

OHRNET

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PARSHA INSIGHTS

JOE'S HOROSCOPE

"If you will follow My decrees..." (26:3)

Joe Cohen is 42 and a half years old. Joe is an extravagantly generous person. He makes the mitzvah of charity his special province. He neither neglects nor rejects any worthy cause. His house and his heart are open to all.

If you were a stargazer and could look into Joe's horoscope, you would see that Joe was not destined for a long life. Joe's *Mazal* is anything but *Tov*. In his *mazal*, in his horoscope, it says that Joe will die at the age of 43 from a heart attack. However, seeing as our own individual horoscopes are not published in the papers, neither Joe nor anyone else has any idea about Joe's imminent demise. Joe's 43rd birthday passes with the usual birthday gifts – meaning large anonymous financial gifts that Joe gives to charity. Joe's 44th birthday passes in much the same way, so does his 45th, his 46th, his 47th... In fact, not until his 90th birthday does Joe take his leave of this earthly stage and is brought to the World of Truth.

Simon Shmuzer loves to talk. Unfortunately the vast majority of what emanates from Simon's mouth is putting down other people behind their backs. Simon has developed subtle, and not-so-subtle, character assassination into a fine art. A look at Simon's celestial horoscope would show that Simon is supposed to live to the ripe old age of 89. However, when he turns 47, suddenly Simon develops a malignant disease of the larynx and passes away quite suddenly.

What happened to Joe's and Simon's horoscopes? Should they look for new astrologers?

At the beginning of this week's Torah portion the Torah gives a detailed picture of the bounty that awaits us if we keep the Torah. *"rains in their time... the land will give its produce..."*

the tree... its fruit; You will lie down and none will frighten you; I will cause wild beasts to leave the Land, and a sword will not cross your Land... You will eat very old grain (which will remain fresh and improve with age) so that you will have to move it to make way for the new harvest..."

If you look at all these promises, they all refer to this world. There is not one mention about the reward that we will get for keeping the Torah when we get to the World of Truth.

Why not?

The Torah doesn't deal with the rewards and punishments of the Next World because it's obvious that the proper place to receive the reward for our performance of spiritual tasks is in a world of spirituality. The next world is a totally spiritual world designed and constructed with the sole purpose of rewarding or punishing us. The Torah doesn't need to stress the fact that we are recompensed there. Where else would we expect to receive the results of our spiritual actions if not in a world of spirituality?

The surprise is that we are rewarded and punished for spiritual things here in this physical world too. Now that's something we would never have known had the Torah not told us.

However, we don't see that we are rewarded and punished here in this world for our actions. It all looks perfectly natural. It all looks like the Way of the World.

No one saw anything miraculous about Simon's demise, or Joe's longevity. After all, many people die young and more when they are old. And yet both Joe and Simon experienced miracles. We would never know about those miracles had the Torah not spelled them out in this week Torah portion.

• Source: Ramban

PARSHA OVERVIEW

The Torah promises prosperity for the Jewish People if they follow Hashem's commandments. However, if they fail to live up to the responsibility of being the Chosen People, then chilling punishments will result. The Torah details the harsh historical process that will fall upon them when Divine protection is removed. These punish-

ments, whose purpose is to bring the Jewish People to repent, will be in seven stages, each more severe than the last. *Sefer Vayikra*, the Book of Leviticus, concludes with a detailed description of *Erachin* – the process by which someone can make a vow to give to the *Beit Hamikdash* the equivalent monetary value of a person, an animal, or property.

TWO DAYS – ONE LESSON

The importance of Torah study to the security and prosperity of the Jewish People finds eloquent expression in two consecutive days this week. On Shabbat we read in the weekly portion that “If you shall follow My commandments... the Land will give forth its bounty... and you shall dwell securely in your Land.” (*Vayikra* 26:3-5). Rashi cites the explanation of our Sages that “follow My commandments” means toiling in the study of Torah.

The day before Shabbat this year is LaG B’Omer, the 33rd day of counting the days and weeks between the second day of Pesach (when an Omer offering was made in the *Beit Hamikdash*) and the Festival of Shavuot. This is some-

what of a festive day because tradition has it that on this day almost two millennia ago there came to an end the plague which claimed the lives of the 24,000 disciples of Rabbi Akiva. The loss of these Torah scholars is described by the Talmud as “desolation of the world”, a situation which existed until Rabbi Akiva rebuilt the Torah world through new disciples. The mourning practiced by Jews during this period of the year is an expression of the sense of spiritual desolation the Jewish People sensed when so many scholars were taken from them.

The lesson which emerges from these two days is that it is only the study of Torah and the maintenance of Torah scholars which can protect Israel forever.

