

# O H R N E T

SHABBAT PARSHAT VAERA · 27 TEVET 5765 · JAN. 8, 2005 · VOL. 12 NO. 14

## PARSHA INSIGHTS

### WHAT'S YOUR NAME?

“...but with My Name Hashem I did not make Myself known to them...” (6:3)

Moshe had ten names: *Moshe, Yered, Chaver, Yekutiel, Avigdor, Avi Socho, Avi Zanuach, Tuvia, Shemaya and Halevi*. Of all these names, the only one that Hashem used was Moshe, the name he was given by Pharaoh's daughter, Batya.

Why, of all Moshe's names, did Hashem use the one name given to Moshe by an Egyptian princess? What was so special about this name?

The name Moshe comes from the word meaning 'to be drawn', for Moshe was drawn from the water by Batya. When Batya took Moshe out of the river she was flouting her father's will. Pharaoh's order was to kill all the Jewish male babies to stifle their savior. By rescuing Moshe, Batya was putting her life in grave danger. Because Batya risked her life to save Moshe, that quality was embedded in Moshe's personality and in his soul. It was this quality of self-sacrifice that typified Moshe more than all his other qualities, and for this reason Moshe was the only name that Hashem would call him.

This is what made Moshe the quintessential leader of the Jewish People, for more than any other trait, a leader of the Jewish People needs self-sacrifice to care and worry over each one of his flock.

Another question – but with the same answer:

Of all the places that Moshe's mother, Yocheved, could

have chosen to hide Moshe, why did she choose the river? Why not in a tunnel? Why not hide him in a barn or any of the other numerous possible hiding places? Why did Yocheved choose to hide Moshe in the river?

Yocheved hoped that by putting Moshe into the river the astrological signs would show that the savior of the Jews had been cast into the Nile and Pharaoh would abandon the massacre of the baby boys. Yocheved was right. The Egyptian astrologers told Pharaoh the Jewish savior had been dispatched into the Nile and Pharaoh ordered the killing to cease.

It was not an easy thing for Yocheved to put her son into a wicker basket and abandon him to the eddies of the Nile. Before she placed Moshe into the water, Yocheved made a little canopy over the basket and said in sadness “*Who knows if I will ever see my son's 'chupa' (marriage canopy)?*” Certainly there were safer places for a baby than a makeshift basket adrift in a river. However, Yocheved chose a hiding place that may have not been the safest because it meant that she could save the lives of other Jewish children.

From two sides of the same event the quality of self-sacrifice was instilled into Moshe — by his real mother when she put him into the river and by his adopted mother when she drew him out from the river, for if any quality epitomizes the essence of leadership, it is the ability to forget oneself and give up everything for the good of the people.

• Based on the Midrash Shemot Rabba 1:24, 1:29;  
Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz, Rabbi C. Z. Senter

## PARSHA OVERVIEW

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

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

## LET MY PEOPLE GO...TO SERVE ME

Independence is a universally cherished value but unfortunately a much misunderstood one. While subservience to a mortal dictator is certainly undesirable, it is an illusion for man to believe he is truly free when he is not under such a yoke and can do whatever he likes. All he has done is switch subservience to a despot for submission to his own uncontrolled passions.

Throughout this week's Torah portion Moshe is commanded by G-d to demand of Pharaoh "Let My people go so that they shall serve Me." Freedom for G-d's chosen people would not be complete by merely releasing them from Egyptian bondage, only when they would become the servants of a Divine master. In the Hallel praise we sing on

Pesach and other special days, we begin with the words "Sing praise you servants of G-d." This is our way of saying that it is not enough to simply be free of tyrants like Pharaoh but that true freedom consists of serving G-d.

The shocking statistics of crime, corruption and violence in the independent Jewish State of Israel pose a disturbing question mark about the quality of independence of a society which fails to appreciate service of G-d as the only road to true freedom from the self-destructive, unbridled satisfaction of human passions. If we have merited in our time the fulfillment of "Let My people go" it is our responsibility to complete the process by exercising the privilege of "to serve Me" as the best guarantee of Israel forever

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

### WHAT ALEXANDER THE GREAT SAW

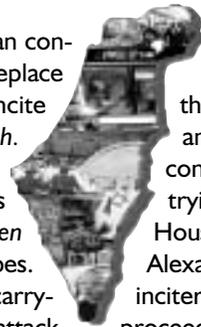
An historic confrontation took place on the 25th day of the month of Tevet which falls on Erev Shabbat this week, and it was the source for a day of celebration during the period of the Second Temple.

