

# OHRNET

THE OHR SOMAYACH TORAH MAGAZINE ON THE INTERNET

## PARSHA INSIGHTS

### ENOUGH TO TURN YOUR FACE GREEN

*“You are standing today, all of you...” (29:9)*

Nothing is more frightening than the unknown. As little children, we asked our parents to leave the door open just a little so that some light could spill in from the hall. Nothing is as foreboding as an unspecified threat. We have no way of dealing with a vague menace, for we don't really know what it is that threatens us, and our imaginations run riot.

The Midrash asks what is the connection between this week's Parsha and the 98 curses that conclude last week's Parsha. It answers: “The Jewish People heard one hundred curses minus two... Immediately their faces turned green and they said ‘Who can exist in the face of these curses?’ ”

The terminology of this Midrash is puzzling. Why does it say “one hundred curses minus two?” Wouldn't it be easier to say 98? Does the Midrash need to probe our knowledge of basic arithmetic?

Nothing turns one's face green quicker than the fear of the unknown. The Jewish People had just heard 98 curses. 98 curses for 98 reasons. And each of those reasons naturally had its own cure. What really frightened the Jewish People was the hidden curses contained in the words “Even any illness and any blow that is not written in this Book of the Torah, Hashem will bring upon you until you are destroyed.” (28:61) These two curses turned their faces green

because the reasons for them were left unspecified. One can well imagine the thoughts that ran through the minds of the people: “Maybe these two curses are worse than everything which preceded them? Maybe that's why the Torah doesn't reveal their true nature?” It's enough to turn one's face green.

Moshe immediately assuaged their anxiety and told them that these curses were not in order to annihilate them, rather to test them — “For you are all standing today.” The essence of

“When a person puts his heart and soul into doing a mitzvah, he can connect to the power which G-d has locked into every mitzvah, the power to connect to the Source of the mitzvah, to connect to G-d.”

the curses is to ensure that the Jewish People will stand, not that they will fall.

### HEADS UP!

*“You are standing today, all of you, before Hashem your G-d” (29:9)*

Standing means in this context “with your head held high.” A person can hold his head high for two reasons. He can think a lot of

himself and stand tall with self-important smugness. Or he can hold his head high for a different reason.

Man is set between the animals and the angels. If he fills his life with vanity and the empty frenetic rush to fulfill his own desires, then he falls to the level of an animal. Really however, he is worse than an animal, because an animal is supposed to behave like an animal. A man isn't.

On the other hand, if he conquers his negative instincts, sanctifies and purifies his thoughts, his words and his actions, Man raises himself to the level of an angel. In reality, however, he has raised himself higher than an angel, for angels have no negative drives to overcome. This makes Man's ascent so much the greater.

That's the other meaning of *standing with your head held high*: The whole year round a person is constricted by the pressures of the material world — his head and his thoughts bent downwards like an animal, dealing with all the petty nonsense that is part of survival. On Rosh Hashana, however, (it's no coincidence that *rosh* in Hebrew means head) his head — the head of the angel — is held high over his body — the animal. And necessarily if he is an angel, then he must be even higher than an angel, for “Today you are all standing” — with your heads held high.

### THE WILL AND THE SELF

*“For this commandment that I command you today — it is not hidden from you...” (30:11)*

How is it possible for us to have a relationship with G-d? We are finite mortal beings

*continued on page three*

## PARSHA OVERVIEW

**O**n the last day of his life, Moshe gathers together all the people, both young and old, lowly and exalted, men and women, in a final initiation. The covenant includes not only those who are present, but even those generations yet unborn. Moshe admonishes the people again to be extremely vigilant against idol worship, because in spite of having witnessed the abominations of Egypt there will always be the temptation to experiment with foreign philosophies as a pretext for immorality. Moshe describes the desolation of the Land of Israel which will be a result of the failure to heed Hashem's *mitzvos*. Both their descendants and foreigners alike will remark on the singular desolation of the Land and its

apparent inability to be sown or to produce crops. The conclusion will be apparent to all — the Jewish People have forsaken the One who protects them, in favor of idols which can do nothing. Moshe promises, however, that the people will eventually repent after both the blessings and the curses have been fulfilled. However assimilated they will have become among the nations, eventually Hashem will bring them back to *Eretz Yisrael*. Moshe tells the people to remember that the Torah is not a remote impossibility; rather its fulfillment is within the grasp of every Jew. The Parsha concludes with a dramatic choice between life and death. Moshe exhorts the people to choose life.

## HAFTORAH: YISHAYAHU 61:10-63:9

**I**n this last of the seven Haftoras of Consolation, the Prophet Yeshayahu describes how, just as the land will seem to bloom and flourish without any prior cultivation in the time of the *Mashiach*, so Hashem will redeem his people and shower them with kindness without any prior action on their part, and without them deserving it, rather Hashem will bestow His kindness, through his infinite generosity.

In the last days Hashem will come “stained with blood from the battle with Esav/Edom/Rome and its spiritu-

al heir” to liberate His people and reveal that He has been with them in every exile, frustrating the designs of those who wished to obliterate them.

### WHY PEACE HAS NO CHANCE

*“For Zion’s sake, I will not be silent, and for Yerushalyim’s sake, I will not be still”*

**W**hy is it that the history of the world over the past two thousand years has been a constant tale of conflict and turmoil? Surely after all this time, we should have been able to advance a little bit and coexist in some kind of harmony. Why is it that the world is as dangerous a place — or *more* dangerous a place — than it was thousands of years ago? In the areas of

science and technology, we have seen tremendous strides. We look back at the “technology” of a few hundred years ago as if it was primitive in the extreme. Why has there been no parallel development in the relations between the nations of the world?

