

OHR NET

SHABBAT PARSHAT BEHAR · 15 IYAR 5763 · MAY 17, 2003 · VOL. 10 NO. 30

PARSHA INSIGHTS

OF FAITH AND TRUST

*"But the seventh year shall be a complete rest for the land.
A Sabbath for G-d... (25:4)"*

Sometimes trusting G-d isn't so easy. In this week's Torah portion, the Jewish People are told to put down tools once every six years and stop working the fields for a year. G-d tells them to trust that He will provide for them. In the sixth year, He promises that miraculously there will be a bumper crop. This will keep them going for that year, and the next year and the eighth year. Because, of course, seeing as nothing will be planted in the seventh year, there will be nothing to harvest in the eighth. In other words, one year's crop becomes three. G-d says this is going to happen with clockwork regularity every seven years. And it did, for hundreds of years.

Sometimes, however, when it comes to our own lives it's not so easy.

That's the difference between *emunah* – "faith" and *bitachon* – "trust." We can believe that there is a G-d who created everything in existence, who continues to sustain reality from one second to the next, a G-d who rules over everything, everywhere, everyone, every second. But, when it comes to our own lives, we can still fall short in trusting Him when the going gets tough.

The Israeli government has plans to make the most swinging cuts in the living standards of religious families in the history of the State. They propose terminating all kollel stipends – currently nearly \$200 a month – for kollel students above 27, and halving them for students over 22. Many kolells have already closed.

A family with eight children will have their child allowance reduced by over 75%. This can often represent a third to a half of a religious family's budget.

80% has been cut in the budget for Torah institutions. Added to this, religious people, especially younger couples who have found cheaper housing in communities removed from the major population centers, are the heaviest users of public transportation. They face a 5% increase in transportation costs.

It looks a pretty gloomy picture.

What should our reaction be?

Well, let me tell you how one Rosh Yeshiva looks at it. This is a man who has on his shoulders the burden of supporting an institution whose yearly running costs are in six figures. On his last trip to America, he told his donors to prepare "tanks" to receive the outpouring of wealth that G-d is going to bestow on them.

Supporting Torah is a privilege, not a budgetary burden. In the desert, the Holy Ark needed no wagon to carry it from one encampment to the next because "...to the sons of Kehat he (Moshe) did not give (wagons); since the sacred service was upon them, they carried on the shoulder." (Shmot 6:9)

In fact, no one carried the Aron. The Aron carried itself, and also those who "carried" it. The Aron carries its carriers. The Torah supports its supporters, not the other way round. If the new government budgetary decisions lead to a serious reduction in support of Torah, G-d will find other channels. "G-d has many agents."

Which is not to say that there may not be individual cases of hardship. For, after all, trusting G-d doesn't mean that He's going to do what we want. It means that whatever He does is for the best, even when we can't see it.

PARSHA OVERVIEW

The Torah prohibits normal farming of the Land of Israel every seven years. This "Shabbat" for the land is called "shemita". This year, 5761, is a *shemita* year in Israel. After every seventh *shemita*, the fiftieth year, *yovel* (jubilee) is announced with the sound of the shofar on Yom Kippur. This was also a year for the land to lie fallow. G-d promises to provide a bumper crop prior to the *shemita* and *yovel* years. During *yovel*, all land is returned to its original division from the time of Joshua, and all Jewish indentured servants are freed, even if they have not completed their six years of work. A Jewish indentured servant may not be given any demeaning, unnecessary or

excessively difficult work, and may not be sold in the public market. The price of his labor must be calculated according to the amount of time remaining until he will automatically become free. The price of land is similarly calculated. Should anyone sell his ancestral land, he has the right to redeem it after two years. If a house in a walled city is sold, the right of redemption is limited to the first year after the sale. The Levites' cities belong to them forever. The Jewish People are forbidden to take advantage of one another by lending or borrowing with interest. Family members should redeem any relative who was sold as an indentured servant as a result of impoverishment.

WHOSE LAND IS IT?

