

OHRNET

SHABBAT PARSHAT VAYERA · FOR THE WEEK ENDING 13 CHESHVAN 5760 · OCT. 23, 1999 · VOL. 7 NO. 4

PARSHA INSIGHTS

WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YOU SAW G-D?

“And He appeared to him — Hashem” (18:1)

Once there was a man whose eyesight had started to fade. He didn't really notice it at first. But then he started to become aware that he couldn't read the exit signs on the freeway without squinting. He ignored that for a while (and he also ignored a couple of near-misses). One day he caught himself winding down his car window to peer at a street name no more than ten feet away. He decided it was time to visit the optician.

After about a quarter of an hour in the optician's chair in which he felt like he was in a remake of *The Man in the Iron Mask*, the optician pronounced with all due gravity “You need glasses.” “Great,” he thought to himself. “Isn't technology wonderful.” The optician wrote out his prescription and a couple of days later he arrived to pick up his new glasses.

He put them on. The foreground was more muzzy than before, but the near-distance was amazing. It was as if someone had re-opened a vanished world for him. He drove around marveling at the clarity with which he could see every street name.

Some weeks later, the optician

called. He asked him when he would be coming in to pick up his free cleaning kit. “What?” he said. “You have to clean these things?”

He drove downtown and picked up his cleaning kit. He applied a little of the special solution to the lenses and gently rubbed them with the lens tissue. The tissue turned black after one or two rubs. The optician had

“If we used “G-d's cleaning fluid” — His Holy Torah — a little more often, we would be astounded at what a beautiful G-d filled world this is.”

never seen such a grimy pair of spectacles.

The man put on the glasses once again and he was shocked. He was shocked not so much by the clarity with which he could see again but at how little he had noticed how blurry was his sight before he had cleaned his spectacles. Was it really possible that he had been walking around looking at the world through so much grime and had noticed it so little?!

“And He appeared to him (Avraham — Hashem)” The first sentence of this week's parsha seems reversed. Why didn't the Torah write *“And Hashem appeared to him (Avraham)?”*

G-d doesn't move. He doesn't change. He doesn't “appear” one moment and “disappear” the next. When we talk about G-d “appearing,” we really mean that we have brought ourselves close to Him. To us, it looks like He has appeared. It's a bit like Ice Mountain ride at Universal studios, where you feel as though your car is turning over and over, when really the car is stationary and the scenery is revolving.

That's the meaning of the verse *“I am to my beloved and my beloved is to Me.”* Corresponding to our efforts to bring ourselves close to G-d, so will we sensitize ourselves to G-d's greatness. We will feel His awe the more. This is what is called in language of the mystics “the arousal from below.”

Sometimes, we find it hard to see G-d in the world. But maybe it's not because He's far away. Maybe it's because we buy into a lifestyle of spiritual grime. Maybe if we used “G-d's cleaning fluid” — His Holy Torah — a little more often, we would be astounded at what a beautiful G-d filled world this is.

Sources:

- Rambam, *Moreh Nevuchim*, *Ohr HaChaim*, *Devash V'Chalav in Iturei Torah*

AZAIKAH

This is a little known city mentioned in the *gemara* (*Masechta Ketuvot 122a*):

“If a non-Jew enters a market place outside of Eretz Yisrael and announces that he is selling fruits from the city of Azaikah he is not believed, because we suspect that he is making this claim only to promote the quality of his wares.”

Rashi explains that Azaikah was a city in Eretz Yisrael famed for its fruits. If its fruits are purchased by Jews even outside of Eretz Yisrael, they must be tithed before



they can be eaten. The vendor’s statement need not be taken seriously as a cause for tithing, since most fruits sold in that market are of local origin, and he is suspect of fabricating the source of his wares in order to better promote them.

Rabbi Shmuel Shtrashun (Rashash) suggests that this is the Azaikah mentioned in Yehoshua (10:11) where the Israelite forces defeated a coalition of Canaanite kings thanks to the boulders which Hashem rained down upon them from Heaven.

HAFTARAH

Overview

Just as the nation of Israel came into existence through the miraculous birth of Yitzchak to an aged mother, so G-d ensures our continuity with countless miracles throughout history.