The answer is that G-d has put into the creation a restlessness, a lack of tranquillity, which is the metaphysical reflection of the exile of the Jewish People. While the Jewish People still languish in their final exile, there *will* be no tranquillity in the world: “For Zion’s sake, I will not be silent, and for Yerushalyim’s sake, I will not be still.” Rather the world will know no peace until the final redemption comes.

• Targum Yonason

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## PARSHA INSIGHTS

confined by time and space. G-d is none of these things. How can we ever bridge this chasm and have a relationship with the infinite?

Let's answer one question with another: How do you know what a person is really like on the inside? How can you know a person's essence?

A person is what he wants. What someone wants is who they are. The will expresses the self.

The *mitzvos* — the commandments — are the Will of G-d. They are, quite literally, what G-d wants. So the

*mitzvos* show us, within the limits of our comprehension, "Who" G-d is. G-d's *mitzvos* however, are not like those of a flesh and blood monarch. The commandments of an earthly ruler are mere words. They don't connect us to the monarch. The *mitzvos* of Hashem, however, in themselves are the conduit by which we attach ourselves to G-dliness.

We can see this is the terminology of the *beracha* "Who has commanded us in His commandments...." This power of the command "is not hidden from you," for when a person puts his

heart and soul into doing a *mitzvah*, he can connect to the power which G-d has locked into every *mitzvah*, the power to connect to the Source of the *mitzvah*, to connect to G-d.

We can see this idea in the teaching of our Sages: "The reward of a *mitzvah* — is a *mitzvah*." The reward of a *mitzvah* is that we connect to the power of the *mitzvah* which is the power to connect us to its Source.

Sources:

*Enough To Turn Your Face Green* - Kli Yakar  
*Heads Up!* - Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Zevin

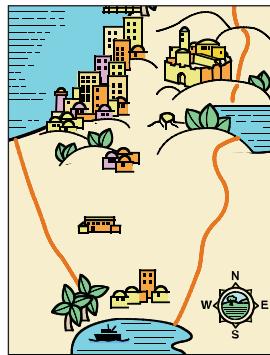
## LOVE OF THE LAND

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

### INDIRECT VANDALISM

The elimination of idol worship in Eretz Yisrael was a responsibility delegated to the Jewish People upon their entry into the Land. They were commanded to destroy the idols, smash their altars and wipe out any trace of their name.

This command is followed by the warning "You shall not do thus to Hashem, your G-d" (*Devarim 12:4*). The simple reading of this passage is that we are warned not to do to the sacred items connected with Hashem that which we are instructed to do to those of the idol worshippers. Our Sages conclude



from this that one who smashes even a stone from the Sanctuary or the altar, or one who erases even one letter of the Holy Name, has violated this prohibition.

Rabbi Gamliel, however, sees another dimension in this warning: Of course Jews are not suspect of destroying their altars, says Rabbi Gamliel; rather, the Torah is warning us not to imitate the idolatrous ways of the heathens and cause our Sanctuary and altar to be destroyed as a result of our sins.

• Sifri, Parshas Re'eh

### I DIDN'T KNOW THAT!

**U'vacharta bachaim — Choose life!** (*Devarim 30:19*)

*B'chaim* (life) refers to the Torah, as follows: *B'chaim* has the *gematria* (numerical value) of 70, and "there are 70 facets of understanding the Torah (*Bamidbar Rabba 13*)."

• Ba'al Haturim

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## WEEKLY DAF

PESACHIM 30 - 36

### BURIED TREASURE?

The Torah prohibition that *chametz* not be “found” in the possession of a Jew includes even such *chametz* which has been stored out of reach and out of sight (*Pesachim 5b*). What if the *chametz* is out of reach and out of sight through no action of the owner, but because a wall collapsed and buried beneath its rubble the *chametz* stored within it?

The *mishna* informs us that *chametz* buried beneath thick rubble, so thick that no dog will smell the scent of the food and be tempted to dig for it, is considered as if it had been removed from the world. Rabbi Chisda, however, adds that although the owner is not required to dig up the buried *chametz*, he is required to relinquish ownership through the declaration of annulment — “*bitul*.” (Although Rabbi Chisda states that one performs *bitul* “in his heart,” this means only that one does not have to make a public declaration.)

While some commentaries contend that this *bitul* is required by Torah law, since the *chametz* is still in the possession of its owner, the mainstream view is that of Rashi and Rabbeinu Nissim. They explain that as regards Torah law, there is no responsibility for *chametz* removed from reach through circumstances beyond the control of the owner. Rabbi Chisda is only citing a Rabbinic law requiring the owner to perform *bitul* because of the possibility that he may decide to dig up the rubble during the intermediate days of Pesach, and he would then become responsible for the *chametz* had he not renounced ownership of it.

Should the pile of rubble be so large that it is beyond the owner’s ability to remove it even if he wished to do so, it is the opinion of one of the authorities cited by *Mishna Berura* (433:8 *Shaar Hatziun* 48) that no *bitul* is needed, because something which is lost from everyone is no longer considered as being in the possession of the owner.

• *Pesachim 31b*

### THE SWEET AND THE BITTER

One cannot fulfill the mitzvah of eating bitter herbs — *maror* — on the eve of Pesach by eating first fruits — *bikkurim*. The reason seems simple enough: *Maror* must be bitter, and none of the seven species (for which *Eretz Yisrael* is praised in the Torah) which are annually brought to the *Beis Hamikdash* as “first fruit” gifts to the *kohanim* are bitter.

But what about olives? asks Tosefos. Our Sages tell us (*Eruvin 18a*) that the dove which Noach sent out of the ark to test the level of the receding flood water returned with an olive leaf in its mouth, as if to pray before Hashem: “May my food be bitter like an olive but come directly from Your hand, rather than be sweet as honey but dependent on flesh and blood like Noach.”