The crux of the conflict between Israel and the Arabs is really about ownership – whose land is it? The Torah perspective on this burning issue can be found at the very beginning of the Chumash and in the chapter which Jews will read in synagogues this Shabbat.

The Torah begins with a statement that G-d created the world. Rashi explains this unexpected beginning for what is basically a Book of Law as a Divine response to those who challenge the claim of G-d's chosen people to the land which He gave them. This declaration to the nations of the world that G-d created the world and can award any portion of it to whom He wishes receives an interesting spin in this

week's portion when it is the Jews who are reminded whose land it is.

"For the land is Mine," says G-d in restricting the sale of land in *Eretz Yisrael*, "for you are sojourners and residents with Me." (*Vayikra* 25:23)

This is an important reminder to our own people that the true owner of the land is G-d, and He has established conditions for our ability to even be "sojourners and residents" in it. And if it is peace and security we desire in our land we are reminded in an earlier passage (*ibid.* 25:18) that "You shall perform My decrees and observe My ordinances and perform them; then you shall dwell securely on the land."

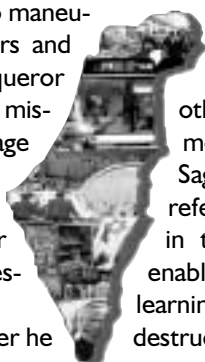
LOVE OF THE LAND - THE PEOPLE

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

RABBI YOCHANAN BEN ZAKKAI – SAVIOR OF THE SANHEDRIN

When this great Talmudic Sage managed to maneuver his way through the Zealot barriers and arrange a meeting with the Roman conqueror of *Eretz Yisrael* he was blessed with success in his mission. The general, who had been hailed by the Sage as emperor upon his arrival, saw the quick fulfillment of that prophecy when a messenger from Rome appeared to inform him that the emperor had died and that he had been elected as his successor.

In gratitude he agreed to grant the sage whatever he



wished before leaving to ascend the throne. Fearful of asking him to spare the *Beit Hamikdash* because an extreme request would result in a rejection of any other pleas, Rabbi Yochanan limited himself to three more moderate requests. "Spare me Yavneh and its Sages" was the most important of the three and referred to the Sanhedrin whose court at that time was in the city of Yavneh. The granting of this request enabled the Jewish community to maintain its center of learning and spiritual leadership even in the dark period of destruction and exile.

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Published by Ohr Somayach Tanenbaum College

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THE WRONG ADDRESS

Betzer and Batzera are two places with a similar sounding name. There is, however, a crucial difference between the two.

Betzer is in *Eretz Yisrael* and is mentioned (*Yehoshua 20:8*) as one of the cities of refuge on the east side of the Jordan where one who killed another accidentally could find safety from the blood avenger of the victim. Batzera, on the other hand, is outside the boundaries of *Eretz Yisrael*.

Two figures are associated with the mistake of confusing Betzer with Batzera, one a human and the other an angel. Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish saw Jews in Batzera eating agricultural produce without tithing it. Assuming that this was the Betzer which is in *Eretz Yisrael* he prohibited them from eating this produce before tithing it as is required of things grown in the Holy Land. But when he reported his action to Rabbi Yochanan he was told to quickly return there, even before taking his coat off, and to repeal his ruling since Batzera is not Betzer and its produce does not require tithing.

Reish Lakish, as this Sage is commonly referred to, took this lesson very much to heart. In *Mesechta Makkot (12a)* we find him applying this distinction in explaining the passage (*Yeshayahu 63:1*) which speaks of “the one coming from Edom with blood stained garments from Batzera”. This is a prophecy about the slaying in the end of days of Samael, the patron angel of the Edomite Romans, who will futilely seek refuge from Divine justice for all the Jewish blood his nation shed. His death will take place in Batzera, says Reish Lakish, which he mistakenly assumed as being Betzer, the city of refuge. Not only will this effort be foolish because refuge is available only for accidental killers and human ones only, while the fugitive here is an angel whose nation was guilty of premeditated slaughter, but he will also be making the mistake of going to the wrong address.

