

O H R N E T

SHABBAT CHANUKAH PARSHAT VAYESHEV · FOR THE WEEK ENDING 25 KISLEV 5760 · DEC. 4, 1999 · VOL. 7 NO. 9

RABBI MENDEL WEINBACH

The Threedom of Freedom

“In the days of Matityahu ... when the wicked Greek kingdom rose up against them to cause them to forget Your Torah and to cause them to abandon Your commandments ...”

Thus we begin the special prayer of thanks we add to our regular prayers on Chanukah. We allude to the spiritual danger which faced our ancestors during the reign of Antiochus, the powerful Hellenist tyrant, and thank Hashem for granting victory to “the few against the many and the weak against the strong.”

How did these Hellenists attempt to subvert the Jewish People and influence them to accept their pagan beliefs?

They did so, our Talmudic Sages tell us, by decreeing that any Jew practicing one of three commandments would be put to death. These three commandments were *Chodesh* (the sanctification of the month upon sighting of the new moon), *Shabbat* (the observance of the Sabbath) and *Milah* (circumcision).

What is the common denominator of these three *mitzvot* which defines both the essence of the Hellenist threat and the significance of our salvation which Chanukah celebrates?

Human slavery takes many forms. In its most literal sense slavery refers to economic servitude to an exploiting master. But a man can be a slave to time, to creativity and to passion. While literal slavery is virtually a thing of the past, these extended forms of slavery have always been — and still are — very much a part of the human condition.

It was Hashem’s special gift to His beloved people to provide them with three *mitzvot* that would liberate them from such enslavement.

Chodesh — The very first mitzvah commanded to the Jewish People — while still in Egypt and even before Sinai — was, “This *Chodesh* (month) shall be yours as the first of months (*Shmot* 12:2). This was a directive to the Sanhedrin — the Torah leadership of the nation — to determine the calendar of the celebration of all holidays and festivals based on their astronomic calculations and the testimony of witnesses who had sighted the new moon. The word *chodesh* for a month in the Hebrew lunar calendar is spelled with the same letters as the word *chadash* (new). This is in stark contrast to the word *shanah* used for a year in the solar calendar of other nations whose months are artificial units unrelated to the cycle of heavenly bodies. The word *shanah* corresponds to *yashan* (old).

“*Chadash* shall be yours” says the Creator to His people on the threshold of liberation from physical enslavement. You will be liberated as well from the enslavement of time, for you will be given the power to determine the time of your sacred seasons, free from the immutable pattern of a solar calendar. You will be a dynamic people capable of casting off the habitual chains of old behavior in order to discover new energy for self-improvement.

Shabbat — This too was something Jews began to observe in some form before they were commanded to do so, even while still in Egyptian bondage. The spirit of this sacred day of rest is liberation from man’s passion for cre-

continued on page eight

Yaakov settles in the land of Canaan. His favorite son, Yosef, brings him critical reports about his brothers. Yaakov makes Yosef a fine tunic of multi-colored woolen strips. Yosef exacerbates his brothers' hatred by recounting prophetic dreams — of sheaves of wheat bowing to his sheaf, and of the sun, moon and stars bowing to him — signifying that all his family will appoint him king. The brothers indict Yosef and resolve to execute him. When Yosef comes to Shechem, the brothers relent and decide, at Reuven's instigation, to throw him into a pit instead. Reuven's intent was to save Yosef. Yehuda persuades the brothers to take Yosef out of the pit and sell him to a caravan of passing Ishmaelites. Reuven returns to find the pit empty and rends his clothes. The brothers soak Yosef's tunic in goat's blood and show it to Yaakov, who assumes that Yosef has been devoured by a wild beast. Yaakov is inconsolable. Meanwhile, in Egypt, Yosef has been sold to