The Kutim, those heathens who the great Assyrian conqueror Sanncherib had brought to Eretz Yisrael to replace the Ten Tribes he had exiled, attempted to incite Alexander of Macedon to destroy the *Beit Hamikdash*. When news reached Jerusalem that this head of the Greek Empire which now ruled the Holy Land was on his way to carry out such destruction, the *Kohen Gadol*, Shimon Hatzadik, donned his priestly robes. Accompanied by some of the nobility of Jerusalem carrying torches, he marched all night to head off this attack. With the first rays of dawn they were sighted by Alexander who asked the Kutim leading him who they were. The reply he got was that they were the Jewish "rebels" he had been

warned about.

When the two groups came face to face at Antipares, the sunrise exposed Shimon Hatzadik to the view of Alexander who descended from his royal chariot and prostrated himself. The shocked Kutim asked why such a mighty king bowed to a Jew. "This was the vision that led me to victory in all my battles," he explained, and then turned to ask why Shimon Hatzadik had come to meet him now. "These Kutim," he replied, "are trying to deceive your majesty into destroying the House in which we pray for you and your kingdom!"

Alexander then gave the Jews permission to punish the inciters. After giving them what they deserved, the Jews proceeded to the idol worship temple of the Kutim on Mount Greizim and demolished it. It was their temple which was destroyed rather than ours, and the day this took place was subsequently known as the Day of Mt. Greizim.



לע"נ  
 מרת חויה שרה בת ר' מרדכי ע"ה  
 ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

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## PARSHA Q&A ?

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

## PARSHA Q&A!

### Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

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

## WHAT'S THE RIGHT THING TO DO?

### REAL-LIFE QUESTIONS OF SOCIAL AND BUSINESS ETHICS

## DISTRIBUTING CHARITY FUNDS

**Question:** Together with some other people in my community I have established a charity fund to assist needy families in our midst. There is a list of one hundred such families, so we have a choice of distributing one thousand dollars to each of these one hundred families, or two thousand dollars to the fifty most needy. What is the right thing to do?

**Answer:** In his commentary on the statement in *Pirkei Avot* (3:14) that "everything depends on the quantity of deeds", Rambam writes that the more times a person gives charity the more he develops his characteristic of generosity, and that it is therefore preferable to give a thousand gold coins

to a thousand needy people than to give the entire sum to one alone.

Whether this rule of thumb applies as well to a situation in which one family is in greater need than another is a question which was put before the leading halachic authority Rabbi Yosef Sholom Eliyashiv by Rabbi Yitzchak Zilberstein of the Ramat Elchanan community of Bnei Brak. The response was that since all hundred are needy and are entitled to receive charity funds, there is no justification for distinguishing between more and less needy because there is an obligation on the part of the donors to the communal fund to provide for all hundred.

## A FORMULA FOR LIVING

“He who heeds the commandments heeds his own life, and he who despises them shall die prematurely.” (*Mishlei 19:16*)

This passage from the wisdom of King Solomon is cited by Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish as a condemnation of immodest behavior in marital relations which can cause one of the parties to be despised.

Rabbi Yochanan applies this same passage to other forms of improper behavior which cause one to be despised by the people who observe him. On his list is one who suddenly enters a home, even his own, without any previous notification. Rashi explains that this is considered disgusting behavior because such a sudden entry may find someone involved in a very private matter and thus cause embarrassment.

The simple meaning of the passage, however, offers a broad perspective of the importance of mitzvah observance to life itself. In his commentary on *Mishlei*, Rabbi Levi ben Gershon (Gersonides) puts it this way:

“One who heeds the commands of G-d contained in His perfect Torah is heeding his very life, for the Torah guides one in the proper care of his body and soul. One who despises the Blessed G-d, however, shall die as a result of faulty character and senselessness which are, together with the punishment he has earned for his transgression, the causes of his premature death.”