• *Avoda Zara 58b*

BURN AND BURY

“Burn it and bury the ashes in a cemetery!” These were the instructions given by Rabbi Chisda to a Jew who received wheat as payment for renting out his ship to transport non-Jewish wine. Since any benefit from such wine is forbidden it was necessary to eliminate the wheat in a fashion where no danger existed that any Jew would, even unknowingly, derive some sort of benefit from it.

Rabbi Chisda therefore ruled out simply scattering the wheat since someone might come across it and use it. Even

scattering its ashes after burning left open the possibility of those ashes being utilized as fertilizer. The only failsafe method, he concluded, was burning followed by burial in a cemetery.

This ruling is challenged, however, both by the *gemara* and by the commentaries. The *gemara*’s challenge is from *Mesechta Sanhedrin (55b)* where our Sages analyze the passage (*Devarim 21:23*) “You shall not leave his corpse overnight on the pole but bury it, shall you bury it on that very day.” The double use of the word “bury” teaches us that not only is the executed sinner buried, but the pole, to which the corpse of certain sinners is momentarily strapped as part of his atonement, is buried along with him. The same is true of all of the paraphernalia used in the execution of capital sinners. These items, asks the *gemara*, are buried intact and not burned before burial, so why was burning required by Rabbi Chisda?

A distinction is then made between the burial of these items in the special cemetery set aside by the court for the executed sinner, which would clearly warn anyone against making use of these items, and the situation of the wheat, which someone might come across and assume it was concealed there by a thief. Tosefot, however, raises the question as to why the forbidden wheat had to be burned and its ashes buried in a cemetery, while other forbidden items such as the carcass of an ox executed for goring a human and the hair removed from a *nazir* may be buried intact and not necessarily in a cemetery. The resolution of this challenge is that since it is not customary to bury meat or hair, the finder of these items will assume that they are forbidden items while it is feasible that a thief would bury wheat to conceal it.

This still leaves one question unanswered. Why did Rabbi Chisda insist on the burial of ashes in a cemetery and not just anywhere? Maharam explains that this requirement was added in order to publicize the ban on benefiting from the forbidden wine.

• *Avoda Zara 62b*

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PARSHA Q&A ?

1. Why does the Torah specify that the laws of *shemita* were taught on Har Sinai?
2. If one possesses *shemita* food after it is no longer available in the field, what must he do with it?
3. The Torah commands, "You shall sanctify the fiftieth year." How is this done?
4. Which two "returns" are announced by the *shofar* during *yovel*?
5. From where does the *yovel* year get its name?
6. What prohibitions are derived from the verse "*v'lo tonu ish et amito — a person shall not afflict his fellow*"?
7. What is the punishment for neglecting the laws of *shemita*?
8. If *shemita* is observed properly, how long is the crop of the sixth year guaranteed to last?
9. After selling an ancestral field, when can one redeem it?
10. Under what circumstance may one sell ancestral land?
11. If a home in a walled city is sold, when can it be redeemed?
12. What does the word "days" mean in this week's Parsha?
13. What is considered a walled city?
14. What is the definition of a "*ger toshav*"?
15. To what is one who leaves *Eretz Yisrael* compared?
16. Why does Rashi mention the plague of the firstborn in this week's Parsha?
17. List three prohibitions which demonstrate the dignity with which one must treat a Jewish indentured servant.
18. Who supports the family of the Jewish indentured servant during his years of servitude?
19. If a Jew is sold as a servant to a non-Jew, does he go free after six years?
20. Where is it permitted to prostrate oneself on a stone floor?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this week's Questions!