It is not the fruit of the olive tree which is bitter, answers Tosefos, but rather the tree itself; indeed, it was a *leaf* from the olive tree which the dove had in its mouth, and not the fruit.

As further proof that it is the olive tree itself which is bitter, Tosefos cites a Midrash: After the splitting of the *Yam Suf*, the Jewish People came to a place called Marah where the water was undrinkable because of its bitterness. In response to Moshe Rabbeinu’s prayers, Hashem directed him to throw a piece of a tree into the bitter waters and they became drinkable (*Shmos 15:25*). That was an olive tree, says the Midrash (*Mechilta*) because its wood is the bitterest of all trees and Hashem wanted to stress the miracle of extreme bitterness making the water sweet.

• *Pesachim 36a*

“And inscribe all the children of Your covenant for a good life.”

*Rosh Hashanah prayers*

THE OHR SOMAYACH FAMILY  
wishes you a *Ksiva V'chasima Tova*.

## PARSHA Q&A ?

1. Why did Moshe gather the Jewish People together on the day of his death?
2. Who were the wood-cutters and water-drawers mentioned in verse 29:10?
3. How do two parties “pass” into a covenant?
4. What is the connection between the verse “*Atem nitzavim*” and the curses in the previous *parsha*?
5. Why can't Hashem disassociate himself from the Jewish People?
6. How many curses were listed in *Parshas Ki Savo*?
7. Which two leaders followed Moshe's example and assembled the people at the end of their rule?
8. With whom did Moshe make the covenant and oath?
9. Why did the Jewish People see only idols of wood and stone?
10. What is meant by the punishment of “adding drunkenness to thirst (29:18)?”
11. The Hebrew word for nose and anger are the same. What is the connection?
12. Why is Hashem described in anthropomorphic terms?
13. What two cities were destroyed along with Sodom and Amorah?
14. When is the entire nation punished for the sins of an individual?
15. When and where did the Jewish People become culpable for each other's sins (*areivim zeh lazeh*)?
16. According to Rashi, how will the day of the ingathering of the exiles be “great and difficult?”
17. If the Torah remained in heaven, what would be expected of us?
18. In what way is the Torah close to the Jewish People?
19. Why did Hashem call the Heaven and Earth as witnesses to the covenant between Him and the Jewish People?
20. What should the Jewish People learn from the way the Heaven and Earth function?

## BONUS QUESTION?

Watstein scratched his head, perplexed. “The verse,” he said, “says: *You are all standing here this day in front of Hashem your G-d: Your tribal heads, your elders, your officers...from your wood choppers to your water carriers.... (Devarim 29:10)*. Rashi says that these wood choppers and water carriers were specifically Canaanites who converted in the time of Moshe. Apparently, they tried to fool Moshe into thinking they were not Canaanites; Moshe, of course, wasn't fooled, and fined them for their irrever-

ence by relegating them to slave status.”

“Deservedly so, wouldn't you say?” said world famous detective Sherlock Holmes.

“But how does Rashi know that it refers to a specific class of people? Perhaps it simply refers to any Jew, converted or native-born, who happened to be a wood chopper or water carrier?”

“The commentaries answer your question Watstein, but I've got an answer of my own....”

answer on page eight

## PARSHA Q&A!

### Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

1. 29:9 - To initiate them into the covenant with Hashem.
2. 29:10 - Canaanites who came to join the Jewish People.
3. 29:11 - The two parties place objects in two parallel lines and pass between them.
4. 29:12 - The Jewish People asked, “Who can survive such curses?” Moshe comforted them, saying, “You've done a lot to anger Hashem, and yet — *‘atem nitzavim*’ — Hashem didn't destroy you ... you're still standing before Him.”
5. 29:12 - Because He told them and swore to the Avos (Patriarchs) that the Jewish People would always remain His nation.
6. 29:12 - Ninety-eight.
7. 29:12 - Yehoshua and Shmuel.
8. 29:14 - With the people standing before him and all future generations.
9. 29:16 - Because these were exposed openly. The idols of gold and silver however, were locked away by their owners for fear of theft.
10. 29:18 - Even unintentional sins will be considered by Hashem as if they were committed intentionally. “Drunkenness” refers to sins committed unintentionally. “Thirst” refers to sins committed intentionally.
11. 29:19 - When one gets angry, his nostrils flare.
12. 29:19 - The Torah speaks in terms that people can understand.
13. 29:22 - Admah and Tsevoyim.
14. 29:28 - When the Jewish People fail to bring the sinner to judgment.
15. 29:28 - When the Jewish People took the oath at Mt. Gerizim and Mt. Eval.
16. 30:3 - It will be as if Hashem needs to take each individual by the hand and lead him out of exile.
17. 30:12 - To pursue it in order to study it.
18. 30:14 - It was given to them in oral and written form.
19. 30:19 - Because they exist forever and will be able to testify if the Jewish People sin in the future.
20. 30:19 - Heaven and the Earth don't receive reward or punishment, yet they never deviate from their ordained functions. All the more so, we, who are rewarded for good behavior, should do Hashem's will.

## AWE-FULL MARRIAGE

Amy <clancyport@aol.com> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,  
Why are marriages not encouraged during the Days of Awe between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur?

Dear Amy,

While there is no prohibition against marrying between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, it is customary to refrain from doing so. Because these are days of judgment, we want to direct our primary energies towards repentance: Reflecting on our performance during the past year, and taking steps to improve.

Once, before Yom Kippur, the famed Rabbi Yitzchak Blazer saw one of his students buying an *etrog*, one of the four species needed for the *Succot* festival occurring shortly after Yom Kippur. "Repentance you have achieved already?" Rabbi Blazer asked him. His point was that, unless you have attained perfection of character, you should direct your primary focus towards repentance during these days, and leave other matters for after Yom Kippur.

