

# O H R N E T

SHABBAT PARSHAT TOLDOT · 29 CHESHVAN 5765 · NOV. 13, 2004 · VOL. 12 NO. 6

## PARSHA INSIGHTS

### PLEASE!

*“Pour into me, now, some of that red, red...” (25:30)*

**T**he word “now” — *nah* — in this sentence can also be translated as “please”. It seems strange that Esav should be saying “please” at this moment. He has just returned from the fields, and is so hungry and involved in his animal side that he does not even use a noun to describe the stew of lentils he so desires. He describes it just with adjectives — *“that red, red...”* Yet, in the same sentence he uses a word of such delicacy: *nah* — “please”.

Some fifty years after the event, we are still trying to come to terms with the destruction of European Jewry. How could the most cultured nation in the world turn to savage and merciless barbarism? How could the nation that produced Goethe and Beethoven produce monsters, unrecognizable as human beings?

If the Germans prided themselves on anything it was their politeness — *derech erez* — as it is called in Hebrew.

I once heard a lady who had been in Auschwitz recount her reception at that terrifying place. Miraculously, she had been saved from the line that led to the gas chambers and was waiting to have her forearm tattooed with the number that would be her only identification in that hell. She was about to become a number. As she reached the man whose task it was to tattoo those numbers on her arm, she froze for a second in front of him and he said to her mechanically, *“Bitte”* (Please).

Please hold out your arm! Please become a number! Please disappear from the face of the earth! Please!

How polite! In that hellhole of death and misery — *“Please!”*

*“Pour into me, please, some of that red, red...”*

Esav has the veneer of politeness, but he uses it merely to mask his animal nature. Our Sages teach us that *“Politeness comes before the Torah.”* (Avot) However, when politeness is not followed by Torah, it is no more than the mask of hypocrisy.

## PARSHA OVERVIEW

**A**fter 20 years of marriage, Yitzchak’s prayers are answered and Rivka conceives twins. The pregnancy is extremely painful. G-d reveals to Rivka that the suffering is a microcosmic prelude to the worldwide conflict that will rage between the two great nations descended from these twins, Rome and Israel. Esav is born, and then Yaakov, holding onto Esav’s heel. They grow and Esav becomes a hunter, a man of the physical world, whereas Yaakov sits in the tents of Torah developing his soul. On the day of their grandfather Avraham’s funeral, Yaakov is cooking lentils, the traditional mourner’s meal. Esav rushes in, ravenous from a hard day’s hunting, and sells his birthright (and its concomitant spiritual responsibilities) for a bowl of lentils, demonstrating his unworthiness for the position of firstborn. A famine strikes Canaan and Yitzchak thinks of escaping to Egypt, but G-d tells him that because he was bound as a sacrifice, he has become holy and must remain in

the Holy Land. He relocates to Gerar in the land of the Philistines, where, to protect Rivka, he has to say she is his sister. The Philistines grow jealous of Yitzchak when he becomes immensely wealthy, and Avimelech the king asks him to leave. Yitzchak re-digs three wells dug by his father, prophetically alluding to the three future Temples. Avimelech, seeing that Yitzchak is blessed by G-d, makes a treaty with him. When Yitzchak senses his end approaching, he summons Esav to give him his blessings. Rivka, acting on a prophetic command that the blessings must go to Yaakov, arranges for Yaakov to impersonate Esav and receive the blessings. When Esav in frustration reveals to his father that Yaakov has bought the birthright, Yitzchak realizes that the birthright has been bestowed correctly on Yaakov and confirms the blessings he has given Yaakov. Esav vows to kill Yaakov, so Rivka sends Yaakov to her brother Lavan where he may find a suitable wife.

## BLESSED WILL BE THOSE WHO BLESS YOU

**T**he rare moments in history when the Jewish People were praised by the rest of the world echo the blessing which the Patriarch Yitzchak gave to his son Yaakov – “Blessed will be those who bless you.”

We here present an article by M. V. Jack, “The World’s Heritage”, which appeared in “The Children’s Encyclopedia” published in Great Britain more than half a century ago:

“Let us go back some thousands of years to look at another ancient culture, that of the Israelites, whose wars and wanderings and captivities, strivings and triumphs, form the theme of the Old Testament story. They were a small nation, scarcely noticeable beside the great Empires of Babylonia and Assyria, Greece and Rome. They were not popular with their neighbors. What, then, can possibly be their contribution to the world’s heritage?