This week’s *haftarah* recounts some

of the miracles performed by the Prophet Elisha. In one incident, the Prophet Ovadiah’s widow is saved from an implacable creditor when her last flask of oil is miraculously blessed; from this one little bottle she fills every vessel and container in her home with precious oil, providing more than enough money to pay her debts.

In another incident, Elisha promises his elderly host and hostess a child within a year. The child is born and grows, but one day falls ill and collapses in a dead faint. The mother journeys to Elisha; Elisha returns with her and revives the child from the dead.

MELACHIM II 4:1 - 37

TUNE IN

“And he placed his mouth upon his mouth, his eyes upon his eyes and his hands upon his hands...and the body of the child became warm.” (*Melachim II 4:34*)

In the same way that the child was brought to life through his contact with the prophet, so are the People of Israel brought to life when we live and breathe G-d’s Word as delivered to us from our teachers. All we have to do is to lean close and tune in, then we will feel ourselves come alive with the warmth of the Torah.

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I DIDN'T KNOW THAT!

Because Avraham invited the angels to “sit under the tree” (*Bereishet 18:4*) his offspring were rewarded with the mitzvah of succah.

• *Midrash Tanchuma*

לרפואה שלמה
 למשה זלמן בן רבקה
 בתוך שאר חולי ישראל

EVEN ON TISHA B'AV!

Even though weddings cannot take place during *Chol Hamo'ed* (the intermediate days of a Festival), it is permitted to make *airusin* (the formal union of man and woman which forbids her to anyone else, and requires a divorce to dissolve this union, but does not allow the pair to live together until the *nissuin* at the time of the *chupah*). The Sage Shmuel explained that the reason the Sages permitted this transaction to take place despite their ban on other transactions is that there is an urgency involved — someone else may marry the woman before he does.

But how could Shmuel advocate such a concern, asks the *gemara*, when he is the author of the statement that each day a Heavenly voice announces which woman will be married to which man?

The answer given is that Shmuel's concern was not over a competitor beating him out by natural means, but rather that the competitor might invoke the power of prayer to win this woman.

An illustration of such a threat is provided in an incident in which the Sage Rava overheard a man praying that he win the hand of a particular woman. Rava reprimanded him for such prayer, because if she was destined for him there was no need for prayer; and if she was destined for another, then his unfulfilled prayer would lead him to a loss of faith. Rava subsequently overheard this same fellow, already resigned to the possibility that the woman he sought might not be destined for him, pray that if she indeed would not be his, that either she die before marrying another or that he himself die before she gets married. Rava reprimanded him for this prayer as well. This incident serves as evidence that there is danger that a competitor's prayer can cause a man to lose his intended and destined mate. Making *airusin* on *Chol Hamo'ed*, therefore, becomes an urgency to assure that she will not become the victim of such a prayer.

This is the explanation of the *gemara* offered by Rashi, and it seems to revolve around the assumption that prayer cannot win a woman for a man for whom she was not predestined, but can prevent her marriage to another. Maharsha already points out that this runs counter to the literal understanding of Shmuel's words which indicate that prayer can result even in a competitor actually gaining the woman not predestined for him.

Ritva has another approach. Prayer, he contends, has the power to change what has been predestined, and this is why the Sages allowed *airusin* even on *Chol Hamo'ed*. Why then did Rava reprimand the fellow who was simply trying to use the power of prayer? Because Rava's wisdom told him that this woman was not really suited for the praying fellow, and that he would eventually regret marrying her. This is why he

told him in his second reprimand not to pray for this woman because it is not for his benefit.

• *Mo'ed Katan 18b*

LEARNING FROM THE FOREFATHERS

Can we learn a halacha from an event in the Torah which took place before the Torah was given? We seem to get conflicting signals on this issue from statements in the Jerusalem Talmud which Tosefot cites in our *mesechta*. Regarding the source for a seven-day period of mourning, our *gemara* cites a passage in the prophecy of *Amos (8:10)* equating festival with mourning. Why, asks Tosefot, don't we learn this from the seven-day period of mourning which Yosef observed for his father (*Bereishet 50:10*). The Jerusalem Talmud's explanation, answers Tosefot, is that we don't learn laws from what took place before the Torah was given.