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

POST-TSUNAMI BAR MITZVA

“Yes, I am Jewish but I never had a bar mitzvah.” This is what a volunteer in tsunami-ravaged Thailand said to Rabbi Yosef Zaklos, a Chabad relief aid worker working alongside him to help the victims of that natural disaster.

“So we got out the *tefillin* right there and then,” Zaklos is quoted as saying in a report written by Sheera Claire Frenkel in the February 16th issue of the *Jerusalem Post*, “and did a

bar mitzvah for him on the very spot where he was volunteering.”

Zaklos, who has performed four other bar mitzvahs for volunteers in the area, could not help but marvel at the Divine Providence which provided him with these opportunities.

“Sometimes you have to come all the way down to Thailand to have your bar mitzvah!” he concluded.

LOVE OF THE LAND - THE LEGENDS

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

WHO NEEDS PEACE?

The greatest political controversy in Israel today is what price to pay for peace with those enemies who wish to destroy us.

Without entering into the practical aspects of this issue, it is worth reflecting on what the Torah says about peace in this week’s Torah portion.

After promising plentiful rain, bountiful harvests



and a booming economy if Jews study the Torah and perform the *mitzvot*, G-d adds that “I will grant peace in the Land.” (*Vayikra* 26:6)

One can have food and drink, explain our Sages, but they have no value if there is no peace.

“This teaches us,” they conclude, “that peace is equal in value to everything else.”

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PARSHA Q&A ?

1. To what do the words “*bechukosai telechu*” (walk in My statutes) refer?
2. When is rain “in its season?”
3. What is the blessing of “*v’achaltem lachmechem l’sova*” (and you shall eat your bread to satisfaction)?
4. What is meant by the verse “and a sword will not pass through your land?”
5. Mathematically, if five Jewish soldiers can defeat 100 enemy soldiers, how many enemy soldiers should 100 Jewish soldiers be able to defeat?
6. How much is ‘*revava*’?
7. Which “progression” of seven transgressions are taught in Chapter 26, and why in that particular order?
8. What is one benefit which the Jewish People derive from the Land of Israel’s state of ruin?
9. What was the duration of the Babylonian exile and why that particular number?
10. How many years after entering the Land were the northern tribes exiled?
11. In verse 26:42, the name Yaakov is written with an extra “vav”. From whom did Yaakov receive this extra letter and why?
12. What positive element is implied by the words “and I will bring them into the land of their enemies?”
13. In verse 26:42, why is the word “remember” not used in connection with the name of Yitzchak?
14. Why does the Torah say in 26:46 “*Toros*” (plural) and not “*Torah*” (singular)?
15. What happens when a poor person dedicates the value of a man to the *Beit Hamikdash* and doesn’t have sufficient funds to fulfill his vow?
16. If a person says “The leg of this animal shall be an *olah* offering”, the animal is sold and sacrificed as an *olah* offering. What is the status of the money received for the animal?
17. If a person dedicates his ancestral field to the *Beit Hamikdash* and fails to redeem it before *Yovel* what happens to the field?
18. Where must “*Ma’aser Sheini*” be eaten?
19. When a person redeems “*Ma’aser Sheini*” what happens to the food? What happens to the redemption money?
20. How does a person tithe his animals?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week’s Questions!

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

1. 26:3 - Laboring in Torah learning.
2. 26:4 - At times when people are not outside (e.g., Shabbos nights).
3. 26:5 - You will only require a little bread to be completely satisfied.
4. 26:6 - No foreign army will travel through your land on their way to a different country.
5. 26:8 - Two Thousand.
6. 26:8 - Ten Thousand.
7. 26:14,15 - Not studying Torah, not observing *mitzvos*, rejecting those who observe *mitzvos*, hating Sages, preventing others from observing *mitzvos*, denying that Hashem gave the *mitzvos*, denying the existence of Hashem. They are listed in this order because each transgression leads to the next.
8. 26:32 - No enemy nation will be able to settle in the Land of Israel.
9. 26:35 - 70 years. Because the Jewish People violated 70 *Shemita* and *Yovel* years.
10. 26:35 - 390 years.
11. 26:42 - In five places in the Torah Yaakov’s name is written with an extra “vav” and in five places the name Eliyahu is missing a “vav.” Yaakov took these vavs as a pledge that Eliyahu will one day come and announce the redemption of Yaakov’s children.
12. 26:41 - Hashem Himself, so to speak, will bring them into their enemies’ land. This means that even when the Jews are in exile, Hashem will supply them with leaders who inspire them to keep the Torah. This guards the Jews from assimilating into the host culture.
13. 26:42 - Because the image of Yitzchak’s ashes (who was prepared to be brought as an offering) upon the altar is always before Hashem.
14. 26:46 - To teach that both the Written Torah and the Oral Torah were given to Moshe on *Har Sinai*.
15. 27:8 - The person whose value was donated goes before the *kohen*, who sets the obligation according to the poor person’s ability to pay.
16. 27:9 - The money is ‘*chullin*,’ meaning it does not have ‘holy’ status, except for the value of the animal’s leg which does have ‘holy’ status.
17. 27:16 - It becomes the property of the *kohanim* who are on rotation at the beginning of *Yovel*.
18. 27:30 - In Jerusalem.
19. 27:31 - The food becomes permissible to him outside of Jerusalem. The redemption money must be brought to Jerusalem and used to purchase food to be eaten there.
20. 27:32 - He passes them through a door individually and every tenth animal he marks with a rod smeared with red dye.

