

# OHRNET

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## PARSHA INSIGHTS

### PROTECTING AN ENDANGERED SPECIES

*“I have sojourned with Lavan.” (32:5)*

One of the reasons I like swimming is that waterproof smart-phones have not yet been invented. (Please, do not show this article to Nokia, Motorola, et al!)

A few months ago, I noticed one of my swimming buddies carefully placing a towel at the end of the pool right by the edge of the water. He did a few laps and then coasted to a halt in front of his poolside towel. He carefully dried his hands and then he flipped the towel open to reveal – a smart-phone.

Is it my imagination or has solitude become an endangered species?

Life can be divided into two distinct phases: input and output.

In one’s childhood, our brains are largely set to “record”, and we record by imitation. A child learns to speak by imitating his mother. A boy starts to learn by imitating his teacher.

Part of raising a child is to encourage positive role-modeling and minimize contact with negative stereotypes.

In this week’s Torah portion, Yaakov sends a message to Esav that he “sojourned with Lavan.” The numerical equivalent of *garti*, “sojourned,” is 613. Yaakov was hinting to his brother Esav that Lavan’s negative influence had not rubbed off on him, that he still kept the 613 *mitzvot*.

A similar example is when Yaakov prays to G-d (28:21) to return him in peace to his father’s house without Lavan’s negative influence. Even though already 75 years old, Yaakov was still concerned that the natural instinct to imitate would lead him astray.

This also explains the Torah’s praise of Rivka. Despite being surrounded from the cradle by evil people she was able to sense that they were unsuitable role models and did not learn from them. Only an inherent holiness could have protected her.

The second phase starts when a child reaches maturity, or should reach maturity.

At this point, imitation should give way to our motivation. It’s not enough for us to do things because “that’s the way we always did it at home.” Lessons learned through imitation must be re-learned and made our own. If not, we will never grow to be truly independent thinkers and doers. Not only that, but our own ability to be role models for our own children and students will be severely limited.

At a certain point, we have to pick up the ball and run with it by ourselves.

The only way we do this is by giving ourselves time; time to introspect, to examine our lives, our wants, our goals. A quarter of an hour a week may be sufficient, but it has to be quality time. If one’s spouse or child comes and asks for advice, we would make sure to close the door, take the phone off the hook, and give them our undivided attention. Should we not give ourselves the same attention?

In a world where the deep-sea smart-phone is just around the corner, it takes a little effort to create the silence of solitude that is the key to maturity.

• Based on Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe

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## PARSHA OVERVIEW

Returning home, Yaakov sends angelic messengers to appease his brother Eisav. The messengers return, telling Yaakov that Eisav is approaching with an army of 400. Yaakov takes the strategic precautions of dividing the camps, praying for assistance, and sending tribute to mollify Eisav. That night Yaakov is left alone and wrestles with the Angel of Eisav. Yaakov emerges victorious but is left with an injured sinew in his thigh (which is the reason why it is forbidden to eat the sciatic nerve of a kosher animal). The angel tells him that his name in the future will be Yisrael, signifying that he has prevailed against man (Lavan) and the supernatural (the angel). Yaakov and Eisav meet and are reconciled, but Yaakov, still fearful of his brother, rejects Eisav's offer that they should dwell together. Shechem, a Caananite prince, abducts and violates Dina, Yaakov's daughter. In return for Dina's hand in marriage, the prince and his father suggest that Yaakov and his family intermarry and enjoy the fruits of

Caananite prosperity. Yaakov's sons trick Shechem and his father by feigning agreement. However, they stipulate that all the males of the city must undergo *brit mila*. Shimon and Levi, two of Dina's brothers, enter the town and execute all the males who were weakened by the circumcision. This action is justified by the city's tacit complicity in the abduction of their sister. G-d commands Yaakov to go to Beit-El and build an altar. His mother Rivka's nurse, Devorah, dies and is buried below Beit-El. G-d appears again to Yaakov, blesses him and changes his name to Yisrael. While traveling, Rachel goes into labor and gives birth to Binyamin, the twelfth of the tribes of Israel. She dies in childbirth and is buried on the Beit Lechem road. Yaakov builds a monument to her. Yitzchak passes away at the age of 180 and is buried by his sons. The Parsha concludes by listing Eisav's descendants.