At first glance it is not a spectacular one. We can watch the Egyptians carving the Sphinx under a burning sky, or the merchants of Babylon haggling over their rich wares. We can picture the cool colonnaded temples of Greece looking over pine and cypress to the sea – or the splendid fury and energy of a Roman chariot-race. But Israel, this small contentious community, had no great monuments of stone, no exquisite sculpture, no great discoveries in science or medicine to leave behind.

She had a noble literature, certainly, but it does not affect

our literature so much as some others have done. We do not model our poetry on the Psalms — lovely as these are — or our drama on the Book of Job. But we *do* model our lives to some extent on this ancient people.

The Israelites, or Hebrews as we call them, could afford to let the arts and sciences go because they had something much more important to conserve. They had an intense and lofty realization of humanity based on a right relation with G-d. This was their unique contribution to human progress – that they alone of the world’s peoples believed that G-d was a Spirit, that He was One G-d, that He was good and just and merciful, and that men were His creation and His children, from whom He exacted obedience, not to any arbitrary whim but to His rational laws.

The Ten Commandments are the broad basis of our own moral code, and if Israel’s sole claim to distinction were that she was the Custodian of the Law she would still be a mighty heritor.

It is this that makes us feel that the Chinese and Egyptians with their hoary arts and sciences were but barbarians after all – that the Greeks, with all their beauty and philosophy, were yet earthbound, because though they brought the body, and in some ways also the mind, very near to perfection, they had only a very limited view of the spirit. And it is to this spiritual idea that we must look for the most perfect flowering of civilization in the years to come.”

## THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

### STILL FEEL THE WARMTH

“**H**ow is it that someone so distant from religious belief and practice shows such sympathy for the religious community?”

In response to this question put to him by a rabbi, the chairman of the council of a pronouncedly irreligious left-wing settlement in Israel told the following story:

As an intellectually gifted youngster he sought to study in the Radin Yeshiva of the saintly Chafetz Chaim. The instructor who tested him for admission reported to the Chafetz Chaim that although the applicant was well skilled in Talmud he had some dangerous heretical ideas. Fearful of the negative influence this fellow might have on the other students the Chafetz Chaim ordered him to leave immediately. Since the last train from Radin had

already left, the rejected youngster asked permission to sleep overnight in the yeshiva. That was impossible, was the reply, but an invitation was extended instead to spend the night in a spare room in the Chafetz Chaim’s own home.

That night as our “hero” was trying to fall asleep he saw the door to his room open and the Chafetz Chaim stealthily entering. Certain that his young guest was fast asleep the venerable sage stood there for a moment to test the temperature of the room on this winter night. Convinced that it was uncomfortably cold, he removed his fur coat and covered his guest to keep him warm.

“And you know,” the unreformed but sympathetic heretic concluded, “I still feel the warmth of that coat.”

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## PARSHA Q&A ?

1. Why was it important that Yitzchak look like Avraham?
2. Why does the Torah stress that Rivka was Betuel's daughter and Lavan's sister?
3. What are the two differences between Tamar's pregnancy and Rivka's pregnancy?
4. Why was Esav named Esav?
5. Who gave Yaakov his name?
6. How did Esav deceive his father?
7. Why was Esav faint when he returned from the field?
8. Why are lentils a food for mourners?
9. What was the birthright that Yaakov bought from Esav?
10. Why was Yitzchak not permitted to go to Egypt?
11. Why did the Philistines plug up the wells?
12. Why did Yitzchak lose his sight? (three reasons)
13. At what age should one anticipate his own death?
14. Why did Rivka ask Yaakov to bring two kid goats?
15. Why did Esav leave his special garments with Rivka?
16. What fragrance did Yitzchak detect on Yaakov's garments?
17. What was the "fat of the land" promised to Esav?
18. When will Esav be freed from subjugation to Yaakov?
19. What inspired Esav to marry the daughter of Yishmael?
20. Knowing that Machalat was Yishmael's daughter, it's self-evident that she was the sister of Nevayot. Why, then, does the Torah state that Esav married "Yishmael's daughter, the sister of Nevayot?"