Yet, regarding a previous *gemara (Mo'ed Katan 8b)* which bans getting married during the intermediate days of a Festival, as it is wrong to mix one *simcha* with another, Tosefot cites the Jerusalem Talmud offering as a source the incident with Yaakov and Lavan: Lavan insisted that Yaakov complete the seven days of celebration with Leah before being allowed to marry Rachel (*Bereishet 29:27*).

Rabbi Zvi Hirsh Chayot, in his commentary printed at the back of the Vilna Shas, calls attention to this contradiction regarding learning from events that happened before the Torah was given. He refers us to his "*Torat Hanevi'im*" in which he discusses this issue at length. In his comprehensive review of all the rules we do or do not learn from pre-Torah days, his basic point is that only when there is something which logic dictates as proper behavior do we cite a source from pre-Torah times as scriptural support for doing so. Not mixing *simchas*, so that proper focus can be given to each, is a logical point, as Tosefot himself notes, so we can rely on the example of Lavan and Yaakov as support. The length of time for mourning, however, is more a matter of law than logic, and can therefore not be deduced from what Yosef did for his father in pre-Torah times.

• *Mo'ed Katan 20a*

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PARSHA Q&A?

1. Why did Hashem appear to Avraham after the *brit mila*?
2. Why was Avraham sitting at the entrance to his tent?
3. What were the missions of the three angels?
4. Why did Avraham enjoin the guests to wash the dust off their feet?
5. Why did Avraham ask specifically Yishmael, and not someone else, to prepare food for the guests?
6. Why did the angels ask Avraham where Sarah was?
7. When Hashem related Sarah's thoughts to Avraham, He did not relate them precisely. Why?
8. What "cry" from Sodom came before Hashem?
9. How many angels went to Sodom?
10. Why was Lot sitting at the gate of Sodom?
11. Lot served the angels *matza*. Why?
12. Why did Lot delay when he left Sodom?
13. Why were Lot and his family not permitted to look back at Sodom?
14. Lot's wife looked back and became a pillar of salt. Why was she punished in this particular way?
15. In what merit did Hashem save Lot?
16. Why did Avraham relocate after the destruction of Sodom?
17. Why did Avimelech give gifts to Avraham?
18. Why was Avraham told to listen to Sarah?
19. Why did Hashem listen to the prayer of Yishmael and not to that of Hagar?
20. Who accompanied Avraham and Yitzchak to the *akeidah* (binding)?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

1. 18:1 - Avraham was sick, so Hashem came to "visit" him.
2. 18:1 - He was looking for guests.
3. 18:2 - To announce Yitzchak's birth, to heal Avraham and to destroy Sodom.
4. 18:4 - He thought they were among those who worship the dust, and he didn't want any object of idolatry in his home.
5. 18:7 - To train him in the performance of *mitzvot*.
6. 18:9 - To call attention to Sarah's modesty, so as to endear her to her husband.
7. 18:13 - For the sake of peace.
8. 18:21 - The cry of a girl who was executed for giving food to the poor.
9. 19:1 - Two; one to destroy the city and one to save Lot.
10. 19:1 - He was a judge.
11. 19:3 - It was Passover.
12. 19:16 - He wanted to save his property.
13. 19:17 - As they, too, deserved to be punished, it wasn't fitting for them to witness the destruction of Sodom.
14. 19:26 - She was stingy, not wanting to give the guests salt.
15. 19:29 - Lot had protected Avraham by concealing from the Egyptians the fact that Sarah was his wife.
16. 20:1 - Because travel in the region ceased and Avraham could no longer find guests.
17. 20:14 - So that Avraham would pray for him.
18. 21:12 - Because she was greater in prophecy.
19. 21:17 - Because the prayer of a sick person is more readily accepted than the prayer of others on his behalf.
20. 22:3 - Yishmael and Eliezer.

KASHA! (KASHA MEANS "QUESTION")

"Behold! Three people stood upon him..." (Bereishet 18:2).

Rashi explains that these were angels. One angel came to announce Sarah's birth, one to destroy the city of Sodom, and one to heal Avraham. The angel who came to destroy Sodom, why did he need to visit Avraham first? What was the purpose?