## LOVE OF THE LAND

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

### THE GRAVE THAT WAS SAVED

One of the most revered graves in Eretz Yisrael is that of Rabbi Chaim ben Attar, the author of the Ohr Hachayim commentary on the Torah. Thousands of Jews come to this grave on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem on the 15th of the Hebrew month of Tammuz, the day he passed away in 5503 (1743), to pray for Heavenly aid in the merit of this sainted Torah scholar and kabbalist.

During the period of Jordanian control of the Mount of Olives cemetery between 1948 and 1967, there was mass desecration of the Jewish graves. The Arabs even decided to build a road through this ancient cemetery which would pass directly over the grave of the Ohr Hachayim.



When the bulldozer came within inches of the grave, however, something strange happened. The engine sputtered and died. Another attempt the following day failed in a more spectacular way. As the bulldozer rushed towards the grave at full speed, it suddenly flipped over and plunged into the adjoining Valley of Kidron, killing its driver.

The Arabs thereupon abandoned their plans for desecrating this holy grave and rerouted their road to pass much higher on the mountainside. Visitors to the grave can clearly see how the original clearing went straight in the direction of the Ohr Hachayim's grave.

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## PARSHA Q&A ?

1. What sort of messengers did Yaakov send to Eisav?
2. Why was Yaakov both “afraid” and “distressed?”
3. In what three ways did Yaakov prepare for his encounter with Eisav?
4. Where did Dina hide and why?
5. After helping his family across the river, Yaakov remained alone on the other side. Why?
6. What was the angel forced to do before Yaakov agreed to release him?
7. What was it that healed Yaakov’s leg?
8. Why did Eisav embrace Yaakov?
9. Why did Yosef stand between Eisav and Rachel?
10. Give an exact translation of the word *nisa* in verse 33:12.
11. What happened to the 400 men who accompanied Eisav?
12. Why does the Torah refer to Dina as the daughter of Leah and not as the daughter of Yaakov?
13. Whom should Shimon and Levi have consulted concerning their plan to kill the people of Shechem?
14. Who was born along with Binyamin?
15. What does the name Binyamin mean? Why did Yaakov call him that?
16. The Torah states, “The sons of Yaakov were twelve.” Why?
17. How old was Yaakov when Yosef was sold?
18. Eisav changed his wife’s name to Yehudit. Why?
19. Which three categories of people have their sins pardoned?
20. What is the connection between the Egyptian oppression of the Jewish people and Eisav’s decision to leave the land of Canaan?

## PARSHA Q&A!

### Answers to this Week’s Questions!

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

1. 32:4 - Angels.
2. 32:8 - He was afraid he would be killed. He was distressed that he would have to kill.
3. 32:9 - He sent gifts, he prayed, and he prepared for war.
4. 32:23 - Yaakov hid her in a chest so that Eisav wouldn’t see her and want to marry her.
5. 32:25 - He went back to get some small containers he had forgotten.
6. 32:27 - Admit that the blessings given by Yitzchak rightfully belong to Yaakov.
7. 32:32 - The shining of the sun.
8. 33:4 - His pity was aroused when he saw Yaakov bowing to him so many times.
9. 33:7 - To stop Eisav from gazing at her.
10. 33:12 - It means “travel”. It does not mean “we will travel.” This is because the letter *nun* is part of the word and does not mean “we” as it sometimes does.
11. 33:16 - They slipped away one by one.
12. 34:1 - Because she was outgoing like her mother, Leah.
13. 34:25 - Their father, Yaakov.
14. 35:17 - His two twin sisters.
15. 35:18 - *Ben-Yemin* means “Son of the South.” He was the only son born in the Land of Israel, which is south of Aram Naharaim.
16. 35:22 - To stress that all of them, including Reuven, were righteous.
17. 35:29 - One hundred and eight.
18. 36:2 - To fool Yitzchak into thinking that she had abandoned idolatry.
19. 36:3 - One who converts to Judaism, one who is elevated to a position of leadership, and one who marries.
20. 36:6 - Eisav knew that the privilege of living in the Land of Israel was accompanied by the prophecy that the Jews would be “foreigners in a land not their own.” Therefore Eisav said, “I’m leaving — I don’t want the Land if it means I have to ‘pay the bill’ of subjugation in Egypt.”

