

O H R N E T

SHABBAT PARSHAT VAYECHI · FOR THE WEEK ENDING 16 TEVET 5760 · DEC. 25, 1999 · VOL. 7 NO. 12

PARSHA INSIGHTS

EASY STREET

“Yissachar is a strong-boned donkey; he rests between the boundaries. He saw tranquility that it was good... yet he bent his shoulder to bear...” (49:14-15)

Between 9% and 10% of American schoolchildren are clinically depressed. That’s an amazing statistic. And that doesn’t include those who are just above the cutoff point of what’s called “clinically depressed.” And it also doesn’t take into account those who haven’t sought professional help. Whichever way you look at it, 9% is a frightening number.

Why do so many children experience feelings of depression?

America is a society predicated on making everything easy. Convenience shopping. TV dinners. Drive-thru banking. These short-term benefits breed a certain attitude: Nothing should cause me effort.

One of the fundamental components of a happy person is a healthy self-esteem. Probably more cases of juvenile depression are linked to low self-esteem than any other cause. What give us a sense of self-esteem? When we do succeed in doing something that’s difficult. By making life into *easy street*, by giving the subliminal message that everything has to be easy, we have unconsciously taken away a major formula for achieving self-esteem: Rising to a challenge.

Overcoming something that’s difficult.

What’s the difference between fun and happiness?

Mount Whitney in California is the highest peak in the lower 48 United States. It’s 14,494 feet tall. You could probably fly to the top of Mount Whitney in about 15 minutes. To walk the same distance might take you 15 days.

“What give us a sense of self-esteem? When we do succeed in doing something that’s difficult.”

It could well be that flying to the top of Mount Whitney is a lot more fun than climbing it, but climbing will give you a lot more happiness because you’ll have achieved something quite difficult. Fun is something external, and because it’s external it’s evanescent and fleeting. Happiness is inside. It becomes part of your essence.

Studying Torah is the ultimate in deferred gratification. The Torah is as hard as steel and as difficult to hold onto as water. It takes many years of

application, of “breaking your teeth,” to be able to master its sublime intricacies — and yet there is no *simcha* in the world like studying Torah.

There is no physical pleasure in this world that can compare with the ecstasy of cracking a difficult *Tosefot*. It may not be much fun, but it’s the greatest happiness that there is.

“Yissachar is a strong-boned donkey; he rests between the boundaries. He saw tranquility that it was good... yet he bent his shoulder to bear and became an indentured laborer.”

Yissachar is the tribe of Torah scholars. A Torah scholar carries a heavy yoke, but he is a “strong-boned donkey.” G-d gives him the stamina to carry out his task. Even though he labors day and night, he “rests between the boundaries.” He rests between the boundaries of the day and night. How can anything exist between day and night? That’s all there is. Day or night. The *talmid chacham* scholar experiences repose of the soul on a spiritual plane that is beyond the boundaries of day and night. On that plane he has a contentment that is out of this world. He saw “tranquility that it was good” — “yet he bent his shoulder to bear.” He understands that the ultimate of achievement comes from hard work and dedication to G-d’s Holy Torah.

And he ends up much higher than Mount Whitney.

After 17 years in Egypt, Yaakov senses his days drawing to a close and summons Yosef. He has Yosef swear to bury him in the Machpela cave, the burial place of Adam and Chava, Avraham and Sara, Yitzchak and Rivka. Yaakov falls ill and Yosef brings to him his two sons, Efraim and Menashe. Yaakov elevates Efraim and Menashe to the status of his own sons, thus giving Yosef a double portion that removes the status of the first-born from Reuven. As Yaakov is blind from old age, Yosef leads his sons close to their grandfather. Yaakov kisses and hugs them. He had not thought to see his son Yosef again, let alone Yosef's children. Yaakov begins to bless them, giving precedence to Efraim, the younger, but Yosef interrupts him and indicates that Menashe is the elder. Yaakov explains that he intends to bless Efraim with his strong hand because Yehoshua will descend from him, and Yehoshua will be both the conqueror of Eretz Yisrael and the teacher of Torah to the Jewish