Potiphar, Pharaoh's Chamberlain of the Butchers. In the Parsha's sub-plot, Yehuda's son Er dies as punishment for preventing his wife Tamar from becoming pregnant. Onan, Yehuda's second son, then weds Tamar by levirate marriage. He too is punished in similar circumstances. When Yehuda's wife dies, Tamar resolves to have children through Yehuda, as this union will found the Davidic line culminating in the *mashiach*. Meanwhile, Yosef rises to power in the house of his Egyptian master. His extreme beauty attracts the unwanted advances of his master's wife. Enraged by his rejection, she accuses Yosef of attempting to seduce her, and he is imprisoned. In jail, Yosef successfully predicts the outcome of the dream of Pharaoh's wine steward, who is re-instated; and the dream of Pharaoh's baker, who is hanged. In spite of his promise, the wine steward forgets to help Yosef, and Yosef languishes in jail.

ZECHARIAH 2:14 - 4:7

AROUND THE WORLD IN EIGHT DAYS

There is a certain timeless quality to that simple catchy tune of *Ma'oz Tzur*, sung by Jews worldwide after lighting the menorah. What about the words? What deep message is hidden in these six cryptic verses?

The first and last verses of *Ma'oz Tzur* express our longing for the rebuilding of the Temple. The middle four verses speak of the exiles to which the Jewish people have been subjected — Egypt, Babylon, Medio-Persia, and Greece — and of their joyous endings. At the Pesach Seder we do not sing about Chanukah and on Purim we don't mention Egypt. Why is Chanukah the time to learn about Jewish history?

OHRNET

THE OHR SOMAYACH TORAH MAGAZINE ON THE INTERNET

Published by
OHR SOMAYACH
 TANENBAUM COLLEGE
 POB 18103, Jerusalem 91180, Israel • 02-581-0315

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Another puzzle: Chanukah celebrates the one small jar of oil that miraculously burned for eight days. Surely everyone has heard of Judah the Maccabee and his mighty army; why do we not celebrate the military victory?

In the *haftarah* for the Shabbat of Chanukah, the Prophet Zechariah's vision flickers between the attempt to rebuild the Second Temple, and the euphoria that will accompany the rebuilding of the third Temple in the future. Then Zechariah sees a seven-branched menorah, above which is a large oil container with seven pipes feeding olive oil to each of the seven lamps of the menorah. Zechariah is told that this menorah is a message to Zerubavel, who was instrumental in rebuilding the second Temple: "Not by strength or by might," says G-d, "but with my spirit."

Consider the shape of the menorah, seven lights branching forth from a central stem. The word menorah can also be read as "*m'nurah*" — from the fire. The menorah shows how light spreads forth from the "fire" of Torah and illuminates the world. If we learn to trace everything back to its Divine source, then G-d will channel His benevolence upon us from above, just as Zechariah's menorah was fueled from above. On Chanukah we sing about all the exiles, for all those exiles could end only when the Jewish People learned the lesson of the menorah. And when we take this message to heart, then our final exile too will end, and the crown will be returned to its former glory.

I DIDN'T KNOW THAT!

"Reuven said: 'Cast him (Yosef) into this pit in the desert; do not actually kill him; (Reuven said this) in order to save him from them and bring him back to his father (Yaakov).'" (37:21-2)

When a person does a *mitzvah*, he should do it with a full heart and with joy; for had Reuven known that his good intentions would be eternally inscribed in the Torah, Reuven would have hoisted Yosef upon his shoulders and carried him home to his father.

• Ruth Rabba 5, Tanchuma Vayikra 25:665

RESIDENTIAL PROPERTY

"And Yaakov dwelled (vayeshev) in the land of his father's residing (m'gurei aviv)." (37:1)

There's a big difference between renting an apartment and buying it. When you buy, you think in terms of permanent and sometimes expensive re-modeling — the best carpets and furnishings you can afford. A fitted kitchen with black marble work surfaces. But when you rent, you reckon you could get by with a lick of paint.

When you buy, you *dwell* . When you rent, you *reside* .

If you want to make money writing a thesaurus for the Holy Tongue, I'd advise you to keep your day job. There are no synonyms in the Hebrew. If you look in an English thesaurus, you'll probably find *dwelling* and *residing* listed as synonyms. In Hebrew, however, every word has a unique meaning.