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*Based on the Talmudic Sages found in the seven pages of the Talmud studied each week in the Daf Yomi cycle*

## SHABBAT 58 - 64

*“When putting on shoes, first put one on the right foot and then on the left.”*

This counsel is based on the honor given to the right arm with which a person performs *mitzvot*. The left, however, is the shoe first removed for the same reason of deference to the right.

Where the left is shown deference is in regard to tying the shoes. Since tefillin are tied on to the left arm, the left shoe is tied before the right one.

• *Shabbat 61a*

*“Rejoice, young man, in your youth; let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth; follow the direction of your heart and the sight of your eyes – but be aware that for all these things G-d will call you to account.”*

The advice from King Shlomo, the wisest of men, (*Kohelet 11:9*) is applied by Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish to the study of Torah. He urges one to study Torah with joy and follow his heart in understanding what he can. But he must be aware that he will have to give an account for his failure to practice what he has learned.

• *Shabbat 63b*

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## WORTH TO COME

**From: Jack**

*Dear Rabbi,  
Maybe my wife is more spiritual than I am, but she's always encouraging me to be observant because of the World to Come, whereas I say that if I'm going to do something it's because it will benefit us in the here and now. Would you please help clarify this for us?*

Dear Jack,

In a way, you're both right; but also both wrong. You're both right because the Torah lifestyle is beneficial for a person both in this world and the next. But you both could improve on your concept as to why we do so. Ideally, it's not for the benefit or reward in either, but rather we observe the Torah because it's G-d's will that we do so.

There's nothing wrong with being aware of the benefits and beauty of the Torah's teachings and instructions in both the material and spiritual planes, and each of you should perhaps work on a more balanced appreciation of that, but the motivation behind it all should really be more about doing things for G-d.

Your question reminds me of a story:

A man of very little means once came to the Tzadik Rabbi Avraham Yehoshua Heshil from Apta, explaining that he had no money to marry off his daughter. The rabbi asked how much he needs and how much he has. He answered that he needs 1000 rubles and has only one. The rabbi, gazing afar, thought for a minute and then told the man to return to his hometown and that all would be well, instructing him to take advantage of the first business opportunity that comes his way.

On the way home, he stopped in a tavern where there were Jewish gem dealers examining their wares at one of the tables. Curious to see such wealth, the man stood by and gasped at the beauty and value of the stones. Seeing the poor man, one of the merchants mockingly asked if he'd like

to do some business. Overcoming his obvious inclination to decline, yet recalling the rabbi's words, he replied, "Yes".

With great delight, the scoffer jeered, "And just how much money do you have for the deal?" "One ruble", he replied. At which the dealers broke out in uncontrollable laughter. The leader of the group then asserted with feigned seriousness, "You know what, I have a deal for you. I'll sell you my portion in the world to come for your ruble". To his astonishment, the poor man agreed, and with the cynical support of his friends, they wrote out a bill of sale which they signed with witnesses.

After a time, the gem dealer's wife came in the tavern, and eager to let her in on the joke, he told her the whole story, accompanied by the merriment of all - except for that of his wife. "Do you mean to say that you forwent the only good thing that you have, no matter how small that portion may be? I refuse to be married to such a wicked person with no place in the world to come!" And with that she stormed out of the tavern declaring her desire to divorce.