## ROSH HASHANA IN A SCHNAPPS GLASS

David from Pittsburgh, PA  
<glick@nuauticom.net> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,  
Could you email me a brief description of Rosh Hashana? I would like to use it for my web page.

Dear David,

The first day of *Tishrei* is called "a day of shofar blasting" (*Numbers 29:1*). Our oral tradition tells us that this day marks the anniversary of the creation of the world. Hence it is the day when, every year, G-d "takes stock" of Creation, judging our actions. Thus, we call it Rosh Hashana, the "Head" of the Year; for just as the head directs the body, so too, G-d's judgment on Rosh Hashana directs the events of the coming year.

Rosh Hashana is a two-day festival which we honor and enjoy with special (new) clothing and festive meals. There is a prohibition against certain types of

work. We light holiday candles and recite *kiddush* over wine. We eat sweet apples dipped in honey, in prayer that we merit a good, sweet year. The highlight of the daily prayer service is the sounding of the shofar, the ram's horn.

For more, see *Ohr Somayach Interactive*, our web site, particularly the following:

<http://www.ohr.org.il/special/roshhash/index.htm>

There's lot's there. Feel free to link your site to as many articles and features as you like.

## PHYSICAL FITNESS

Anon from Australia  
<nswbje@tmx.com.au> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,  
What is the rationale behind the prohibition of not wearing leather shoes on Yom Kippur?

Dear Anon,

The shoe symbolizes the physical body. Just as the shoe encases the lowest part of the body and allows it to ambulate in the world, so too the body encases the lowest level of the soul and allows it to ambulate and relate to the physical world.

Therefore, whenever G-d wants a person to relate on a totally spiritual level, ignoring the body, He commands him to remove his shoes. This was true when G-d spoke to Moses and to Joshua; it was true for the *kohanim* in the Temple in Jerusalem, and it is true for every Jew on Yom Kippur. We ignore the physical for one day a year, and to symbolize this we remove our leather shoes. Leather specifically, because it came from a living creature and hence symbolizes the body in a much more graphic way than other materials.

The shoe is also removed in a ceremony called "*chalitzah*," as follows: If one of two brothers dies childless, it is a mitzvah for the widow and the surviving brother to marry each other. If the brother refuses, then the widow is to remove his shoe, signifying that he does not deserve physical comfort or even a body, because he refuses to give a physical form to his deceased brother's soul.

## RING AROUND THE SHOFAR

Jeffrey Gold from Stamford, CT  
<la@iname.com> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,  
There is a practice I have seen in many synagogues during the High Holidays for children to come up to the bimah for the blowing of the shofar. Where does this come from?

Dear Jeffrey Gold,

It is an expansion of the custom to bring the children to the synagogue in order to educate them in the practicing of *mitzvos*. They come closer so they can more easily see and hear the shofar. However, if this practice causes a disturbance it should be abolished.

## PAYING FOR PRAYING

John from Sweden  
<slm95ej9@student.l.lu.se>  
wrote:

Dear Rabbi,  
Synagogue fees: Is it in accordance with Jewish law to take fees from local Jews just to attend the synagogue?

Dear John,

It is certainly the accepted norm to pay a membership fee to the synagogue in which one prays.

First of all, paying fosters a stronger sense of communal spirit; when a person pays for something, he comes to value it more than had he received it for free. Paying a synagogue fee tends to make a person feel more a part of the community.

But on a practical note, synagogues have tremendous expenses: Books, rent or mortgage, electricity, heat, water, furniture, cleaning supplies, structural maintenance, salaries, social services, etc. Who is supposed to pay for it all, if not the people who avail themselves of the synagogue's services? Even if charitable donors pay for many of these costs, why shouldn't each participant also contribute to the remaining costs according to his/her ability?

(Note: The above is a general description of the appropriateness of paying synagogue fees; it isn't a definitive ruling regarding any specific case. Rulings in such matters should be sought from a rabbi or adjudicating body (*beit din*) personally familiar with the claims of *both* parties.)

Sources:

- Shulchan Aruch Choshen Mishpat 163:1

## YIDDELS AND KITTELS

Alan Shear <alshear@global.co.za> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

I have read through the entire section of Rosh Hashana in the Mishna Berura, yet found no source which mentions the custom of the *shaliach tzibbur* (cantor), the *ba'al tokeah* (one who sounds the shofar), or the *ba'al korei* (public Torah reader) to wear a *kittel* (white ritual robe) on Rosh Hashana. Is there in fact a source for this custom? Certainly on Yom Kippur, but no source for Rosh Hashana!

Dear Alan Shear,

There are two reasons given why a *kittel* is worn: 1) The *kittel*, being a plain white garment, symbolizes purity from sin. 2) A person is buried wearing a *kittel*. Therefore, when a person wears a *kittel* he feels humble and remorseful for his sins, remembering the day of death.

According to reason #1, the *kittel* would only seem appropriate for Yom Kippur, when we are cleansed of our sins, but not for Rosh Hashana. Reason #2 is also not totally applicable to Rosh Hashana; although Rosh Hashana is a day of repentance, it is also a joyous holiday of solemn celebration and one should not display undue sadness.

In some communities the *kittel* is in fact worn on Rosh Hashana by all congregants. This custom is mentioned by *Match Moshe* and has its source in a midrash which describes how the Jewish people wear white on Rosh Hashana, confident that their sins will be forgiven. Perhaps the custom you mention, namely that the *shaliach tzibbur*, *ba'al tokeah* and *ba'al korei* wear a *kittel* is based on this midrash, due to their crucial role in the Rosh Hashana services.