People. Yaakov summons the rest of his sons in order to bless them as well. Yaakov's blessing reflects the unique character and ability of each tribe, directing each one in its unique mission in serving Hashem. Yaakov passes from this world at the age of 147. A tremendous funeral procession accompanies his funeral cortege up from Egypt to his resting place in the cave of Machpela in Chevron. After Yaakov's passing, the brothers are concerned that Yosef will now take revenge on them. Yosef reassures them, even promising to support them and their families. Yosef lives out the rest of his years in Egypt, seeing Efraim's great-grandchildren. Before his death, Yosef foretells to his brothers that Hashem will redeem them from Egypt. He makes them swear to bring his bones out of Egypt with them at that time. Yosef passes away at the age of 110 and is embalmed. Thus ends Sefer Bereishet, the first of the five Books of the Torah.

HAFTARAH

OUT OF DATE?

We live in a world where yesterday's knowledge is out of date and last year's computer is obsolete. What pearls of wisdom can we glean from the elderly? Yaakov on

his deathbed gathers his sons to bless them. These blessings are peppered with rebuke, and turn out to be Yaakov's game plan for each of their individual lives. In the Haftarah, the ailing King David gives his final commands to Shlomo, his son and heir. "Guard the Torah," David tells him, "walk in its paths, do not deviate from the law of Moshe and then you will know wisdom." David, having lived the life of a king, complete with all its joys and troubles, has one message for Shlomo. He does not tell him where to place his investments or which career to

choose. Rather he tells him that there is nothing above or beyond the Torah. This is the wisdom of the aged *tzaddik*. While we may believe that life can offer us nothing more satisfying than the Torah, only an aging Yaakov or David can know it. In making any decision, although we may attempt to do G-d's will, our first thought is often "What's in it for me." The Torah commands us to seek the advice of our "elders," meaning a Sage, a *tzaddik*. Only one who has liberated himself from a self-centered attitude can direct us along the true path.

MELACHIM I 2:1-12

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LOVE OF THE LAND

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

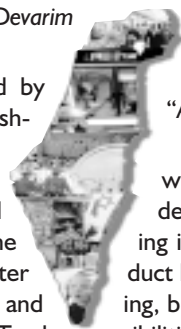
HAR GERIZIM AND HAR EYVAL

"When Hashem, your L-d, brings you to the land which you come to inherit, you shall declare the blessing towards Har Grizim and the curse towards Har Eyval." (Devarim 11:29)

This command was fulfilled by the Jews in the following fashion: Six tribes stood on one mountain and six on the other. In between them stood the Holy Ark and the elders of the Kohanim and Levites. The latter turned first towards Har Gerizim and said the words recorded in the Torah in the form of a blessing for those who

obey the particular command. The entire nation then answered "Amen." They then turned around and faced Har Eyval, repeating the same command in the form of a curse for those who disobeyed it, and all answered "Amen."

We may see in the manner which these blessings and curses were declared a lesson for the nation entering its promised land. A man may conduct himself in a manner worthy of blessing, but if he turns away from his responsibilities even momentarily he may be inviting the opposite.



TAKING THINGS LITERALLY

A purely literal reading of the Torah can sometimes be misleading. The classic example in regard to a *mitzvah* is the Torah command for the brother of a man who died childless to perform *yibum* by marrying the widow. “The first-born to whom she shall give birth,” says the Torah (*Devarim 25:6*), “shall take the name of the deceased brother.” Literally understood, this would require the couple involved in *yibum* to name their first-born son after his deceased uncle.