## PARSHA Q&A!

### Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

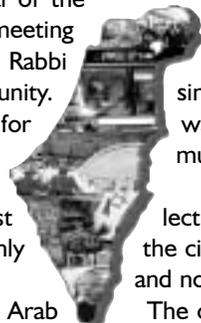
1. 25:19 - So everyone would agree that Avraham was indeed his father.
2. 25:20 - To praise her, that even though her family was evil she was righteous.
3. 25:24 - Rivka gave birth at full term to two children, one righteous and one wicked. Tamar gave birth after seven months to two righteous children.
4. 25:25 - He was born fully developed. The name Esav is based on the Hebrew word for "made".
5. 25:26 - G-d.
6. 25:27 - Esav deceived Yitzchak by asking questions that suggested that he was very strict in mitzvah observance.
7. 25:29 - From having murdered.
8. 25:30 - They are round like a wheel and mourning is like a revolving wheel that eventually touches everyone.
9. 25:31 - The right to bring sacrifices.
10. 26:2 - Through the *akeida* he had attained the status of a *korban* and was forbidden to leave Eretz Canaan.
11. 26:15 - They felt that either marauders would attack to capture the wells, or if attacking for other reasons, they would use the wells as a water supply.
12. 27:1 - a) From the smoke of the incense offered by Esav's wives to their idols; b) From the angel's tears which fell into Yitzchak's eyes at the time of the *akeida*; c) In order for Yaakov to receive the blessings.
13. 27:2 - When he reaches five years from the age his parents were when they passed away, until five years after.
14. 27:9 - One for Yitzchak and the other to offer as a *korban Pesach*.
15. 27:15 - He suspected that his wives might steal them.
16. 27:27 - The scent of *Gan Eden*.
17. 27:36 - Italy.
18. 27:40 - When the Jewish People transgress the Torah.
19. 28:7 - Seeing that his father despised his current wives, he resolved to take a wife from his father's family.
20. 28:9 - To indicate that Yishmael died between her betrothal and her wedding, and that it was Nevayot who gave his sister in marriage to Esav. Knowing the date of Yishmael's death, we can determine the date of Esav's marriage and thus Yaakov's age, 63, at the time of his flight from Esav.

## LOVE OF THE LAND - THE LEGENDS Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael

### THE ANSWERED PRAYERS

When a famine threatened the very survival of the Jews in Old Jerusalem, a midnight prayer meeting at the Western Wall was organized by Rabbi Yeshaya Bardaky, leader of the city's Perushim community. As they returned from offering fervent prayers for Heavenly salvation, the participants came across an Arab-led caravan of mules laden with sacks of wheat. When they inquired as to how much it would cost them to buy this lifesaving grain, the caravan leader only responded by asking "Where is Bardaky?"

Upon meeting this distinguished Jewish leader the Arab offered to sell him the entire cargo of wheat which he had



brought from so far away. When Rabbi Bardaky replied that he was willing to do so but lacked the cash, the Arab said he was willing to accept a note since the rabbi was known to be trustworthy. An IOU was duly written and the Arab hurried off with his mules.

Weeks passed but the Arab never returned to collect payment. Furthermore, an investigation revealed that the city gates had been closed the night of the prayer vigil and no one had heard of a mule train entering that day.

The only conclusion was that the prayers were answered and the wheat was sent by Heaven.

## THE ATONEMENT MYSTERY

**D**oes Yom Kippur absolve the sinner from the responsibility of offering the sacrifice prescribed for his atonement?

There is a distinction between the *chatat* or *asham* sacrifices which one must offer when he is aware of the sin he committed and the *asham talui* sacrifice required when he has a doubt as to whether he sinned. The Yom Kippur atonement is described in the Torah as “On this day there will be an atonement for you to purify you from all your sins; before G-d shall you be purified.” (*Vayikra 16:30*) Rabbi Elazar points out that only for those sins which are before G-d, known by Him and not the sinner, is there an atonement on Yom Kippur, which eliminates the need for a sacrifice. This applies to the *asham talui* but not to the *chatat* and *asham* which would be offered for sins that are known to the sinner as well.

The question is raised in our *gemara* about the *egla arufa*, the calf which is beheaded as an atonement for the residents of the city nearest the corpse of a man who was murdered by an unknown assailant (*Devarim 21:1-9*). If that beheading did not take place before Yom Kippur, there is reason to assume that it will not be required afterwards since this is also a sin in which only G-d knows who the sinner is. The Sage Abaye rejects this suggestion because the murderer himself is aware of the sin he committed. The Sage Rava takes a different approach in determining that the *egla arufa* rite must be performed even after Yom Kippur. He cites a passage which declares that “there will be no atonement for the land in which blood has been shed other than the blood of the one who shed it.” (*Bamidbar 35:33*) This is a clear indication that Yom Kippur cannot atone for any guilt connected with murder.