The name of this week's Parsha is "*Vaye-shev*" — "and he dwelled." The verb *lay-shev* connotes permanence. "*La-gur*" — to reside — means a temporary stay.

"And Yaakov dwelled (vayeshev) in the land of his father's residing (m'gurei aviv)."

Yaakov *dwelled* where his father had merely *resided* . Yitzchak recognized, as no one else, that this world is no more than a corridor, that we're all just passing through on the way to the palace.

This is not to say, G-d forbid, that Yaakov was overly enamored of this world, but that his lack of attachment to this world did not compare to that of his father. That minute bias has been amplified down the generations. Yaakov wanted to dwell in tranquility where his father Yitzchak had only resided. As a result, Yaakov is subjected to the heart-wrenching loss of his favorite son, Yosef.

Yosef started off his career as a dreamer on a grand scale: He saw the sun and the moon and the stars bowing to him. Later he is reduced to interpreting the dreams of Pharaoh's chief wine chamberlain — who forgets Yosef as soon as he is released from prison.

Just as it was in Egypt, so it has been throughout Jewish history in exile. The great-great grand children of Israel dream their dreams, be it in Russia, Germany or America. We want to change the world. We attach ourselves to every new "ism" that comes along. Show me any idealistic movement in the last two hundred years, and I'll show you a Jew, or many Jews, behind it — and in the forefront of it.

How is it that we Jews allow ourselves to dream these dreams? Because we start to feel ourselves very comfortable in our alien surroundings. We start to see ourselves as *dwellers* where our parents only saw themselves as *residents* . Look at every one of these movements, from the

Bolshevik revolution in Russia to the Civil Rights Movement of the sixties in the United States. From the Hippies to the Yippies. They all have one thing strangely in common — the "wine-chamberlain" forgets us. The movement has sudden and total amnesia as to who it was that started the whole thing. That same movement turns around and accuses the Jews of being the very enemy they are trying to eradicate.

A Jew prays three times a day. Probably the most difficult of those prayers is *Mincha* , the afternoon prayer. In the morning, the day is just beginning. Before the world fills with noise and bustle, we have space in our minds to contemplate the Eternal and the Unchanging. At night, the world is winding down and we can catch our breath and talk to G-d in peace and tranquility. But in the middle of the afternoon, when we are engrossed in worldly affairs, it takes a real wrench to step out of this world and speak to G-d.

Maybe that's one of the reasons we start off the *Mincha* prayer service — the service that Yitzchak instituted — with the words "Happy are those who *dwell* in Your House." Happy is the person who knows that his permanent residence is G-d's house, in the spiritual world, and that this world is no more than a rented apartment.

Sources:

• *Kli Yakar, Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Zevin*

LOVE OF THE LAND

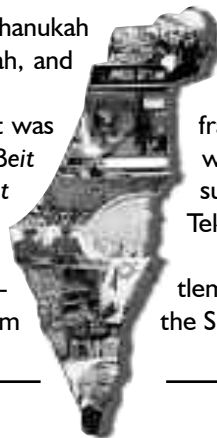
Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael

TEKOAH

The oil of the Menorah is the subject of the Chanukah miracle. Where did this oil for the Menorah, and for the flour offerings, come from?

Tekoah was the city in ancient *Eretz Yisrael* that was the prime source of the olive oil used in the *Beit Hamikdash* (Holy Temple). (*Mesechta Menachot 85b*)

The Biblical source for this city as a source of oil is the story of King David's military commander-in-chief, Yoav, who employed a wise woman from



Tekoah to put on a dramatic performance before the king in order to effect reconciliation between him and his son Avshalom, after Avshalom's act of fratricide (*Shmuel II Chapter 14*). Olive oil makes one wise, say our Sages (*ibid.*), and the abundance of such oil is what produced the wise woman of Tekoah who succeeded in her difficult mission.

Tekoah is today the name of a thriving Jewish settlement established in the Judean Desert shortly after the Six-Day War.