This however, is not the case. Our Sages had a tradition going back to Sinai that just as the term “name” used by Yaakov in regard to the tribal status of Yosef’s children (*Bereishet 48:6*) obviously refers to inheritance rather than to the given name, so too does the term “name” in the case of *yibum* refer to inheritance. The passage should then be understood in this way: The oldest of the surviving brothers has the prime responsibility for performing *yibum*, and if he — or any of the other brothers in the event that he refuses — marries the widow, he inherits her husband’s share in his father’s estate.

Reflecting upon this radically non-literal interpretation, the Sage Rava commented that this is an exception to the general rule of Biblical interpretation that requires us to apply the literal interpretation of a passage in addition to any other interpretations that it communicates. This is the one instance, he notes, where the literal interpretation is completely abandoned.

It is this statement of Rava that led some commentaries to an interesting conclusion regarding another *mitzvah*. “You shall not place a stumbling block in the path of a blind man,” the Torah commands us (*Vayikra 19:14*), and our Sages interpret this as a ban on giving bad advice or assisting someone in violating Torah law. This interpretation of the Oral Law was not accepted by the Kuttim who adhered to the Written Law only. They understood this literally as a ban on placing a stone in the path of a blind man (*Rashi, Mesechta Chullin 3a*). What about us — do we include this literal interpretation in the Torah ban along with the other aforementioned ones, or do we consider it to be completely abandoned?

Two sides of the case are presented in the discussion of this matter, both in the *Minchat Chinuch (Mitzvah 232)* and the *Ohr Somayach* in his *Meshech Chochma* commentary on the Torah.

• *Yevamot 24a*

PERVERSION OF CONVERSION

If someone converts to Judaism out of a fear of lions, the Sages differ as to whether that conversion is valid. Although Rabbi Nechemia disqualifies any conversion not purely motivated by a desire to be Jewish, the halacha follows the opposing view which rules that even such a conversion is valid.

Who are these mysterious converts out of fear of lions?

Rashi refers us to the Kuttim, who King Sancherib of Assyria brought from their native land to *Eretz Yisrael* to replace the ten tribes he exiled to their land. After settling in the cities of Samaria and continuing their idolatrous ways, they were attacked by lions sent by Heaven. When they complained to the king, he sent them one of the exiled *kohanim* to teach them the ways of Hashem, and they converted to Judaism (*Melachim II 17:24-28*).

Tosefot rejects this explanation, because the conversion of the Kuttim was not only improperly motivated but also a sham. “They feared Hashem,” we read in a passage in that same chapter (*ibid. 17:3*), “and worshipped their gods.” The converts to which our *gemara* refers, Tosefot concludes, were those who out of fear of lions made a genuine conversion.

There is a dispute in *Mesechta Chullin (3b)* as to whether the Kuttim were genuine converts. Tosefot’s understanding is that there is a consensus, based on the above passage, that their initial conversion was a sham since they continued worshipping their idols. The opinion that they were genuine converts is based on a tradition that after becoming familiar with Judaism, they made a genuine conversion and abandoned idol worship. This explains why we find the Kuttim mentioned in *mishnayot* as Jews. But even according to this view, there were problems with these converts, beginning with their degeneration into rejecting the Oral Law and culminating with the discovery that they were secretly worshipping idols which led to their being totally discredited as Jews. The *gemara* in *Mesechta Chullin (6a)* reports that when Rabbi Ami and Rabbi Asi, two of the leading Sages in the post-Mishnaic era, learned of this duplicity “they did not leave their place of judgment until they declared the Kuttim to be considered non-Jews.”

• *Yevamot 24b*

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PARSHA Q&A ?