Rashi writes that Rava saw in this passage a statement that there can be no atonement for murder other than the execution of a known murderer or the *egla arufa* for an unknown murderer. The problem with this is that the passage cited by Rava refers only to the punishment of a known murderer and makes no mention of the *egla arufa*. In his commentary Rashash suggests that since the purpose of the *egla arufa* rite was to stimulate public interest in tracking down the murderer (a concept already mentioned in Rambam’s *Moreh Nevuchim*), we can understand that atonement for murder can be achieved either by actually punishing the murderer or at least making the effort to bring him to justice through the publicity generated by the *egla arufa*.

• Keritot 26a

## THE ROYAL DEBATE

**I**f someone makes a vow to offer a sacrifice for which either a sheep or a goat qualify, is there a preference for one over the other?

From the fact that the Torah usually mentions sheep before goat when discussing both as sacrifices it would seem that it is the preferred species. The *mishna*, however, dismisses this assumption because there is one place — the laws of an individual Jew offering a *chatat* sacrifice — where the Torah first mentions his offering a goat (*Vayikra 4:28*) and only later mentions his offering a sheep (*ibid. 4:32*). This teaches us that sheep and goat have equal status and either one can be offered as fulfillment of a vow.

Ignorance of the *mishna*’s ruling is attributed to a *kohen gadol* by the name of Elazar of Kefar Barkai who failed to apply it when he faced a fateful challenge. The king and queen of the Hasmonean dynasty once debated which of the two animals was preferable, with the king favoring the goat and the queen the sheep. They decided to seek the judgment of the *kohen gadol* because of his familiarity with these animals which regularly served as sacrifices. Instead of citing the ruling of the *mishna* that they are equal, he insolently waved his hands at them and haughtily dismissed their question by arguing that if goats were of equal status with sheep they should have qualified for the daily communal sacrifice for which only sheep are eligible.

The insolent manner in which he responded angered the king who ordered that the hand he waved at him be cut off. The *gemara* points out that this was Heavenly punishment for the disrespect which Elazar had shown for the sacrifices by wearing a covering on his hands when performing the sacrificial service in order to avoid getting blood on them.

There are two different explanations of the nature of the debate between the king and queen. Rashi (*Mesechta Pesachim 57*) writes that the issue is which meat is tastier. Rabbeinu Gershom on our *gemara* maintains that the debate was in regard to which of the two animals is preferred as a sacrifice. Whichever the case, the *kohen gadol* could have avoided taking sides by truthfully — and diplomatically — referring the royal couple to the equal status which the Torah awarded to the animals in question.

• Keritot 28b

## TO BOW OR NOT TO BOW?

**From: Ari T. in Illinois**

Dear Rabbi,

I am thinking about taking a class in "Tai Kwan Do" to get some exercise. After sitting in on the first class, it seems that there is a lot of bowing involved: students are supposed to bow to the training room, to each other, and to the instructor. The instructor told me that this bowing is a typical gesture of respect, that it is bi-directional (instructors bow to students too), and is not a supplication. Given the Purim story though, where Mordechai refused to bow to Haman, I am hesitant to participate in this class. Is there any conflict between this type of bowing in martial arts and Judaism?

Dear Ari T.,

Bowing to people as a gesture of respect is perfectly okay. Abraham bowed to his guests: "And he lifted his eyes and saw, and behold, three men were standing beside him, and he saw and he ran toward them from the entrance of the tent, and he prostrated himself to the ground" (Genesis 18:2). Joseph's brothers bowed to him: "Now Joseph was the ruler over the land...and Joseph's brothers came and prostrated themselves to him, with their faces to the ground" (Genesis 42:6). Moses bowed to his father-in-law: "So Moses went out toward Jethro, prostrated himself and kissed him..." (Exodus 18:7).

So if *Tai Kwan Do* bowing is nothing more than a gesture of respect toward others, there is no problem with it. Why then in the Purim episode did Mordechai refuse to bow to Haman? The Midrash explains that Haman claimed divine powers for himself. He even went so far as to attach an idolatrous icon to his clothing. He intended to lure the Jews to

idol worship, and under these circumstances bowing to him would have been tantamount to bowing to an idol, which is strictly forbidden.

Regarding the question about bowing to the room, although it is customary to bow upon entering a synagogue, we don't bow to the room, but rather to the Divine presence resting within it. Therefore, bowing to the room in martial arts, even if it is not to a spiritual force but rather out of deference to the place of training, is forbidden. We may not bow, even out of respect, to anything other than people.

This does not mean that Judaism doesn't teach respect for other things, animate or inanimate. G-d instructed Aaron to initiate the first three plagues, and not Moses, as an expression of Moses' deference to the waters of the Nile that "saved" him, and to the sand that "received" the body of the Egyptian murderer. (If this display of respect applies to inanimate objects, all the more so one must respect and appreciate living things and people.) However, bowing to these things is taking it a step too far. And even though we sometimes kiss a Torah scroll, or mezuzah or some holy book, it is important to realize that we are not kissing the object itself, per se, but expressing love for G-d whose name is written within it.