• *Niddah 16b*

## BLOOD REDDER THAN WATER

In its discussion of the various shades of color of menstrual blood which can cause ritual impurity, the *gemara* cites this passage which definitively characterizes a red-colored fluid as being such blood:

“They arose in the morning when the sun shone upon the water; Moav looked upon the water which was red like blood.” (*Melachim II 3.22*)

The water which appeared to the Moavites as blood led to their downfall in the war they waged against the armies of Israel and Judea and their ally Edom. In fulfillment of the prophecy of Elisha, the dry river beds miraculously filled with water to quench the thirst of the famished soldiers and animals of these armies led by the righteous King Yehoshafat. The illusion of these waters being blood also led to the beginning of the fulfillment of the second part of that prophecy dealing with the defeat of Moav.

The Moavites misinterpreted the red colored water as being the blood of the armies of Israel, Judea and Edom which had come to fight them and who had subsequently fought amongst themselves and shed each other's blood. Eager to gain spoils the Moavites descended upon the Israelite camp in foolhardy fashion and were decisively routed as the Prophet had foreseen.

• *Niddah 19a*

## THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

### THE PLOT THAT FAILED

It was one of the matchmaker's rare successes and he rejoiced at the thought that both families were pleased with the *shiduch* he had initiated and that he would soon be collecting his *shadchanut* fee. But before the climax was reached, he received a call from a friend from abroad who was coming to Israel with his daughter in search of a *shiduch* for her. The sum he offered the *shadchan* if he succeeded was far beyond anything he had ever received in his career, and temptation overcame him.

He was convinced that the boy whose engagement was soon to be celebrated would be ideal for his friend's daughter. In order to make him available, he rushed off to his father and maliciously lied to him that the girl's father was spreading terrible stories about him. He then did the same with the girl's father and thus succeeded in breaking up the almost certain match.

This unscrupulous fellow was not so successful when he tried pairing the boy with his friend's daughter. But the story did have a happy ending thanks to the initiative taken by the girl's father. After his initial anger at his prospective *mechutan*, he began to have doubts about the accuracy of the *shadchan's* report that he had maligned him. He went to see him and asked why he had spoken against him, and was surprised to hear that the same lie had been told to him. They then embraced each other and the original *shiduch* finally came to fruition.

When the malicious *shadchan* had the gall to ask for his fee, since he was the initiator of the match, the local rabbi told him that he would have him publicly ostracized for such behavior and that he had no claim to a fee since he demonstrated that he did not want the original *shiduch* to succeed.

## BABY MAISEHS

**From: Paula Sharfe**

*Dear Rabbi,*

*Friends and I heard that one should not allow a baby in its first year to look into mirrors. We have been unsuccessful in finding a source for this and would appreciate it if you could help us. Thank you.*

Dear Paula,

I've heard this as well, with different versions as to how long to keep the baby away from the mirror: For a boy until the *brit*; during the first year; until the baby get its first tooth. However, Rabbi Chaim Pinchas Scheinberg, *shlita*, said he knows of no source for this whatsoever and indicated that it is a mere *bubbe maiseh*, an old wives' tale.

**From: Name Withheld**

*Dear Rabbi,*

*I like to be shomer Shabbos [Sabbath observant] but my son will not eat anything that I have made for Shabbos. He is nearly four years old. I have been cooking for him on Shabbos. Otherwise he would not eat but I feel bad about breaking Shabbos like this. Can you please advise me what I should do?*

Dear Name Withheld,

As a parent myself, I understand the importance of empathizing with one's children and trying to accommodate their needs. However, except for emergencies, G-d forbid, this should not be at the expense of breaking Shabbat.

It sounds like your son doesn't like traditional Shabbat foods. How about fries? Macaroni and cheese? Pizza? These and most other foods can be cooked before Shabbat and kept warm. They can even be heated on Shabbat itself under certain conditions (consult us or a local Orthodox rabbi). These aren't traditional "Shabbat" foods, but it doesn't matter. The main thing is that he eats and that you observe Shabbat.

Your situation brings to mind a story about the famous Rabbi Yosef Rozen, known as the Ragotchover. A woman's newborn wouldn't nurse on Shabbat. This was endangering the baby, as once a week, from Friday afternoon before sunset until Saturday night after dark, the newborn

refused to eat. The doctors were stumped. Finally, the mother brought the baby to the Ragotchover for a blessing. Interestingly, the Ragotchover told her not to change into her special Shabbat clothing but rather remain in her regular weekday clothes. That Friday night the mother remained in her weekday garb, and the problem was solved! The baby nursed.