1. Why is kindness towards the dead called “*chesed shel emet*” — kindness of truth?
2. Give three reasons Yaakov didn't want to be buried in Egypt.
3. How do you treat a “fox in his time” (i.e., a commoner who rules)?
4. “When I was coming from Padan, Rachel died on me... I buried her there on the way to Efrat...” Why did Yaakov say all this to Yosef?
5. Initially, why was Yaakov unable to bless Efraim and Menashe?
6. What does *pillalti* mean?
7. What does “*Shechem*” mean as used in this week's Parsha? (two answers)
8. Which individual is called “the *Emori*”? Why? Give two reasons.
9. What did Yaakov want to tell his sons but was unable to?
10. What privileges did Reuven lose due to his rash actions?
11. What congregation from Yaakov's offspring did Yaakov not want to be associated with?
12. What did Yehuda do after he heard Yaakov rebuke Reuven, Shimon and Levi? Why?
13. What does milk do to teeth?
14. Why is Yissachar like a “strong-boned donkey?”
15. With what resource did both Yaakov and Moshe bless Asher?
16. In Yosef's blessing, Yaakov said, “They embittered him...” Who are “they”?
17. Which descendants of Binyamin “will divide the spoils in the evening”?
18. From whom did Yaakov buy his burial place?
19. What oath did Yosef make to Pharaoh?
20. Which two sons of Yaakov did not carry his coffin? Why not?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

1. 47:29 - Because the giver expects no reward from the recipient.
2. 47:29 - a) Egypt's ground was to be plagued with lice; b) At the time of the resurrection, those buried outside Israel will suffer; c) So the Egyptians wouldn't make him into an idol.
3. 47:31 - Bow to him.
4. 48:7 - Yaakov thought Yosef harbored resentment since Yaakov had not buried Yosef's mother, Rachel, in the *Ma'arat HaMachpela*.
5. 48:8 - The *Shechina* departed from him.
6. 48:11 - “I thought.”
7. 48:22 - a) The actual city of Shechem; b) A portion.
8. 48:22 - Esav. a) He acted like an Emorite; b) He trapped his father with words (*imrei pi*).
9. 49:1 - When *mashiach* will come.
10. 49:3 - Priesthood and Kingship.
11. 49:6 - Korach and his congregation.
12. 49:8 - He drew back. He was afraid that Yaakov would rebuke him for the incident with Tamar.
13. 49:12 - It makes them white.
14. 49:14 - Just as a donkey bears a heavy burden, so the tribe of Yissachar bears the yoke of Torah.
15. 49:20 - Oil-rich land.
16. 49:23 - Yosef's brothers, Potifar and his wife.
17. 49:27 - Mordechai and Esther.
18. 50:5 - From Esav.
19. 50:6 - Yosef swore not to reveal Pharaoh's ignorance of Hebrew.
20. 50:13 - Levi, because he would carry the *aron* (holy ark). Yosef, because he was a king.

KASHA! (KASHA MEANS “QUESTION”)

Avi Elfenbein <art118@lawrence.csnet.net> wrote:

In Parashat Vayechi, Yaakov gives a blessing to his sons. Why does he not give a blessing to his daughter, Dina? I look forward to an answer. Shabbat Shalom.

Dear Avi Elfenbein,

Good question. In truth, there's no proof that he *didn't* bless Dina: The Torah doesn't record everything Yaakov ever did or said. If he did bless her, the Torah may not have considered it necessary to include as she was not a founder of one of the tribes. Yaakov's blessings to his sons are not just individual blessings, but blessings to them and to the tribe that is to emerge from them. The Torah records this so that we will know the character and strength of each tribe.

Do you have a KASHA? Write to kasha@ohr.org.il with your questions on any Parsha!

WORDS FROM THE HEART

Carol Conaway wrote via the Internet:

Dear Rabbi,

While on a plane from Boston to Philadelphia two weeks ago, I happened to look at the cover of the book the man seated next to me was reading. On the back cover of the book, the following quotation appeared: "Words written from the heart, enter the heart." As a scholar and professor, I was very moved by the quotation and wrote it down for my own keeping. The quote was attributed to "The Sages."

I would like to ask: Where do these words appear in the vast writings of The Sages? I would be very grateful if you could find the time to provide me with an exact reference so that I might consult the entire text and see in what context the statement was made.