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

1. 25:1 - To teach us that just as *shemita* was taught in detail on Har Sinai, so too, all the *mitzvot* were taught in detail on Har Sinai.
2. 25:7 - Remove it from his property and declare it ownerless.
3. 25:10 - At the beginning of the year the *Beit Din* declares, "This year is *kadosh* (sanctified)."
4. 25:10 - The return of the land to its original owner, and the "return" (freedom) of the slave from slavery.
5. 25:10 - From the sounding of the *shofar*. A ram's horn is called a *yovel*.
6. 25:17 - One may not intentionally hurt people's feelings, nor give bad advice while secretly intending to reap benefit.
7. 25:18 - Exile.
8. 25:21,22 - From Nissan of the sixth year until Sukkot of the ninth year.
9. 25:24 - After two years following the sale, until *yovel*. At the beginning of *yovel* it returns to the family automatically.
10. 25:25 - Only if one becomes impoverished.
11. 25:29 - Only within the first year after the sale.
- Afterwards, even in *yovel*, it does not return.
12. 25:29 - The days of an entire year.
13. 25:29 - A city that has been surrounded by a wall since the time of Yehoshua.
14. 25:35 - A non-Jew who lives in *Eretz Yisrael* and accepts upon himself not to worship idols.
15. 25:38 - To one who worships idols.
16. 25:38 - The prohibition against taking interest is accompanied by the phrase, "I am Hashem your G-d who took you out of Egypt." Rashi explains that just as Hashem discerned in Egypt between those who were firstborn and those who were not, so too will Hashem discern and punish those who lend with interest, pretending they are acting on behalf of others.
17. 25:39-43 - a) Do not make him perform humiliating tasks, b) Do not sell him publicly, c) Do not make him perform unnecessary jobs
18. 25:41 - His master.
19. 25:54 - No. If he is not redeemed with money, he must wait until the *yovel* to go free.
20. 26:1 - In the *Mikdash*.

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

GIVERS AND TAKERS

The generosity of Jews towards their needy brothers reaches its peak at Pesach time. Millions of dollars in cash and grocery items were distributed to needy families in Israel by charitable organizations and municipalities.

One organization made its appeal for funds by featuring on television the heart-wrenching tale of a giver turned taker. A businessman showed viewers ten years' worth of

receipts for over 10,000 Shekels in monthly donations he gave to a local food aid organization. Viewers then saw film footage of this same fellow standing in line to receive aid from that same organization after his thriving business collapsed and left him with debts.

People who heard this story could not help seeing it as a vindication of the Talmudic comparison of charity to a wheel with givers sometimes becoming takers.

SEFIRAT HA'OMER

T H E F O R T Y N I N E S T E P S

When you look forward to something very much, when you fix your gaze on a special moment in the future, you count the days to that event. When the Jewish People left Egypt, even though their newfound freedom was very sweet to them, their gaze was fixed on a moment that Moshe told them would arrive seven weeks later, the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai.

From the second night of Pesach, every night for seven weeks, we count the days that have passed on this spiritual journey from Egypt to Sinai. We call this process "The counting of the Omer."

The emergence from Egyptian slavery marked the beginning of the physical freedom of the Jewish People. On the spiritual plane, however, we were still sunk in the morass of Egyptian immorality and spiritual pollution. 210 years of Egyptian slavery had brought us very low, down to the 49th level of spiritual corruption. We were standing at the door to the 50th

level. Before the giving of the Torah, no one who passed through that door, returned. In seven short weeks, G-d brought us from the brink of spiritual abyss to the highest level of all the generations — the Generation of Knowledge, the generation fit to receive the Torah.

Sometimes, when we think of spiritual greatness, it seems so far away from us, another galaxy. We think to ourselves that we could never be really spiritual. It's all too difficult. We're too enmeshed in the physical world and its baubles and its lures. All it took was seven short weeks for the Jewish People to rise from the pits of pollution to the heights of closeness to the Creator. The key to their success was that their gaze was heavenward. As Oscar Wilde put it "We are all in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars."

When we fix our eyes on the stars of spiritual greatness, when we turn our heads heavenwards, G-d draws us close to Him and the distance between heaven and earth is a mere seven weeks.



WHAT IS LAG B'OMER?

We are commanded by the Torah to count forty nine days starting from the second day of Passover. On the fiftieth day we celebrate the festival of Shavuot, commemorating the Giving of the Torah. This 50-day period is called "Counting the Omer." The Omer was a barley offering which was brought in the Temple on the day we start counting, the second day of Passover.