Sources:

- Yalkut Shimoni 4:825
- See Aruch Hashulchan Orach Chaim 581:13

## PUBLIC DOMAIN

Comments, quibbles and reactions concerning previous "Ohrnet" features

**Re: Reimbursement for Yom Tov Expenses (Ohrnet Chukas):**

Although it is generally true that a person is reimbursed for clothing that is bought for Yom Tov, there is an important factor to keep in mind. It is explained with a parable of a wealthy man who has two married children. One child is very wealthy while the other one is poor. The father sends out invitations to the two children, inviting them to come visit him in honor of a third child's *bar mitzvah*. The father asks that, in his honor, they buy new clothing, and that whatever they spend for this, he will repay. The wealthy child spends a fortune, adorning himself and his family in the finest raiment, while the poor child is unable even to borrow the amount needed to buy the simplest of new clothing. After the *bar mitzvah*, the wealthy child presents his father with a hefty bill, which the father refuses to pay: "I promised to pay expenses incurred in my honor," says the father. "Had you been concerned with my honor, you would have seen to it that your poor brother attended the *bar mitzvah* in new cloth-

ing. As it occurred, he arrived in rags."

So too, G-d promises to reimburse you for what you spend for Shabbos and Yom Tov; but only if you prove that you are doing so to honor the Shabbos, by providing for the needy and the poor just as you do for yourself.

- Dovid <needmail@aol.com>

Regarding whether buying one's wife a new dress for Yom Tov is included in the "Divine reimbursement" one receives for "Shabbat, Yom Tov, and children's Torah education" (*Beitzah 16a*): You may be astonished to find that the *Shita Mekubetzes* in the name of the *Ritva* says that the "Divine reimbursement" applies to expenses of *all mitzvos*, and that these three were chosen as examples because they are common and regular. Not a lot of people know that! Yours faithfully,

- Dons Hool, Kollel Ponevez Bnei Brak <ruthie@bsnet.co.uk>

**Re: Missing numbers in the sequence (Matos-Masei Ohrnet Yiddle Riddle):**

Another excellent Yiddle Riddle that created lots of interesting discussions in my *kollel*, as per usual. But you missed one: The number 298 would normally be spelled *raysh tzadi chet*, but since that spells "murder," therefore in one of the newer editions of the *Mishna Berura* the order of the letters are reversed. (In an older edition it appears as normal.)

- Avi and Dalia Davidowitz, Bait Vegan, Jerusalem

## THE OTHER SIDE OF THE STORY

## GIVING PEOPLE THE BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT

In the following true story, one of our readers tried to fulfill the mitzvah to judge favorably; it was hard, though, because apparently...

### IT JUST DIDN'T GEL

My husband was convinced I was making a mistake sending money to someone I knew nothing about, in expectation of receiving merchandise in the mail. But I was desperate. I had been suffering with a skin irritation which creams and lotions hardly alleviated, and the pain was getting unbearable.

Then one day I saw an item in the newspaper describing an imported gel made of aloe vera which could possibly give me relief. I called Mr. H. whose cellular phone number was listed in the paper. He sounded quite sympathetic,

even offering to give me the name and number of an alternative medicine practitioner who had helped him. He said the gel could make me feel better. I sent my check and two days later received his call thanking me for my order. I was informed the package would arrive within several days. I waited impatiently, but when two weeks had elapsed with no sign of the item, I decided to call Mr. H. An answering machine told me to leave a message, which I did. Mr. H. did not return my call. I called several times after that, only to be told that the answering device was full and couldn't accept any more messages.

My husband was now giving me the "I told you so" routine. I didn't know what to make of all this and began to think that perhaps he was correct. My husband suggested contacting a government agency dealing with fraudulent mail practices. I was undecided. About four weeks after

placing my order, I received a call from Mr. H. He was very upset and apologetic and told me my package had just been returned to him by the post office. Apparently some postal clerk couldn't read my address which had been written in English. Mr. H. promised to re-mail the package immediately. When I asked why he hadn't returned my call, he told me he had changed cellular phone numbers and never got my message. This time he gave me his new number, and his home number as well. The item arrived several days later (now with my address written in Hebrew). Soon thereafter, I received another call from Mr. H. asking whether the gel had arrived and whether it had helped me. He turned out to be a *mentch* after all!

• Submitted by Harriet Sunshine, Petach Tikvah, Israel

Concept based on "The Other Side of the Story" by Yehudis Samet, ArtScroll Series

## YIDDLE RIDDLE

**Last week, we asked:** At the time of the *Beit Hamikdash* (Holy Temple), there was a town near the Euphrates in which the first day of Pesach was always observed for one day. The first day of Succot, however, was sometimes observed 1 day and sometimes 2. Why?

**Answer:** This town was 11 day's traveling distance from Jerusalem. When *Rosh Chodesh* (New Moon) was proclaimed in Jerusalem, messengers went out to inform the people. Even though these messengers did not travel on Shabbat, they would always reach this town in time for Pesach, because at most only two Sabbaths interrupted their journey, giving them 13 days to get there (11 of travel plus 2 of rest). This is enough time to arrive before Pesach, which is on the 15th of Nissan.

Before Succot, however, there are two additional holidays: Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. These are additional days on which the messengers did not travel. Therefore, sometimes the messengers would arrive in time for Succot and sometimes they would not. It depends: If both Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur occur on weekdays, they "use up" two additional travel days. If so, the messengers need 15 days to get there (11 travel plus 2 Sabbaths plus 2 holidays = 15). This is not enough time to arrive before Succot, which is on the 15th of Tishrei. Not knowing the correct date, they therefore needed to observe two days due to doubt. If either Rosh Hashana or Yom Kippur occur on Shabbat, however, they gain a day and arrive on time.