Dear Dr. Carol B. Conaway,

"Words which emanate from the heart, enter the heart" is sometimes quoted in the name of "the Sages," meaning that it is from the Mishnah, Talmud or Midrash. But the truth is that the source for this phrase is a bit of a mystery! Although it has indeed become an accepted Jewish teaching, it does not seem to appear in any of the above mentioned sources!

I've seen it advanced that "Words

which emanate from the heart, enter the heart" is a paraphrase of the statement in the Talmud that "Anyone who has fear of Heaven, his words will be heard and accepted." I personally don't see this as being the correct source, as it doesn't speak about the sincerity of the words which "emanate from the heart."

I would like to propose that the phrase is an application of the principle taught by King Solomon in Proverbs: "As water [reflecting] the face is to the face, so a man's heart is to [his fellow] man." Meaning that the human heart intuitively feels the emotions of others, and thus if one speaks with an open heart, the heart of the listener will be open as well.

In the late 1800's Poland issued a ban against *shechita* (ritual slaughter of animals). It is told that Rabbi Yisrael Meyer Kagan, the Chafetz Chaim, came before the Polish officials to plead for the rescinding of this decree which would cause tremendous hardship for Poland's Jews. The Chafetz Chaim pleaded passionately, in Yiddish. When he'd finished and the translator began translating into Polish, the official said, "Stop. You don't need to translate." He was so moved by the Chafetz Chaim's words, even though he hadn't understood them, that he agreed to do all he could to help rescind the decree.

Sources:

- Tractate Berachot 6b
- Proverbs 27:19, see *Metzudot David*

GOING UP?

Suzanne from Arizona
<JSNAriz@webtv.net> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

Can you tell me what it means to "make aliyah"?

Dear Suzanne,

"Making *aliyah*" means "going to the Land of Israel." In the Talmud and the Bible, travel to the Land of Israel is always referred to as "going up" since it is a holier place. In today's speech, "making *aliyah*" has come to mean actually moving to the Land and becoming a citizen here.

Hence in Modern Hebrew "going down" refers to someone who leaves Israel to live elsewhere.

The story is told of an Israeli in difficult financial straits who thinks he might do better in the US. When he announces his plans to go to Los Angeles, all his friends ask, "Are you 'going down?'" "No! No!" he replies, "I'm just going there to make some money. Then I'll come back to Israel."

In LA he gets a job as an elevator operator. The first day on the job, he rides the elevator up to the tenth floor, opens the door, and a bunch of people cram in. "Going down?" he asks. "No! No!" they reply, "We're just here to make some money. Then we'll go back to Israel."

YIDDLE RIDDLE

Last week we asked: With everyone focused on the "Year 2000" computer bug, not much attention is being given to the "Year 2100" Prayer Book bug. The year 2100 marks a change which will make almost every current English *siddur* (Jewish Prayer Book) outdated, and require that they be changed. What is the "Year 2100" Prayer Book bug?

Answer: In the silent *amidah* prayer, the words "give dew and rain for a blessing" are added during the winter. The people outside Israel begin saying these words on December 4th, and once every four years they begin a day later, on December 5th. These dates are based on the Talmudic calculation of "winter" as beginning a specified period of time after the fall equinox, and are corrected every four years by adding a day — just as the civil calendar adds an extra day every four years. (This correction is necessary due to the length of the solar year being approximately 365 ¼ days. After 4 years, the extra ¼ of a day adds up to a full day).

However, the civil calendar "skips" one leap year at the turn of every century (Y2K happens to be one of the exceptions to this). So, in the year 2100, the civil calendar will "skip" a leap year, but the Jewish calculation of the onset of winter will not change. Hence, the current prayer books which say to add "give dew and rain for a blessing" starting the 4th (or 5th) of December would in that year need to be changed to say the 5th (or 6th) of December.

The above is theoretical, as it could be affected by various factors, such as the reinstatement of the Sanhedrin (Supreme Torah Court). Anyone who has any doubts regarding actual practice should email us 100 years from now.