Answer:

Sodom was destroyed because they did not act with kindness and charity to the poor and the stranger. Their sin was multiplied many times by the fact that they lived near Avraham, the pillar of kindness and charity. They should have learned from his example, at least a little.

Instead, they treated visitors cruelly as part of their law and culture.

So, in order to take away any excuse from the people of Sodom, the angel first needed to experience Avraham's hospitality. Once the angel saw Avraham's super-human kindness, Sodom could no longer claim that they had no example to learn from.

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

SELLING FUTURES

Eli Silberstein

<rebeli@juno.com> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

Recently, I became aware of a situation involving two elementary school aged children (each about 10 years old), in which one of them signed over to the other, in a written contract, his eternal reward. Is such a contract deemed valid, or is it nullified considering the young age of the participants?

Dear Eli Silberstein,

If it came down to actually judging this case, it would need to come before a "dayan" (Torah judge) in the presence of the two boys, or their representatives. I will merely offer some ideas to be used as a general guideline; and my answer is not to be thought of as a definitive ruling.

A cursory glance at the Shulchan Aruch implies very strongly that this contract is null and void due to the fact that the parties are minors. There are a few other reasons as well which would say that this contract is void.

However, I would advise you to try to have these boys annul the contract, regardless of its validity. The action of the seller, even though he is young, shows a lack of seriousness regarding his eternal reward; this attitude may become ingrained unless some action is taken now. This is an opportunity to correct him and explain to him that eternal reward is not something that is for sale.

Additionally, if he continues with the idea that the other person will take his eternal reward, then it won't faze him to commit sins or to abstain from doing mitzvot, as he thinks the other person will get his eternal reward.

BARAK & MUBARAK

Al Pachman

<iluvjudi@mindspring.com> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

It is interesting that the head of the Egyptian state is named Mubarak and the

head of the Jewish state is named Barak. Is it "all in the family" in the Middle East?

Dear Al Pachman,

Many names sound similar even though the people aren't related. (For example, you're not related to Al Pacino or to Pac Man, are you?)

"Mubarak" is Arabic for "blessed" (like the Hebrew "mevurach"). "Barak" is Hebrew for "lightning."

But I think your observation is astute. It's interesting to note that Israel's chief justice is also named Barak. Note that when George Washington was president of the United States, England's king was also George. And Israel recently had two prime ministers one after the other, both named Yitzchak: Yitzchak Shamir and Yitzchak Rabin. And today in the US, both the president and defense secretary are named William. Perhaps people with certain names are just destined to rule at certain times!

THE BIG LIE

Michael Green

<stisrael@barak-online.net> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

Can G-d lie? If so, then everything the Torah says maybe is a lie [50% chance it is]. Also maybe Hashem does not care if we do His commandments, and that what He tells us do to is a lie [and He is being cynical]. Please explain. Thank you!

Dear Michael Green,

No, G-d can't lie or be cynical. G-d is All-Merciful and Benevolent, and no form of imperfection or cynicism can be attributed to Him.

There is an example in the Torah where G-d told Avraham information which wasn't "the whole truth." When 90-year old Sarah heard she was going to have a child, she expresses her surprise by saying "After withering, will I become young again? And my husband (Avraham) is old!" When G-d told Avraham what Sarah had said, G-d altered the information somewhat. Instead of saying "my husband is old" G-d

told Avraham that Sarah said "I am old."

But even here, G-d didn't lie, but rather paraphrased the first part of Sarah's statement in which she describes herself as old, and omitted the second part where she calls Avraham old. This was done for the sake of the greater goal of peace between husband and wife.

Source:

- Bava Metzia 87a
- Bereishet 18,12-13

FINGERS CROSSED

Sherry from Baltimore wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

I've heard that it's forbidden to cross the fingers of the right hand with the fingers of the left hand. This sounds a bit baffling. And I see Orthodox Jews who do this and wonder if they are ignorant of a prohibition or perhaps just not always aware of the state of their fingers. Thank you for this wonderful service.