TALMUDigest

SHABBAT 23 - 29

- Laws of Chanuka lights
- Rewards for *mitzvot*
- Mentioning Chanukah and Rosh Chodesh in Tefillah and Birkat Hamazon
- The oil that can't be used for Shabbat and Yom Tov lights
- Importance of Shabbat lights
- Who is considered wealthy
- Which garments require *tzitzit*
- What qualifies as wicks for Shabbat lights
- Animal skins in regard to spiritual contamination
- The mysterious *Tachash*
- Garment and vessel fragments as wicks
- Oil receptacles next to the lights

WHO IS A WEALTHY MAN?

“Who is considered a wealthy man?” asked Rabbi Meir. His answer was “One who can enjoy his wealth.”

Rashi explains this definition along the lines of what the Sage Ben Zoma stated (*Mesechta Avot* 4:1) that “Who is considered a wealthy man? One who is happy with what he has.” The truly wealthy man is then one who is happy with his portion in life whether he has much or little.

Maharsha, however, offers a different approach to the words of Rabbi Meir. He cites two passages in *Kohelet* describing the different fates of people endowed with wealth. In the first (5:18) King Shlomo speaks of the man “whom G-d has endowed with wealth and property and enabled him to enjoy them... this is a gift of G-d.” In a later passage (6:2) he bemoans the fate of the one “who is endowed with wealth, property and honor and is missing nothing that he desires but G-d does not enable him to enjoy them.”

The conclusion reached by Rabbi Meir from these passages, writes Maharsha, is that true wealth does not depend on how much one has but how much Heaven has blessed him with the ability to enjoy it.

WHAT THE Sages SAY

“One who loves Torah scholars will have children who are Torah scholars; one who has awe for Torah scholars will have sons-in-law who are Torah scholars; one who honors Torah scholars will himself be a scholar – and if he is not involved in Torah study himself he will gain respect for what he says as if he were a Torah scholar.”

• *The Sage Rava*

OHR BITS

Witty Advice for Circling Life

“The mediocre teacher tells. The good teacher explains. The superior teacher demonstrates. The great teacher inspires.”

• *William Arthur Ward*

IGNITING THE FLAME, EXTINGUISHING THE FIRE

From: Alan in MASS

Dear Rabbi,

I go to a small college with relatively few Jewish resources. While I am not yet fully observant, I am interested in Orthodoxy and read and listen to material that is taught and studied in Orthodox circles. When I talk with other students about what I'm learning, I find that they are generally interested, and sometimes very interested in the conversation. The problem is that I don't fully understand a lot of what I'm learning on my own, and I also feel that I am not on a high enough spiritual level to be teaching Torah to others. On the other hand, when I offer people material to read or listen to on their own, the usual response is that they don't have time. What should I do?

Dear Alan,

First, let me praise you on your effort to learn and maintain your connection with G-d and the Torah despite your responsibilities in college, and despite being in what sounds like a spiritually sparse environment.

Ideally, a person should learn Torah, pray and perform the *mitzvot* with great understanding, purity and insight. This applies all the more so to someone who is in a position to ignite the flame of spirituality in others. His or her comprehension and spiritual state should be as perfect and pristine as possible. In this vein our Sages taught, "If a rabbi is like an angel of G-d, learn Torah from him; if he is not like an angel, don't learn Torah from him".

However our Sages also taught, "In a place where

there is no man, try to be a man" (Avot 2). If you are the only one who can have an influence in your surroundings, try your best. G-d directed you to that place for a reason and a purpose. G-d has obviously given you success, as people you talk to are interested. They can't be blamed for not making the time to read or listen to the material you have – they're under a big load.