- See "Festivals in Halacha," Rabbi S.Y. Zevin, Vol. II "Hashe'elah" p.42

Re: Czechs in the Mail:

Greetings from the Czech Republic. I read every week Ohr Somayach's Ask the Rabbi issue and always share it with my friends. It helps me a lot in studies, answers my questions clearly. Thank you very much!

• *Marketa Rubesova, Czech Republic <marketa@mnet.cz>*

Re: Talking Turkey (Ohrnet Vayeshev):

Regarding the reader's comment: "How can Jews celebrate a non-Jewish holiday (Thanksgiving)." Thanksgiving is an American holiday. Its purpose is to thank whomever every American chooses to thank for having a country such as America. A country where Jews can live free from daily fear of persecution. A country where the constitution protects us with freedom of speech, press and religion. The safest country, except for Israel, for Jews to reside in. It is not perfect here but it is better than most other countries on the globe. To anyone who does not believe in thanking Hashem for this country my response is: "Leave. Go live in any country in Europe your forebears came from and see how difficult it can be without the security of America."

I take Thanksgiving very seriously. Without this country most of us would not be alive today.

• *Elana Heitlinger, Ridgefield Park, NJ <elana@webcombo.net>*

Regarding the Jews eating Turkey on Thanksgiving: Many of Columbus' crew were Jewish "Marranos." Among them was his translator, who was conversant in a number of languages. When Columbus landed in North America, many on the crew actually thought he had successfully reached India. Among the items discovered was a turkey, indigenous to North America but unknown in Europe. The translator assumed that the turkey was a native chicken of India and hence referred to it as "tarnagol Hodu," the "chicken of India." The name stuck.

• *Jerry Kowalsk <lhk@aol.com>*

Re: Midnight Rabbi:

I'm so glad to be on your mailing list. And that I can really ask the Rabbi. It's nice to be able to ask questions even if it's two o'clock in the morning. What again is the email address for "Ask the Rabbi," so I can put it in my address book? Again thanks for being here. Sincerely,

• *Deborah I. Klorman <Debschka@aol.com>*

Dear Deborah,

Thanks for your nice message! Ohr Somayach's "Ask the Rabbi" address is <info@ohr.org.il>

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE STORY
THE OTHER SIDE OF THE STORY

Giving People the Benefit of the Doubt

The ability to judge favorably is part of a strong spiritual character. If you are missing this trait, you may end up being...

HEAD STRONG

This past Shabbat, I was walking with some of our children. Talking with one, I didn't notice what happened to my four-year old, who suddenly was screaming, crying and holding his head. I looked back and saw a group of boys watch-

ing him come towards me. I asked, "did they hurt you?" He nodded yes. My older son confirmed this. So I immediately yelled at them. They laughed nervously, which got me more upset. Only after I calmed down, and the boys had already run away, did my six-year old explain that one of the boys had run into my son unintentionally, and had even apologized! I felt terrible about yelling at them, and went back to apologize, but they were still running, off into the distance, homeward bound!

• *Name@Withheld*

I DIDN'T KNOW THAT!

"His smaller brother will be greater than him...." (Bereishet 48:19)

Efraim was chosen above his older brother Menashe because of his greater humility. Thus, the verse emphasizes that he was the "smaller," i.e., the more humble, brother.

• *Based on Kli Yakar*

RECOMMENDED READING LIST

RAMBAN				SFORNO	
47:28	Egypt and Rome	48:15	(first part) Yosef's other children	47:31	Yosef's Oath
47:31	Necessity for the Oath	49:10	(first part) Kings of Israel	48:18	The Laying of Hands
48:1	The Division of Eretz Yisrael	49:17	Shimshon	49:7	The Humility of Dispersion
48:7	Rachel's Tomb	49:31	Burial in the Ma'arat HaMachpela	49:11	Signs of Mashiach
		49:33	The Death of Yaakov		