The Ragotchover later explained how he solved the mystery: The Talmud (Bava Kama 37a) asserts that an ox which establishes a pattern to gore on Shabbat is considered "wild" only regarding Shabbat, but not during the week. Tosefot explains that the different clothing people wear on Shabbat prevents the ox from recognizing them, and is the cause of its irregular behavior. Similarly, the newborn didn't nurse because he didn't yet recognize his mother in her Shabbat clothing. The rabbi sagaciously suspended behavior familiar to Shabbat but unfamiliar to the child.

Give your son more time to recognize the beauty of Shabbat. In the meantime, give him what he likes and what is also permitted. That's *oneg Shabbat*, the delight of Shabbat, his and yours.

**From: Name Withheld:**

*Dear Rabbi,*

*I am a nursing mommy. Sometimes, my baby will cut short the interval between feedings. Some ladies' rooms tend to be a little too dirty for me to nurse there and I end up having to duck into the back seat of the car. However, I feel like I am breaking modesty laws by feeding my baby in the back seat of the car. Could you explain modesty laws and how they relate to nursing in public? Thank you.*

Dear Name Withheld,

Unfortunately, babies don't seem to arrange their feeding habits around their mother's "modesty schedules."

When this happens, it is perfectly permissible to feed your baby in a public place if necessary, but you should do so in a way of maximal modesty. Going to the car is fine, but may not be necessary. Why inconvenience yourself and prolong your baby's crying when there are other possibilities?

For example, take a chair into the ladies' room, enter a changing room, phone booth or even photo-booth. If that is not possible, find a secluded bench and sit with your back toward the public and/or drape a blanket, cloth or jacket over your shoulder.

**Ask! About the Environment**

After reading the comments on the environment issue, I decided to check it out myself (I keep a file for my "Ohrnets" and include "Ask" and other issues based on Ohrnet). After reading this article, I found, as usual, it being very well written, with high respect towards the questioner.

For as long as I can remember, you've almost always given the greatest respectful and educative answers to questions posed to you. *Kol HaKavod* to you and I look forward to continued enjoyment of "Ohrnet". Keep up the good work! All the best!

• Danny Freeman

**Shh! in Shul**

I have two children, two-year old twins (a boy and a girl), and I have taken them to shul several times. The first time they were initially disconcerted, but later they gained confidence and began to stroll around the place and play in it, crawling under the seats and climbing up on them. But this did not disturb anyone in the shul.

The elder of our community told us a couple of Hassidic stories. On one occasion when there were children in the Beith Haknesset and someone complained, the Baal Shem Tov said that when the children play in shul this is their way of praying and it should not really disturb anyone. On another occasion, during the service of Yom Kippur, a little boy, the son of a shepherd, took his whistle and gave it a little blow to the chagrin of the congregation, but from then on the Baal Shem Tov prayed and directed the service with more energy. At the end he said that the whistle helped him with the burden of "sheliach tzibur" (service director).

The children are the future of our communities, that are dwindling in numbers, and every effort must be made so that they will be acquainted with our sources. Lest it be that the first time they enter the shul is for their Bar/Bat Mitzvah.

• Carlos Feldman, Buenos Aires, Argentina

**Ohrnet replies:**

Dear Carlos,

*The halacha makes a distinction between children who have reached the age of "chumash" (5 or 6 years old depending on maturity) and tots who are only a source of disturbance. See Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 689:6 and the Magen Avraham 11.*

To Ohrnet in response to a recent column of "What's the Right Thing to Do?" about "Tots in the Synagogue":

I respectfully disagree with the Rabbi's comment about insisting that young children be kept at a parent's side or be taken home if they get restless in shul. A child should be made to feel comfortable in shul from the time he/she is born. Children need to feel accepted, and if there are no separate services or activities for the little ones, a bit of activity should be lovingly tolerated. A whole generation of children was turned off to Judaism by rabbis who insisted that children be seen and not heard, and therefore children did not feel welcome in shul, and the rabbis were not responsive to their needs. If a child does not regard a synagogue as a pleasant place to be, then he/she will not want to come when older.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond.

• Rochelle Sassler

**Ohrnet replies:**

Dear Rochelle,

*While your comment is appreciated, we must point out that the traditional way of making children "feel welcome in shul" is to offer them goodies while they are there. Tolerance of behavior which goes beyond "a bit of activity" is, however, counterproductive to the training of the child and harmful to the concentration of the adults. A place of worship is no place for "kidding" around.*

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