It suddenly dawned on him what a predicament he was in, and now the jeers of the tavern were directed toward him. Realizing he had no other option, he approached the poor man requesting to tear up the "worthless" document. But the man insisted that the bill of sale was binding. The dealer then offered to buy back his world to come, first at a ridiculously low price, until he agreed to pay the pauper's demand of 1000 rubles, which he explained he needed to marry off his poor daughter. When the merchant's wife heard that her husband paid such a handsome sum for his world to come while also enabling a poor Jewish maiden to wed, she withdrew her intention to divorce.

After hearing about the rabbi's role in this odd chain of events, she traveled to him in order to meet first hand the person who orchestrated this great thing. Once there, she asked the rabbi, "Was my husband's world to come really worth so much that it generated 1000 rubles dowry for a poor Jewish girl?" To which the rabbi replied, "When he sold it, it wasn't even worth the poor man's ruble; but when he bought it back, it became worth even more than the 1000 rubles he paid!"

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**Question:**

As the head of a well-known educational institution I frequently receive CVs from people seeking employment. Since we are fully staffed I cannot even consider the request but feel sorry for the applicant. I vacillate between ignoring the request and responding in the negative. What is the right thing to do?

**Answer:**

When someone sends you their CV it means that they have invested some degree of effort and much hope. Failure to

respond at all leaves them with the discouraging impression that you have no regard for their qualifications.

You should therefore take the trouble to respond that you regret that at the moment you are not hiring new personnel. If you are truly impressed with the applicants qualifications but have no opening for him, you might suggest another organization which might seek his services.

This is another one of those situations in which one must remember the classical dictum of the Sage Hillel: "Don't do to others what is hateful to you." None of us wants to be ignored when we put our best foot forward.

## THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

### LOOKING AT LAWYERS

While once walking with a guest, the rav of the Latvian community of Dvinsk, Rav Meir Simcha Hacoheh, was asked who owned a magnificent mansion they had just passed.

The reply was that he was the most expert lawyer in the country.

"Are you not the greatest expert in your profession?" asked the guest. "Why is it that you don't own such a beautiful home?"

The rav, who was considered one of the great Torah scholars of his generation, modestly replied:

"It is the conflicts among Jews which supply the income for lawyers while my livelihood depends on their good deeds. We all know which there are more of!"

The Chafetz Chaim once wished to offer a blessing for a lawyer who was very helpful to the Jewish community. This is what he told him:

"I cannot bless you to win every case, for justice may be on the side of the party you do not represent. I will therefore bless you that every party that is indeed in the right should hire you as his lawyer."

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# The Great Cholent Challenge

BY RABBI YEHUDA SPITZ

Recently the worldwide Daf Yomi started learning Perek Kira, the chapter in Gemara Shabbat that deals with the myriad and complex minutiae involved in allowing us to eat a hot Shabbat meal without transgressing the prohibition of cooking on Shabbat.

This article sets out to give some background and explain several common *halachic* issues involving the serving of the ubiquitous Jewish dish: Cholent.

## Cholent is its Name...

Ahh! Nothing smells more *geshmak* than the awesomely redolent aroma emanating from the kitchen and wafting throughout the house on a Shabbat morning. If you are like most of us, you just can't wait until you sink our teeth into that piping hot, special for Shabbat, delicacy, Cholent. This exceptional meat and potato, barley and bean (and whatever else you decide to throw in) concoction of a stew has been around for a very long time. In fact, the Ohr Zarua, in the mid 1200s, already mentioned Cholent by name!

Etymologists have a difficult time figuring out where the name comes from. There are several hypotheses regarding it, including the Hebrew *'shelan'* (food that rested overnight), *'shaluk'* (thoroughly cooked) and a combination of the French words *chaud* ("hot") and *lent* ("slow"). However, most Sefardim stick to the name given to a hot Shabbat food by the Mishna (Shabbat 36b), *'Chamin'* or *'Hamin'*.

The origins of this humble dish lie in the words of the Ba'al HaMaor, Rabbi Zerachia HaLevi from Gerona, who lived in the mid-1100s. He writes that it is a rabbinical decree to enjoy the Shabbat with a hot dish. He adds that whoever does not do so is suspect of being a *'Min'* (heretic, *apikores*)! The reason for this is that the heterodox Karites who denied the Rabbinical tradition prohibited eating any hot food on Shabbat. The Ba'al HaMaor explains that one who refuses to eat a hot dish on Shabbat (cooked before Shabbat), is suspect of following their heretical interpretation of the Torah and not those of our "*Chachmei HaDorot* – our true Torah leaders.