"Lag B'Omer" is the thirty third day of counting the Omer. The word "Lag" means 33 because it is comprised of the letters "lamud" and "gimmel," corresponding to the numerical values of "30" and "3."

The Omer period is a time of heightened spiritual sensitivity and growth. The closer Shavuot draws, the greater our anticipation grows for the climactic celebration of the Giving of the Torah, the watershed event of Jewish history.

However, the greater the potential there is for growth and building, the greater the potential there is for destruction. Consequently, in eras when the Jewish People have not lived up to their potential, the Omer period has become one of tragedy.

In the time of Rabbi Akiva, who witnessed the destruction of the Second Temple and who was the greatest Torah Sage of his generation, twenty four thousand of his disciples died in an epidemic. The underlying spiritual cause of the epidemic was the students' lack of respect for each other. This sad event and others took place during the Counting of the Omer. As a result, the Omer period has become one of semi-mourning in which we don't hold weddings or festivities, nor do we shave or get haircuts. But because the epidemic was suspended on the 33rd day — Lag B'Omer — Lag B'Omer has become a joyous day of celebration.

After all his students died, Rabbi Akiva "started over" and began teaching other students. One of his foremost students was Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, the author of the Zohar. The Zohar, which means "The Shining Light," is the basis of the secret teachings of the Torah. Some people light bonfires on Lag B'Omer and sing songs in honor of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, who revealed the teachings of the Zohar to the world on Lag B'Omer.

LA OR B?

Wendy from Westcliff, UK asked:

Dear Rabbi,

When counting Sefirat HaOmer, some people say La'Omer and some say B'Omer. Which is right? Doesn't the fact that everybody says "Lag B'Omer" prove that "B'Omer" is correct and not "La'Omer?"

Dear Wendy,

Rabbi Nachman Bulman, zatzal, explained that "everyone" calls the day "Lag B'Omer" because the main proponents of saying "B'Omer" are Rabbi Yitzchak Luria — the Arizal — and the Sephardi Kabbalists. Celebrating Lag B'Omer with bonfires, music and dancing is largely rooted in their kabbalistic teachings and traditions.

Most poskim say that "La'Omer" is correct. However, both ways are valid, so there is no reason to change one's custom. In fact, even if you say "today is day such and such" — omitting any reference to the "Omer" — you fulfill the mitzva.

By the way, not everyone calls it "Lag B'Omer." The Shulchan Aruch refers to it as "Lag La'Omer."

Which reminds me of the two Jews who argued during their entire plane ride regarding the correct pronunciation of Hawaii.

Upon landing in Honolulu, they asked the first native on the island "Is it pronounced Hawaii or Havaii?"

"Havaii," he replied.

"Thank you," they said.

"You're welcome," said the native.

Sources:

- Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 489:1, 493:2
- Mishneh Berurah 489:8

DREAMS

From: Rob in Passaic, NJ

Dear Rabbi,

What does Judaism say about dreams?

Dear Rob,

Judaism says a lot about dreams. Jacob dreamt of angels ascending and descending a ladder reaching to heaven, revealing to him the site of the Holy Temple. Joseph dreamt that the sun, moon, and eleven stars bowed before him, portending his future greatness. King Solomon also had a dream

in which G-d offered him anything he wanted, and in reward for requesting understanding, he was given wealth and long life as well.

However, not all dreams are real. Our Sages taught that many dreams are caused by physical influences such as the food we eat, and by things we do or think during the day. Once the King of Persia, who was at war with Rome, approached one of the Rabbis saying, "You Jews are supposed to be very clever, tell me what I'll see in my dream." The Sage replied, "You'll see the Romans taking you captive and making you grind date-pits in a golden mill." The King thought about it all day, and, sure enough, he dreamed of it that night.

Other dreams are caused by spiritual influences. The Zohar states that as people sleep, the soul rises to a higher plane. There, it encounters either negative or positive forces. This experience is transmitted to the imagination and perceived as a dream. An experience with a negative force results in an untrue dream, of which it is said "dreams speak falsehood" (*Zechariah 10:2*).

