked the Jewish nation by turning his back on his heritage and becoming an apostate. His actions were so reprehensible that he is called throughout the Talmud simply *Acher* (“the other one”) so as not to afford him any honor by mentioning his real name. The Talmud (*Chagigah* 15a) relates that on one occasion *Acher* heard a *Bat Kol* (a heavenly voice) say, “Return, wayward sons – except for *Acher*.” The inference seems to be that G-d will accept the repentance of everyone – with the exception of *Acher*. However, many Torah commentaries do not accept this understanding. The Midrash Rabbah (*Devarim* 2:12) categorically

states that the Gates of Repentance are always open. It is a definitive and unconditional statement. The Midrash does not say that the Gates of Repentance are open to everyone except for *Acher*. Accordingly, they explain that if a person shows a sincere and heartfelt desire to repent, G-d encourages them and assists them in their pursuit of atonement. Due to *Acher's* towering stature as one of the future spiritual leaders of the Jewish nation before he reneged, the consequences of his apostasy were extraordinarily far-reaching. So much so that G-d declared that even if *Acher* should reach a moment when he was ready to begin the process of repentance for all he had done, G-d would not help him. *Acher* would have to “go it alone.”

*To be continued...*

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## PEREK SHIRA: The Song of Existence

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by Rabbi Shmuel Kraines

### THE SONG OF THE SPRINGS

The springs say: “The singers and the flutists – all of my wellsprings are for You.” (*Tehillim* 87:7)

This song depicts the glory of the offerings in the Beit Hamikdash. Then, the Levites would sing to the music of flutes and other instruments. King David declared about this, “All my wellsprings are for You!” These compositions emerged from his heart, which he describes as an unending wellspring of new praises for the Creator.

Spring water flows upwards, out of the ground, contrary to the usual gravitational effect. So too, one’s soul yearns for its source, heavenwards. When it sings to Hashem, it connects with Him.

The more a Jew fills himself with holiness, Torah, and knowledge of Hashem, the more his soul wishes to sing. However, in the same way a spring may be blocked by earth, the soul may be blocked with the earthliness of the body, sin, or of Earth itself. The Beit Hamikdash – “the gateway to heaven” – is a holy place where there is no blockage. Moreover, it is there that one can atone for his sins and remove the barrier between himself and Hashem. Hence, it is there that it is possible for the soul to express itself uninhibitedly.

Our *shuls* are miniature *Batei Mikdash*, as they are similarly sanctified and free of earthliness. It is there that our souls find fulfillment, communing with their Maker and overflowing with His praise.

▪ *Source: Commentary of verse from Radak*

*\*In loving memory of Harav Zeev Shlomo ben Zecharia Leib*

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# TALMUD TIPS

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by Rabbi Moshe Newman

## Ta'anit 23-29

### Vinegar on Fire

*Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa said, "He (Hashem) Who said to oil to kindle will say to vinegar to kindle."*

Our *daf* relates a number of stories involving the Tana Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa and the miracles that occurred on his behalf. Perhaps the best known is the case where he saw his daughter's sadness just before candle-lighting time on *erev* Shabbat. He asked her why she was sad. "My oil and vinegar bottles were switched and I accidentally filled my Shabbat lamps with vinegar instead of oil and it's time to light!" Her father said, "Why are you worried? He Who said to the oil that it should burn can say to the vinegar that it should burn." A Tana taught the extent of what subsequently transpired: "That lamp burned throughout the entire night and day until they used it for havdalah."

And here is another story along similar lines that is taught on our *daf*. Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa had a neighbor who was building a house, but the roof beams were not long enough to reach from one wall to the other. She came to Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa and said, "I built my house but my roof beams do not reach the walls." He asked, "What is your name?" She replied, "My name is Ikku." He said, "If so (translation of "ikku"), may your beams reach your walls." A Tana taught, "The beams became longer so that that they not only reached the walls but even jutted out a cubit beyond the walls."

However, despite these and other amazing events, we seem to be taught in another story on our *daf* that receiving benefit from the result of a miracle is not necessarily desirable. Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa's wife

said to him, "Until when will we continue to suffer this poverty?" He replied, "What can we do?" She said, "Pray for mercy that something will be given to you from Heaven." He prayed for mercy and there appeared one leg of a golden table. That night, his wife saw in a dream that in the World to Come the righteous will eat at a golden table with *three* legs, but she will be eating at a table with only *two* legs. When she told her husband this dream, he asked, "Are you happy that everyone will eat at a complete table and we will eat at a defective one?" She said, "So pray for mercy that the leg of the golden table should be taken from you."