What can you do? Keep taking advantage of the spontaneous conversations at meals and around campus to spark their interest. Think about ways to make events around learning: You can arrange a discussion over pizza or schedule a video and the like. Be creative! Even if things start small or slow, don't be discouraged. That gives you an opportunity to plan and gain confidence. It'll grow — good people appreciate a wholesome alternative to keg parties.

I'll conclude with a beautiful analogy by the Chafetz Chaim:

There was once a town whose benevolent governor required that all water be filtered from impurities before use. The town enjoyed better health and a higher standard of living than all other towns in the region. Then a fire broke out. Despite the efforts of the inhabitants, the town burned down. Afterwards, the governor found water in the wells. Perturbed, he asked the inhabitants why they weren't able to put out the fire. The townspeople answered that as hard as they tried, they couldn't manage to filter the water fast enough to extinguish the flames. The governor cried, "You fools! I required you to filter the water to maintain purity in normal times. But when fire breaks out, there's no time to filter. Throw water with its impurities on the fire, the main thing is to put out the conflagration!"

There is a spiritual conflagration out there threatening to destroy the Jewish people. Now is not the time to demand the ideal of purity and expect and accept only the highest standards. Every available person must give whatever Torah they've got to put out the fire.



THE UNWANTED AMBULANCE

Question: A fellow got so drunk on Purim that he fell unconscious in the street. Passersby who saw him lying motionless feared for his health and called an ambulance. He was hospitalized for several days at the end of which it was discovered that nothing was wrong with him and he was released. When he subsequently received a hefty bill for the ambulance service and the hospital stay he refused to pay on the grounds that he had been completely healthy and did not require any medical attention so there was no reason for him to pay. What is the right thing to do?

Answer: The ruling issued by Rabbi Yitzchak Zilberstein, rav of the Ramat Elchanan community in Bnei Brak, in this case was that the fellow has to pay. Those who ordered the ambulance which took him to the hospital did so out

of concern for his health. Should people who act in this fashion be required to bear the expenses incurred by their efforts, no one will be prepared to make such an effort and this could spell the difference between life and death.

A similar case came before the rav of a man who started bleeding badly in a public mikveh. People there immediately called an ambulance. The bleeding fellow, however, insisted that he was capable of bandaging himself as he had done on previous occasions. When the ambulance arrived the paramedics saw that he had done an expert job and there was no need for their services. He too balked at paying the bill he later received from Magen David Adom for their ambulance service. Here too the rav ruled that since it appeared to everyone around him that his life was in danger, they were correct in ordering the ambulance and it was his obligation to pay for it.

PUBLIC DOMAIN

Comments, quibbles and reactions concerning previous Ohrnet features

I read something you wrote on the web at Ohr.edu. I am intrigued by your 'Other Side of the Story'. Can you please tell me more? I write stories and also I like to listen to other people's stories.

• *Laura from London.*

Ohrnet replies: *The Other Side of the Story was inspired by a book written by Rebbetzin Samet with the same title. It is a book (and a former Ohrnet magazine column) that is dedicated to trying to teach people an awareness that very often things are not the way that they may appear.*

Bar Mitzvah Siddur

Our company is creating a siddur for a Bar Mitzvah service, and the family found your explanation of Bamidbar from your website. Please let me know if the company (in Boston) can have permission to include that d'var Torah in about 150 single-use books, which guests will then take home. Unfortunately, this needs to go to the printer by Tuesday, so we urgently need a speedy reply! Thank you so much.

• *V.*

Ohrnet replies: Yes, with credit to Ohr Somayach and Ohr.edu — and Mazal Tov to the family! By the way, we are curious as to the meaning of a "single-use book". Why not continue to use the siddurim?

Cornell Kiruv

Next year I am going to be the rabbi at Cornell University. I am right now contacting Torah learning programs trying to network a comprehensive list of possible places to send my students.

So, let me tell you my vision: I want to find out about all kosher learning programs in Israel and abroad that offer programs for the unobservant or the not-so-observant at reduced prices, if not at no cost at all. Each program would tell me what they have available, whether it be full year programs, winter break programs, summer programs, etc, what scholarships and the like are available, and would detail for me to whom they're reaching out, i.e. what the perfect program participant would be like. Then I would try to find as many interested students and groups of students as possible and try to fit everyone into the right program, constantly sending Jewish students all around to learn as much Torah as humanly possible.

So, if you can give me all the information I spoke about here I can get started ASAP when I arrive at Cornell. Please forward this e-mail to the appropriate person.

• *Rabbi Yitzchak Jaffe*

Ohrnet forwarded this request to the appropriate person and Ohr Somayach looks forward to the plane loads of students arriving from Cornell in the coming years.