## BONUS ANSWER!

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"Rashi," said Sherlock, "says that these verses list the people in order of importance: *Your tribal heads, your elders, your officers* (29:9)."

"It makes sense, then, that wood choppers are last," said Watstein,

"Not really," said Sherlock. "In Torah terms, a person's importance is based not on his societal status, but rather on the merit of his actions and the sincerity of his striving to understand and fulfill his Divine mission. As Maimonides writes: Some of the greatest Sages of Israel were *wood choppers and water carriers* (*Hilchos Talmud Torah* 1:9)."

"True," said Watstein, "a menial livelihood doesn't detract from a person's spiritual stature."

"Here too," said Sherlock, "*wood choppers and water carriers* cannot merely describe a group whose livelihood happened to be such — for this would be irrelevant to the context '*You are all standing here this day in front of Hashem your G-d*' — in front of Hashem, great and small are equal. Rather, it must refer to a group of people whose lesser status is not due to being wood choppers, but to some other factor; namely, their disreputable behavior.

• Sherlock concept by Reuven Subar

## RECOMMENDED READING LIST

**RAMBAN**  
29:18 Refusing the Covenant  
29:28 Accidental Sins  
30:2 Returning to Hashem

30:6 Divine Help  
**SFORNO**  
29:18 Denying the Curse

30:6 Clinging to Hashem  
30:9-10 Our Own Merit  
30:11 Repentance in Exile



# The Secret of Tashlich

by Rabbi Dovid Orlofsky

One of my fondest memories of Rosh Hashana, growing up in suburban Long Island, was *tashlich*. For those of you who don't know, *tashlich* is a ceremony that takes place on the first day of Rosh Hashana in the afternoon. That alone was enough to endear *tashlich* to me, because it meant that the synagogue services were over. As a kid growing up, I was sure that the High Holiday services were in themselves a source of penitence. I figured if you could live through the eight hour service, listening to the cantorial performances, G-d would feel so bad for you, He would immediately forgive all your sins.

Another nice thing about *tashlich* was the chance to commune with nature. The way *tashlich* works is as follows: You go down to a river, preferably one with fish, and you empty your pockets into the water. You then read from the book of the Prophet Micha verses about *teshuva*, repentance. Then, in solemn procession you return to synagogue for the afternoon service.

Now that I live in Jerusalem, *tashlich* just hasn't been the same. You see, Jerusalem isn't blessed with many rivers. Although we have several wadis that serve as the runoff for untreated sewage, it's just not the same. So Jerusalemites have to be more creative. People stand at the bottom of water tanks, on the hills above swimming pools, beside their kitchen sinks or above sealed pits that legend says used to be wells.

A number of years ago I was spending Rosh Hashana in the yeshiva where I was teaching, and we went in search of *tashlich*. We followed the natives to a local park where there was a large yellow metal box. Inside, we were told, was a well. I emptied my pockets and began reciting the verses when one of my students came over to me. Sadly, he had never seen *tashlich*. "What exactly are we doing here, Rabbi?" he asked innocently. "We are casting our sins into the water," I responded. He looked at me in disbelief. "You're kidding, right? I mean, won't they just bounce off the box?" That made me stop, and together we stared at the box.

I guess when there is an actual river there, it's a little easier to imagine you're throwing your sins into the water. But does that make any more sense? How can we just throw away our sins? Don't we have to repent? Don't we have to resolve to change, to become better people? Does

this mean I don't have to go to synagogue anymore and listen to the cantor?

It seems to me that the purpose of the *tashlich* ceremony is in fact to facilitate our desire to do *teshuva*, to return to G-d. There are two terms in Judaism that are important terms for understanding the proper approach to life. When a boy becomes thirteen and a girl twelve, they become *bar mitzvah* or *bas mitzvah*, respectively. Literally that means becoming a "son or a daughter of the commandments." But when a person violates a transgression, they become a *ba'al aveira*, literally an "owner of sin." You are viewed as a *child* of a mitzvah, but a *possessor* of transgression.

The difference is profound. When a child does something wrong, or when a child does something bad, or for that matter when a child does something that is the epitome of evil, there are two things you can say. You can tell him "You're a bad boy," or you can say "You are a good boy who did something bad." What's the difference? Well, if you tell him he's bad, then the next time he does something bad, it becomes impossible to rebuke him. What are you going to say to him? "Why did you do that bad thing?" He has a perfect defense: "I'm bad. I did it because I'm bad. Bad people can't be held responsible for their actions, can they? They're just bad." But if I'm a *good* person who did something bad, then it's a whole different ball game. I'm essentially a good person, but I have an external problem that I have to deal with. I can change, if I want to.

When a person goes into the High Holidays, it's really easy to feel a strong sense of despair. The odds are that you are not going to change into the perfect person over the next ten days. Some will even express it in Miltonian terms - "I'm going to burn anyway, I might as well have a good time before I go." As long as people see themselves as bad, there is no hope that they will ever change.

But if instead we view our sins as something external, something that's not us, but rather a terrible burden that we are carrying through our lives, then we can think of ways to rid ourselves of them. To undo the wrong that we've done, to break unhealthy habits and to focus on how to become the people we really are.

That, I believe, is the secret of *tashlich*. On the first night of Rosh Hashana we don't just say "have a sweet year," we *taste* a sweet year. We eat challah and a sweet apple dripping with honey. We want a sensory experience of sweetness to help us focus. Likewise, on the first

*continued on page eleven*

# ALL ROADS LEAD TO ROME

Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

If the Romans did one thing right — they made great roads. Roman roads are still in use to this day. Why were the Romans so interested in building such long-lasting and straight roads?