On the other hand, the Ba'al HaMaor assures that whoever makes sure to cook, heat up (before Shabbat), and eat a hot dish on Shabbat will merit seeing 'the end of days'. Quite a big reward just for eating Cholent. And this is not just a minority opinion. His words are codified in *halacha* by the Rema as a *'Mitzvah'* and eating Cholent on Shabbat is considered *'Minhag Yisrael'* by the Mishna Berura. In fact, I know of a certain renowned rabbi who, although not enamored of Cholent, nonetheless makes sure to "eat one bean every Shabbat", and that way fulfill "*Mitzvat Cholent*".

## Serving Up

However, getting the Cholent from a bubbling pot on a *blech* (a simple sheet of metal placed on the gas burners) onto our plates presents several *halachic* challenges. Aside from the issues of *Shehiya*, placing a food on the fire before Shabbat until the time it is being served on Shabbat, and the more stringent *Chazara*, returning food to the flame on Shabbat, there is also a separate issue of

*Maygis*, stirring, which one might possibly violate by doing the simple innocuous action of lifting the lid off of the simmering Cholent pot and replacing it, or just ladling out some Friday night *'To'ameha'* Cholent.

Therefore, in order to serve our Mitzvah Cholent properly, without unwittingly transgressing any Shabbat prohibitions, authorities have come up with a five-point plan, which enables us to serve a steaming, savory Cholent, and allows us to return it to the flame for seconds (more Mitzvot!). **Note: this follows the widespread Ashkenazic practice that one must first remove the pot from the fire in order to serve.**

The pot of Cholent must be on a covered flame, as a reminder that we cannot adjust the flame on Shabbat. In Mishnaic and Gemara terms this is referred to as "*Garuf V'Katum*", meaning the coals in the ovens were pushed to the side and /or covered up. There is a famous debate amongst the Rishonim whether the key reason for doing this is so there will be a reminder that it is prohibited to stoke the coals and make the food cook faster and better, or whether it is meant to actually lessen the cooking heat. Making sure the flame is covered is a prerequisite for committing *Shehiya* or *Chazara* on Shabbos in a permitted manner. A *blech* on the stovetop is the most commonly known example of this.

The Cholent must be fully cooked.

It must still be hot or at least warm.

One must take it off the fire in order to serve it. If one wants to keep it hot for later (Fleishig Shalosh Seudot, anyone?) he must have in mind, when taking the pot off the fire to serve, that he is planning on returning it to the fire.

One must have his hand on it the whole time.

However, in extenuating circumstances, even if one was not planning to return it to the flame, as long as his hand was still on it, he may nevertheless do so. Similarly, if he placed it on the counter, but still intended to return it to the fire, he is permitted to return it to the *blech*.

## Sefardic Style

Common Sefardic practice follows the opinion of the Shulchan Aruch that merely scooping out from the pot does not constitute *Maygis*. Therefore, once the Cholent is fully cooked, one may scoop out and serve Cholent directly from the pot, even while it is still on top of the *blech*. However, it should be noted that the Ben Ish Chai and later, Rabbi Ben Tzion Abba Shaul ruled that one may only rely on this *L'tzorech Mitzvah*; otherwise, they maintain that one must take the pot off of the fire before ladling out. Interestingly, the Tzitz Eliezer maintains that Yeshiva students "raiding" the Cholent pot on a Friday night qualifies as *L'Tzorech Mitzvah*.

Although these procedures and nuances may seem complicated, they are but a small sampling of the numerous intricate *halachot* that pertain to the prohibition of cooking on Shabbat. It behooves us all to make sure that we are serving our Cholent in the proper *halachic* way, as, aside for the earthly reward of eating Cholent on Shabbat, the taste of its Mitzvah is eternal.