The commentaries explain the concern of receiving benefit from a miracle here to be that the recipient will be rewarded less in the World to Come as the "price" of receiving a miracle-product in the here-and-now.

Rashi writes a commentary on our *daf* that seems to account for this issue of not getting benefit from a miracle derivative. He states that although the lamp stayed lit until havdalah, Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa did not use it directly for havdalah. Instead, he lit another lamp from it. In addition, Rabbi Chanina said that Hashem could have the vinegar kindle in the same manner as the oil not for his personal gain but only in order to alleviate his daughter's great distress.

Many other great Torah commentaries address various aspects of these amazing stories of our shared



history, commentaries that illuminate the path of understanding Hashem's ways in a correct light. Of special note, in my opinion, are the commentaries of Rabbi Yaakov Emden (aka *Yaavetz*, 1697-1776), the ancestor of a treasured personal friend and Torah study partner of my youth. I would also add the commentary of the Ben Yehoyada to the recommended reading list for better understanding our *gemara*.

In conclusion, I would like to share the commentary of Rav Tzadok HaKohen, as I understand it. For most people, nature is nature and miracles are not natural – they are supernatural. Righteous souls, however, fail to see the difference, at least for the most part. The Chazon Ish, for example, describes in great detail the miraculous nature of the human body in his renowned work called *Emunah u'Bitachon*. The blessing of *Asher Yatzar*, which is often colorfully

posted above sinks outside our restrooms, reminds us to thank Hashem for the most basic bodily functions essential for life. Do we experience continuous miracles or is it all “just nature”?

Although, of course, the world behaves in what is perceived as following laws of nature, the righteous and wise observers of the Torah see the existence of the Living Creator everywhere. Hashem makes everything seem natural, with noted exceptions such as the splitting of the Red Sea and the Revelation at Mount Sinai. A scientist has words to explain the reason why oil burns. And if water would burn, undoubtedly scientists would find a way to proudly explain that phenomenon as well. But it is all so much simpler. In Rabbi Chanina Ben Dosa's famous words, “He Who said to oil to burn can say to vinegar to burn.” Everything happens because Hashem wills it to be.

▪ *Ta'anit 25a*

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## PARSHA OVERVIEW

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**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*

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# LETTER AND SPIRIT

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*Insights based on the writings of Rav S.R. Hirsch by Rabbi Yosef Hershman*

## Jewish Monarchy

**A**s Yaakov nears his death, he calls his children together to “tell them what will happen to them at the end of days.” However, such information is never imparted. Instead, Yaakov blesses each one in accordance with his characteristic diversity. But in the blessing of Yehuda, the tribe from which King David and Mashiach will descend, a vision of the end of days is alluded to.

*He ties his foal to the grapevine, his she-donkey’s colt to the choice vine-branch.* (Bereishet 49:11) Yaakov envisions the redeemer of mankind riding, not on a horse, but on a young donkey. Whereas a horse represents military might, the donkey, the beast of burden, represents peaceful prosperity. The donkey carries man and property calmly and peacefully.

The purpose and pride of a Jewish king is not his military prowess. This is why the Torah forbids him from acquiring too many horses. In fact, the commandment to appoint a king applied only after complete conquest and settlement of the Land, underscoring that his purpose is not primarily military. Thus, the people at the time of Shmuel were faulted for requesting a king to lead them in defense of the country – this, warned Shmuel, is the province of the Almighty King.

What then is the purpose of a Jewish king? The Torah instructs us to appoint a king “over us.” (Devarim 17:15) But if his role is not military, and the judicial and executive infrastructures already function without a king, what does it mean for a king to be “over” his subjects? Unlike the ruling bodies of other nations, the Jewish crown does not represent the sum total of the national will. Instead, the king is to ensure that the will of the nation bends to the law of Torah. His task is to be a Jew *par excellence*. In this way, he will be “over” the people – by leading the nation to constant awareness of and steadfast commitment to Torah.

An examination of the root letters of the Hebrew word for king – “*melech*” (*mem-lamed-chaf*) – as compared to the Hebrew word for ruler – “*moshel*” (*mem-shin-lamed*) – leads to a fascinating distinction. Many of the Hebrew letters have a clear meaning by themselves. Thus, the letter *mem* means “derived from” – and when it is added to the beginning of a word it means “from \_\_\_\_.” The letter *lamed* means “to” and the letter *chaf* denotes “example” or “model.” Thus, the Jewish vision of a king is this: everything comes from him; everything reverts to him, and he is an example and ideal for all. By contrast, *moshel* lacks the letter *chaf* – he is not a personal or moral example. If we were to survey the ruling personalities of the past century, would we put a *chaf* in their title? The very word politician has a derogatory connotation and conjures up memories of schemes and corruption.