Sources:

- Rashi on Megillat Esther 3:2
- The idea of bowing to G-d's presence in the synagogue is expressed in the verse which is the source for the custom, and which we actually say while entering and bowing: "But I, with Your great loving-kindness, shall enter Your House; I shall prostrate myself toward Your Holy Temple in the fear of You" (Psalms 5:8).
- Regarding Moses' deference to the water of Nile and to the earth, see Exodus 7:19, 8:1, 8:12, and Rashi there.

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## THE PERIMETERS OF PRIVACY

**Question:** I am well aware that everyone is entitled to his privacy and that it is therefore improper to look into another's private quarters. But does this respect for privacy also extend to other areas that I am not aware of?

**Answer:** In his very popular book "Tuvchu Yabiyu" (Volume Two) Rabbi Yitzchak Zilberstein, the rav of the Ramat Elchanan community in Bnei Brak, suggests a number of areas in which one should be careful to avoid invading another's privacy:

Looking at someone's Identity Card (or passport) to discover his age.

Looking at his Sick Fund Booklet (or other health document) to discover the illnesses he suffers from.

Removing from the Western Wall a prayer note one has placed in it.

*(The author of this column and others in Ohrnet often rely on Rabbi Zilberstein's rulings and stories contained in his "Tuvcha Yabiyu" and "Aleinu Shebayach" volumes. I recently spoke at a public forum in Jerusalem immediately after Rabbi Zilberstein and planned to use in my talk a wonderful story I had read in one of his books. I suspected, however, that he might have used it himself so I carefully introduced the story as something I had read in the previous speaker's book. The whispers which followed my opening words of the story confirmed my apprehension. Although I lost an opportunity to use a story which I have shared with many audiences, I was pleased to see that my choice of stories coincided with that of this great man.)*

## PUBLIC DOMAIN \_\_\_\_\_

### Comments, quibbles and reactions concerning previous Ohrnet features

#### Lakewood Lauds

About a half a year ago some one handed me an 'Ohrnet' one week and I couldn't put it down until I was done. I was so impressed with the contents and simplicity of the articles, but simultaneously delivering such deep meaning and thought.

I am from Lakewood and am rarely exposed to anything other than the yeshivish world. It is so good to see such intelligent people doing such a fine job in this 'avodas kodosh' (holy work). I am sure it is not easy and it must take a lot out of your personal/family time.

To that I say 'well done' and keep up the good work. Klal Yisroel depends on your holy work. Thank you.

• N. R.

**Ohrnet replies:** Thank you for your warm words of appreciation. Appreciation is always appreciated!

#### The Ohr.edu Gene

I remember reading some recent scientific research along the lines that our genes are preprogrammed to prevent us from having the longevity we'd like. If that pre-program was removed, the scientists in the study suggested living 400-500 years would not be a problem. Very interesting stuff!

• S. H.

**Ohrnet replies:** Thank you for sharing this with us. We have seen scientific articles on genes that speed-up or slow-down the aging process in life forms, but it appears one might require a longevity gene now in order to reap the fruits of this research

*unless there is a major breakthrough in this field.*

#### Re: Have You Heard This Before? (Ohrnet Vayera)

After reading "Have You Heard This Before?" in Ohrnet on Ohr.edu for Parshat Vayera — which related the appropriate conduct upon hearing good news that one has already heard — I was reminded of a story I once heard. There was a small yeshiva in Russia where a young man was called up to the Czar's Army (a virtual death sentence). The whole yeshiva prayed hard for him until one day they got a message that, somehow, by some miracle, his call-up was cancelled. One by one, students came to the Rosh HaYeshiva to tell him the good news. The first time he heard it he was truly happy and gave the student a broad smile. Soon afterwards came another student, who, after giving over the same news, received that same smile and grateful thanks as the first. This continued again and again, with each student receiving that same warm appreciative smile and thanks. A truly beautiful story. I, thank G-d, have the privilege of knowing such true *tzaddikim* (the extremely righteous). People who truly feel that their purpose in life is to help others feel good, using the Torah as their guide. By each Jew taking it upon themselves to practice this may we merit seeing the final redemption soon in our time!

• Danny F.

**Ohrnet replies:** Thank you for sharing the story with Ohrnet and its readers. For those who have heard this story already we wonder how they will react...