We live in a world where we increasingly “let our fingers do the walking.” From a portable cell-phone equipped with a web browser, you can conduct business on three continents without leaving the beach. (Just make sure you don’t spill your banana daiquiri on your cell-phone.)

Increasingly, the word “communication” has come to mean electronic contact as opposed to flesh and blood meeting.

One of the prerequisites of rulership is communication. The Romans built quick straight roads because they needed to know and dominate what was happening in the far corners of their empire. Size is a function of the ability to conquer space. We talk of the world getting smaller even though it’s still some 24,000 miles around. The “size” of the world is in direct proportion to our ability to span the globe, both physically and electronically. Even though the Roman Empire occupied little more than Europe, the Middle East and North Africa, in comparative terms it was probably the largest empire that ever existed, because the world was a very large place in those days.

Communications is an instrument of government. The Romans used the roads to rule. The inheritors of their empire use the electronic media.

Imperial domination, however, can take the form of more than brute force and tax collection. Most of the wars in history have been either about trade or religion. And religious wars are about the imposition of a certain *weltanschauung* — a cosmology. “We see the world this way — and if you want to stay in this world you’d better see it that way too.” The sword is often the ultimate theological argument.

The imposition of the religion of the imperial power is an expression of its cultural domination. In our era, the cultural domination of the heirs of the Empire is the Coca-Cola sign hanging beside the Inca Trail on the way to Macchu Picchu; it’s the Golden Arches in the shadow of the Taj Mahal.

The brilliance of American consumerism is that it bonds into a cohesive whole a country of numerous time zones, vastly different geography and weather, culture and religion. Whether you come from Biloxie or Topeka, Encino or Nantucket, however far you are from home, you can

always look out your car window and feel right at home looking at the same icons you left behind: Best Western; Burger King; Holiday Inn; K-Mart. The same familiar landscape — the landscape of Empire. Television performs the same function: It binds the nation together. Wherever you are, you’re in the same transcontinental parochial meeting house.

Broadcast television is such a powerful tool, and it’s so much a part of our cultural language, that people frequently suggest it as a means of spreading Torah values. There is an idea that we can reach many of our brothers and sisters who have become estranged from Judaism by making TV documentaries for broadcast television about the Torah and the Torah way of life. Another idea is that those who have had conspicuous success in the secular world, whether in the arts, business or science, should make their stories into TV docu-dramas. (One can well imagine the sort of title which would emerge, such as “From Wall Street to the Western Wall.”)

It seems to me that such projects are doomed from their very inception. Have you ever seen Orthodox Jews look anything other than weird in the media? Why is that? Why is it that only Muslims look exotic and picturesque against all those Lawrence-of-Arabia sand dunes? Why does Kodachrome love every African or Indian cult, whereas the People of the Book are singularly non-photogenic? Why do they seem parochial and rather shabby when exposed to the glare of the TV’s gaze?

Our Sages teach that the Jewish People will experience four exiles. These exiles are hinted to in the very opening lines of the Torah: “*And the Land was formless (Babylon) and void (Persia/Medea) and darkness (Greece) on the face of the deep (Rome).*” Since the Torah is the blueprint of the world, something written at the very beginning of the blueprint indicates that these exiles are a fundamental process in history of the world.

The first of these four kingdoms took the kingship from the Jewish People. Each empire has successively grabbed the mantle of power from its predecessor. Ultimately the fourth empire, the empire of Esav/Rome and its current heirs, will return kingship to the Jewish People. Until that time however, the fourth kingdom has the power of the kingship and all its trappings. It writes the songs of the world, for music is a scion of kingship: King David, the prototype of all kings, is called the “sweet singer of Israel.” But the lyre of David breathes the songs of majesty no

# Trumping the Kings

“There will soon be only five kings left: The Kings of England, Diamonds, Hearts, Spades, and Clubs.” So declared King Farouk, King of Egypt to Lord Boyd-Orr of England in 1951, shortly before the declaration of the Egyptian republic in 1953. But King Farouk forgot one — the King of Kings, Hashem.

“For the sovereignty is Hashem’s and He rules over nations.” (Psalms 22:29) If the sovereignty is Hashem’s then why must we be taught that He rules over nations? Isn’t it obvious?

The Vilna Gaon taught that a sovereign (*melech* in Hebrew) refers to a king who is *willingly* accepted by his subjects, whereas a ruler (*moshel* in Hebrew) is a king who *forces* his subjects to obey him.

King Farouk and many others among the nations have forgotten that Hashem is King, therefore He rules over them as a *Moshel*, by force. Only the nation of Israel accepts Hashem as our *Melech* or Sovereign.

May we crown Hashem our King on Rosh Hashana and usher in a sweet new year filled with blessing! By crowning Hashem King of Kings, we unify the Eternal as the One G-d, the “Ace” that “trumps” the remaining Kings of Diamonds, Hearts, Spades, Clubs, and even of England!

THE SECRET OF TASHLICH...continued from page nine

day of Rosh Hashana we go through the motions of casting off our sins. We have to understand that our sins are not us, but a burden we carry. And we’re tired of them. And just as we can cast off our sins symbolically, we can cast them off in reality — if we want to.

I’m often asked by people going into the High Holidays how they can possibly face Almighty G-d and tell Him they’re really sorry and will never do it again. They know they’re

not ready yet to do everything perfectly. Frankly, I don’t know too many people who are. So instead I suggest they try the following: At some point in the service, talk to G-d. Tell Him the truth. Say “G-d, You know me better than I know myself. I mean, after all, You created me. And You know that I fail more often than I succeed. But I can tell You this much, G-d. I’m a better person this year than I was last year. And if You give me the chance, I’ll be a bet-

ter person next year than I was this year.”