Dear Sherry,

Crossing the fingers isn't really a prohibition, but it is mentioned in traditional sources as something to avoid. Here is the explanation of one commentary: "The right side represents Divine mercy whereas the left represents Divine strict judgment, and it is inappropriate for a person to do something that signifies a mixing of these distinct attributes of G-d. It is even a dangerous thing to do, and therefore one should be careful to avoid this practice." This is a deep kabbalistic concept that we cannot truly understand.

I asked a renowned Jerusalem rabbi who said that if you aren't generally concerned about intertwining your fingers then there's no need to be concerned about this. Only if one is generally careful not to cross fingers because of it being wrong or even dangerous does one need to be always careful not to do so.

Sources:

- Shmirat Haguf V'Hanefesh 78:1

Re: What Levi'im Never See (Ohrnet Ki Teitze):

In a recent Yiddle Riddle, you asked "What is it that a *levi* never sees in his entire adult life," and answered "if there is no *levi* present, a *kohen* is called to the Torah instead of a *levi*. A *levi* never sees this."

There would appear to be a number of exceptions to this; here's one: We do not call up the *Chasan Torah* or *Chasan Bereishis* (the ones honored with ending and beginning the year's Torah reading) more than once on *Simchas Torah*. Therefore, if the *Chasan Torah* is a *levi*, even if he is the only *levi* present, he is not called up for the second *aliya* (reading) of *VeZos HaBeracha*; rather, the *kohen* called for the first

aliyah remains there in place of a *levi* for the second *aliyah* as well. The *levi* is not even required to leave the synagogue for that second *aliyah*. (*Ta'amei Haminhagim 831*, in footnote citing *Orchot Chayim*)

• Stephen Phillips. <stephenp@cix.co.uk>

A *levi* could see this if it's a fast day and he is not fasting. In such a case, he would not be called up to the Torah.

• Zvi Freund <milonf@villagenet.com>

A *levi* could also have seen it if, G-d forbid, he was sitting *shiva* (in mourning) and no other *levi* was present.

• Lawrence Myers <lawrm@globalnet.co.uk>

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

Giving People the Benefit of the Doubt

UPSIDE DOWN PLATE

Following Shabbat Mincha, we all dashed to wash our hands, bless, and partake of the third meal. Seeing long lines at the wash basins, I decided to reserve a seat first. Scooping some herring, pasta and salad into a plate and turning a cup upside down beside it, I went to wash.

When I returned to my seat someone was sitting in it! I couldn't believe it. He saw the plate of food and the international "reserved" sign, a turned-over cup; yet he sat down anyway!

"I believe this is my seat," I said.

"It is?" he asked.

"Whose plate did you think that was?"

"I thought it was mine. Do you want to sit here?"

"No, no. You sit right there," I said. I found another place and sat down thinking, "How can a person sit down at a place obviously reserved with food on the plate and say it's his?"

I hadn't been seated five minutes when he came over and said, "I am so sorry; I really must apologize. You see, every week I sit in that seat; and every week a friend of mine — who I just found out is not here today — puts a plate of food there for me. I am really sorry."

I wanted to go straight through the floor! I know this man. I've eaten in his home. He even loaned me a warm muffler one cold January night. And all I could think of when I found him in "my seat" were negative thoughts.

You don't know the whole story until you know the whole story!

• M. B. via the Internet

YIDDLE RIDDLE

Last week we asked:

Where in *davening* (liturgy) do you say 24 words in a row that end with the letter "chaf?"

Answer:

In *Kiddush Levana* — Sanctifying the New Moon — we say the verse: "Baruch Yotzraych, Baruch Osaych, Baruch Kohnaych, Baruch Bohraych" three times.

• Riddle and answer submitted by Shlomo Zev Friedman <geno@netvision.net.il>

RECOMMENDED READING LIST

	SFORNO	19:11	The Nature of the Wicked	18:13	For the Sake of Peace
18:2	The Love of Kindness	19:37-8	Meaning Well	18:15	Sarah's Laughter
18:22	Persistence			19:8	Lot's Disgrace
19:8	Lot's Reasoning			22:1	The Meaning of a Trial
			RAMBAN	22:16	The Promise of Eternity
		18:7	The Love of Kindness		