Interaction with a positive force results in a true dream, referred to in the verse "In a dream, in a vision of the night...G-d opens the ears of man" (*Job 33:15*). However, it is interesting that Joseph's dream included the moon, which symbolized his mother, even though she was no longer living at the time. From here our Sages derived that even true dreams have inaccuracies. Which reminds me of a story:

One night, Yankel, the tailor of Pletstk, dreamed he saw a bridge. By the bridge stood a sentry. Under the bridge lay buried a treasure.

When he awoke, Yankel took some food and a pick-ax and set off. After many days, he came to a bridge, and under the bridge was the very sentry he'd dreamed of, standing there. Yankel took his pick-ax and began to dig. "What in blazes!" cried the soldier. Yankel told the soldier of his dream, whereupon the soldier broke out laughing.

"You fool," the soldier said. "If I believed in dreams, I'd be off to a little Jewish town called Pletstk; I'd break down the door of a little tailor named Yankel; I'd push over his cast-iron stove, and if dreams be true I'd find there a buried treasure. Ha! Ha! Ha!"

Yankel gasped. He snatched up his tools, ran home, and pushed aside his cast-iron stove. There it was — the buried treasure!

Sources:

- Genesis 28:12; 37:5; Kings I 3:5
- Tractate Berachot 55a, 56a
- Zohar, Parshat Vayeshev p. 412
- Derech Hashem 3:1:6

WHEN NOT TO TELL IT AS IT IS

Question: A friend of mine recently purchased a second-hand automobile and is anxious to show me the acquisition he is so proud of. I happen to know that this car is not what he thinks it is. Should I tell him what I really think or should I let him be happy in his ignorance?

Answer: The right thing for you to do depends on the seriousness of the problem with the car. If it is of so substantial a nature that your friend will have real trouble in driving and maintaining such a vehicle there is a likelihood that he would, upon hearing this from you, be able to cancel the bad deal he made and get his money back. If this is indeed the case you have a responsibility to help him retrieve his investment just as you would have to return a lost item which you found.

If, however, it is simply a matter that you don't like the car he bought and believe he could have done a better deal your

obligation is to make him feel good about his purchase. The source for this is a debate in the Talmud (*Mesechet Ketubot 17a*) between the Academies of Hillel and Shammai about how one should sing the praises of a bride. In contrast to the Shammai approach that one must refrain from praising her charms when there is something obviously wrong with her because this would be considered a falsehood, the Hillel approach is to offer comprehensive praise. To support this position these Sages rhetorically ask: "When one has made a purchase do you praise it or put it down?" The obvious answer is that you praise it in line with the caution of our Sages that one should always strive to get along with people.

Why this is not considered a falsehood, explains Maharsha, is that we must assume that the purchaser was attracted to the item he bought, and you are merely praising the "beauty in the eye of the beholder".

PUBLIC DOMAIN _____

COMMENTS, QUIBBLES AND REACTIONS CONCERNING PREVIOUS "OHRNET" FEATURES

Re: Meaning of "Ohr" (Ohrnet Magazine)

What does "Ohr" stand for? My wife and I were curious and are unable to ascertain the meaning. Thank you for your time

• Michael

Ohrnet replied:

Good question and please don't hesitate to ask further questions. "Ohr" means light in Hebrew.

Michael replied: Thank you for your prompt reply! One day I would love to learn Hebrew. Once again, thank you ever so much.

Re: A Rabbi (Ohrnet Spring Issue)

In Sepharic countries the term for Rabbi is "Haham". In the simple meaning it is "wise". Some say it was a short term for "talmid haham", meaning a wise man who is always studying.

• Samuel Cohen

DID YOU KNOW THAT... _____

...the Israeli version of "Okay" is "*Hakol B'Seder*" which literally means "All is in order". Judging from a recent poll this phrase takes on a new meaning – that "all were at the Seder". The poll found that 94% of Israelis took part in some form of Pesach Seder this year, the highest rate ever recorded in Israel. Hotels hosted some 100,000 people for the Seder meal.

לע"נ
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