THE TABLE AS ALTAR

In the days of the *Beit Hamikdash*, say Rabbi Yochanan and Reish Lakish, it was the altar upon which a person achieved atonement; but now it is a person's table that atones for him.

This is derived from a passage in the prophecy of Yechezkel (41:22) regarding the *Beit Hamikdash* of the future; the prophecy begins by describing the dimensions of the altar and concludes with the words "this is the table before Hashem."

What is it that transforms a table upon which we eat into a virtual altar and places it in the exalted position of being "before Hashem?"

Rashi's explanation is that the table is where one shows hospitality to needy guests. Tosefot refers us to the statement of the very same Rabbi Yochanan (*Sanhedrin 103b*) about the power of dining together to bring people closer to each other.

Variations on this theme are found in other places. Rabbi Yehuda (*Berachot 55a*) states that one who spends a long time at his table so that there will be a possibility to offer food to a poor, hungry person will be rewarded with long life. In *Pirkei Avot (3:4)* Rabbi Shimon declares that a table at which words of Torah are said becomes "a table before Hashem" and those who dine there are considered as if they are eating from the Divine table.

The theme of the table as an instrument of hospitality and charity finds poetic expression in a custom cited by one of the early commentaries on Chumash, Rabbeinu Bachaye.

"It is the custom of the very pious Jews of France," he writes in *Parshat Terumah*, "to use the wood from their tables to make the coffins in which they are buried. This is to demonstrate that a man takes nothing with him and that nothing of all his labors will accompany him, except for the charity that he performed in his lifetime and the kindness that he dispensed at his table. This is what the Sages meant when they said that one who spends a long time at his table (in order to have the opportunity of offering food to a poor person who may come along) will be blessed with long life."

• *Chagiga 27a*

RELATIVE RESPECT

The respect for parents demanded by the Torah is so far-reaching that one might have even presumed that if parents ask a child to perform a service for them that involves the violation of Shabbat he is obligated to do so. To dispel such a notion, the Torah tells us (*Vayikra 19:3*): "A man must respect his mother and his father and you shall observe my Shabbat for I am Hashem, your G-d." By adding

that last phrase, Hashem resolved the conflict between respect for parents and respect for Shabbat by reminding us that He is the G-d of the parents as well, and they must therefore defer to His will.

Tosefot raises the question as to how the *gemara* deduced from the passage that Hashem placed Shabbat above respect for parents. We could just as easily assume that the reminder at the end of the passage refers to the first command in the passage, and that its purpose is to reiterate the need to respect parents even if it means putting aside the Shabbat.

It may be suggested that the challenge presented by Tosefot is based on the concept that respect for parents is a form of respect for the ultimate parent, Hashem. The *gemara (Bava Metzia 32a)* calls attention to the fact that Hashem uses the same term in referring to the honor due to parents and to Himself in order to equate the two.

Despite this equation, states Tosefot in his response to this challenge, it was clear to our Sages that respect for Shabbat is a greater form of honoring Hashem than is respect for parents. This is so because observance of Shabbat is testimony that Hashem created the world. One who fails to observe Shabbat, say our Sages (*Eruvin 69b*), is considered as if he denies that Divine creation took place.

In his second response, Tosefot proposes that the closing phrase "I am Hashem," which communicates the need to respect Hashem's authority, must be referring to a respect for authority mentioned in that passage and serving as a limitation on it. We find that the Midrash comments on the passage "You shall sanctify yourselves and be holy" that we should not presume to become as holy as Hashem Himself, because Hashem reminds us in closing that "I am holy" — My holiness is more exalted than yours. In the same fashion, concludes Tosefot, Hashem qualifies the respect he demands for parents by reminding us that the respect due to Him takes precedence.

• *Yevamot 5b*

To our Ohrnet Readers

Best Wishes
for a Happy
& Healthy
Chanukah

PARSHA Q&A ?