I don’t know too many Jews today, who are still going to Synagogue on the High Holidays, who can’t say that to G-d. And if you do, then you have taken one step closer to becoming the person you really are, and unburdening yourself of the many mistakes you commit throughout your life.

May you and your family enjoy a happy and healthy New Year.

ALL ROADS LEAD TO ROME...continued from page ten

more. When the Jewish People went into this last exile, the exile of Rome, the Temple songs of the *levi'im* were silenced. The Romans took that music and made it serve a new master. It resurfaced hundreds of years later as the Gregorian chants of the church.

If music and religion are but two aspects of imperial cultural domination, television is the ultimate form of this thrall: Television is the dream factory which allows the ruling power to foist its world-view on its vassal states. It places the minds of its subjects in a cultural iron-mask. Wherever you can put up a satellite antenna and beam down a Big Mac — there the empire rules.

The Romans built the best roads in

the world. But if they were alive today, they would be producing Seinfeld. Television is an instrument of kingship, and the kingship is not ours at the moment. This is not just a physical reality, it’s a mystical reality. It means that when we attempt, as the Jewish People, to take hold of the reins of kingship, be that music or television, we must inevitably look ridiculous and fail.

The Kingdom of Heaven is mirrored in the Kingdom of Earth. The Jewish People are in their darkest exile and the Divine Presence is in that exile with us. This is an exile of such totality that most of us don’t even *realize* that we are in exile. We have almost totally accepted upon ourselves the yoke of the empire, its icons

and its ideas. We are glued to their visions. We wear their clothes. We think their thoughts.

Rosh Hashana is a time when we crown Hashem as King over the world. We crown Him *in absentia*, for there is little that we can see which bespeaks His Majesty. He is in exile, doubly hidden in a world where materialism and selfishness are the twin rulers.

We long for the day when this fourth kingdom will have run its course and the kingship will return to the Jewish People. For on that day, Hashem will be One and His Name One, and the people who proclaim twice daily His Oneness will be seen in their splendor, risen from the sackcloth of ages.



**Q** Why do we blow the shofar during the month of Elul?

**A** After the sin of the golden calf, Moshe went up to Mount Sinai to receive the second set of Tablets on Rosh Chodesh Elul. On that day, the Jewish People sounded the shofar to remind themselves to stray no more after idol worship. Also, the sound of the shofar strikes awe into our hearts and inspires us to return to the ways of Torah.

• *Mishna Berura and Aruch Hashulchan Orach Chaim 581*

**Q** Where in the written Torah text does it tell us explicitly that the first day of Tisrei is Rosh Hashana?

**A** Nowhere. The Torah calls it “a day of shofar blowing.” (This is one of many examples showing how our observance depends on the continuous oral tradition dating back to Mount Sinai).

• *Bamidbar 29:1*

**Q** We eat apples dipped in honey to symbolize a sweet year. Why do we choose apples above other sweet fruits?

**A** Isaac blessed Jacob with the words: “The fragrance of my son is like the fragrance of a field which Hashem has blessed...” (*Bereishis 27:27*). The Talmud identifies this “field” as an apple orchard.

• *Ta’anis 29b, Biyur Hagra*

**Q** What two blessings do we say before sounding the shofar?

**A** “Blessed are You... who has commanded us to hear the sound of the shofar,” and the *shehechyanu* blessing.

• *Orach Chaim 581:2*

**Q** From which Book of Tanach does the beginning of the Tashlich prayer come?

**A** The Book of Micha (7:18-20).

**Q** What three barren women were “remembered” by Hashem on Rosh Hashana?

**A** Sara, Rachel and Chana. On Rosh Hashana it was decreed that these barren women would bear children.

• *Tractate Rosh Hashana 10b*

**Q** A person’s yearly allowance is fixed on Rosh Hashana, except for three types of expenses. What are they?

**A** Expenses for Shabbos, Yom Tov, and the cost of one’s

children’s Torah education.

• *Ba’er Hetaiv Orach Chaim 242:1*

**Q** We refer to the binding of Isaac in our prayers when we say: “Answer us as You answered Abraham our father on Mount Moriah...” What was Abraham’s prayer on Mount Moriah?

**A** He prayed that Mount Moriah should remain a place of prayer for all future generations. Also, he prayed that his sacrifice of the ram should be considered as though he had actually sacrificed Isaac.

• *Onkelos 22:14; Rashi 22:13*

**Q** Why, even in Israel, are there two days of Rosh Hashana, whereas other festivals in Israel are celebrated for only one day?

**A** Before our current exile, we did not have a fixed calendar as we do today. Rather, the Supreme Torah court in Jerusalem determined our calendar on a month to month basis. They did this on the first day of every month, based on witnesses testifying that they had seen the new moon. Therefore, the people outside Israel had insufficient time to find out the exact date in time for the festivals. The “two-day festival” arose to correct this situation. In Israel, however, the people lived close enough to Jerusalem to find out the exact date of all the festivals except Rosh Hashana. Since Rosh Hashana occurs on the first day of the month, even those living in Jerusalem sometimes needed to observe it for two days, if the witnesses failed to arrive.

**Q** What halacha applies to the *shehechyanu* blessing on the second night of Rosh Hashana which does not apply on the second night of any other holiday?

**A** On the second night of Rosh Hashana it is customary to wear a new garment or to have a new fruit on the table when saying the *shehechyanu* blessing. Thus, the *shehechyanu* blessing applies not only to the holiday, but to the new garment or new fruit as well. (This is done in order to accommodate the minority of halachic authorities who rule that no *shehechyanu* blessing need be said on the second night of Rosh Hashana.)

• *Taz 600:2*

## I Didn’t Know That!

The word “shofar” is related to the Hebrew word “*shapair*,” which means “improve.” The shofar blast tells us: “Improve your ways!”

• *Vayikra Rabba 29*