We find the final earthly king riding on a young donkey. He arrives as the emissary of peace. Where does he tie his young animal? To a vine! That vine must be at least as strong as a tree to bear the weight and sway of a frisky young foal. This sturdy vine is a sign of great prosperity and abundance. The two symbols of the end of days are the donkey – world peace – and the vine – great abundance.

The prophet Zechariah describes Masiach not as a warrior, conqueror or politician. This king is a *tzaddik*, a righteous man, and he is *a poor man riding on a donkey, on a foal of a she-donkey.* (Zechariah 9:9) His is not the gallop of the mighty horse, but the soft steps of the foal, carrying peace and prosperity on the back of his righteousness.

- Sources: Commentary Bereishet, 49:11; 10:10; Collected Writings IV, pp. 275-77

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# INSIGHTS INTO HALACHA

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by Rabbi Yehuda Spitz

## 5782 – The Rarities Continue...

Throughout the past year in Ohrnet Magazine we have detailed many fascinating and unique calendar occurrences that transpired over the previous year of 5781. Although 5782 does not hold a candle to 5781 in terms of remarkable and rare calendar occurrences, it nonetheless does sport a few. And interestingly enough - unbeknownst to many - two occurred in the same 24-hour period: on Shabbos *Mikeitz* and on its Motzei Shabbos.

On a recent Shabbos that was Rosh Chodesh Teves and Chanukah as well, being that 5782 is also a leap year (with two Adars), at *Mussaf* we added the words “*U’lchapas Pasha*.” The rare synchronization of Shabbos Rosh Chodesh Chanukah in a leap year occurs just under ten percent of the time, thus making this specific *Tefillas Mussaf* – with the additions of *Attah Yatzaarta* with “*U’lchapas Pasha*,” as well as *Al HaNissim* – the second rarest *tefilla* recited, and the rarest possible *tefilla* in Eretz Yisrael.

So, what is the rarest?

According to Rabbi Dovid Heber in his recent *sefer* “The Intriguing World of Jewish Time,” the rarest *Shemoneh Esrei* is recited when Motzei Shabbos Chanukah is also Rosh Chodesh Teves – and *V’sein Bracha* is still being said (in *Chutz La’aretz*). In this *Shemoneh Esrei* we say *Attah Chonantanu*, *V’sein Bracha*, *Yaaleh V’Yavo*, and *Al Hanissim*. This can only occur with the rare combination of Rosh Chodesh Teves on a Motzei Shabbos in an extremely “early” year.

Rabbi Heber adds that the first time this specific *Shemoneh Esrei* was recited was in 5413/1652! The

last two times it was recited were in 5660/1899 and in 5755/1994, and it is next scheduled to be recited in 5850/2089. This means that this specific rare *Shemoneh Esrei* can only be recited once every ninety-five years (!), thus making it the rarest *tefilla* by far.

However, as noted previously, this can only occur in *Chutz La’aretz*, where *V’sein Bracha* switches over to *V’sein Tal U’Mattar L’Vracha* on December 4th (or 5th when the following February has twenty-nine days). Yet, in *Eretz Yisrael* this switch is always made far earlier, on the 7th of Marcheshvan, thus making this specific *Shemoneh Esrei* an impossibility and leaving the second rarest *Shemoneh Esrei* – the *Mussaf* on Shabbos Chanukah-Rosh Chodesh Teves in a leap year – the rarest Israeli *tefilla* possible.

As for the second rare calendar event, this is referring to the longest “regular” *Shemoneh Esrei*. Quite remarkably, this occurred that very night, on Motzei Shabbos *Mikeitz*. As it was still Chanukah and Rosh Chodesh, this *Shemoneh Esrei* contained the most additions possible, making it the longest stand-alone “regular” *tefilla*. This *tefilla* contained:

- *Mashiv HaRuach U’Mord HaGashem*
- *Attah Chonantanu*
- *V’sein Tal U’Mattar L’Vracha*
- *Yaaleh V’Yavo*
- *Al Hanissim*

What is even more interesting is that since it was also the 4th of December, all of *Chutz La’aretz* switched over to *V’sein Tal U’Mattar L’Vracha* on that very night, in that specific *Tefilla*, the longest “regular” *Shemoneh Esrei* possible. Simply fascinating!

\*Rabbi Spitz’s recent English *halacha sefer*, “Insights Into Halacha - Food: A Halachic Analysis,” (Mosaica/Feldheim) contains over 500 pages featuring over 30 comprehensive chapters discussing the myriad halachic issues relating to food. It is now available online and in bookstores everywhere.