1. "These are the offspring of Yaakov: Yosef...." Give three reasons why Yosef is considered Yaakov's main offspring.
2. What was praiseworthy about the fact that Yosef's brothers did not speak to him in a friendly manner?
3. How do we see from Yosef's dream about the sun, moon and stars that all dreams contain some untrue element?
4. Who brought Yosef down to Egypt?
5. Where was Reuven when Yosef was sold?
6. In addition to the brothers, who else knew that Yosef was alive?
7. Why didn't Hashem reveal prophetically to Yaakov that Yosef was alive?
8. For how long did Yaakov mourn the loss of Yosef?
9. Verse 37:35 states "his father wept." To whom does this refer?
10. Who was Tamar's father?
11. In what merit did Tamar deserve to have kings as her descendants?
12. Why is the word "hand" mentioned four times in connection to the birth of Zerach?
13. Why does the Torah relate the incident with Potiphar's wife immediately after the incident of Yehuda and Tamar?
14. How did Potiphar "see" that Hashem was with Yosef?
15. Who in this week's Parsha pretended to be sick?
16. Why were the butler and the baker imprisoned?
17. For how long were the butler and the baker in prison?
18. How did the baker know that Yosef had correctly interpreted the butler's dream?
19. What prompted the butler and baker to tell Yosef their dreams?
20. How was Yosef punished for asking the butler for help?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

1. 37:2 - (a) Yosef was the son of Rachel, Yaakov's primary wife. (b) Yosef looked like Yaakov. (c) All that befell Yaakov befell Yosef.
2. 37:4 - They did not act hypocritically.
3. 37:10 - The moon represented Rachel. Since she had already died, it was impossible for that element of the dream to come true.
4. 37:28 - A caravan of Midianites.
5. 37:29 - He was attending to Yaakov.
6. 37:33 - Yitzchak.
7. 37:33 - Because the brothers had issued a ban against revealing the truth to Yaakov, and Hashem, so to speak, abided by their ban.
8. 37:34 - Twenty-two years.
9. 37:35 - Yitzchak, who wept because of Yaakov's suffering.
10. 38:24 - Shem.
11. 38:26 - In the merit of her modesty.
12. 38:30 - To allude to his descendant, Achan, who sinned with his hand by taking four things from the spoils of Jericho.
13. 39:1 - To teach us that just as Tamar acted with pure motives, so did Potiphar's wife.
14. 39:3 - Yosef mentioned Hashem's name frequently in his speech.
15. 39:11 - Potiphar's wife.
16. 40:1 - The butler was imprisoned because a fly was found in the king's goblet, and the baker was imprisoned because a pebble was found in the king's bread.
17. 40:4 - Twelve months.
18. 40:5 - The baker dreamed the interpretation of the butler's dream.
19. 40:6 - Yosef asked them why they looked troubled.
20. 40:23 - He remained in prison an additional two years.

KASHA! (KASHA MEANS "QUESTION")

"They put him in jail, the place where the royal prisoners were imprisoned." (39:20)

Yosef, a Hebrew slave on the lowest rung of Egyptian society, was accused of a capital crime against the wife of a royal minister, yet he was not put to death. On the contrary, he was given special privileges, and he was placed in the special jail with the royal prisoners. Why?

ANSWER:

Potiphar knew Yosef was righteous and he strongly suspected that his wife was lying. Publicly, however, he needed to pretend that he supported her.

Therefore he punished Yosef, but he chose the most lenient punishment possible under the circumstances.

• Ramban

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

WHAT THE ELEPHANTS?

Ceil Carey <jscarey718@aol.com> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,
I work in the youth services department of a library and in a child's book we see an elephant used as a symbol of Chanukah but no explanation. Could you explain the symbolism of an elephant in the celebration of Chanukah? Thank you so much.

Dear Ceil Carey,

According to the Book of Maccabees, the ancient Greek armies came against Israel with fearsome armored elephants. It is known from other historical sources as well that the Greeks used elephants in warfare. They were the ancient tanks!

WHO COMMANDED IT?

Avner Stein from Tampa, Florida <AvnerStein@juno.com> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,
I thought that blessings having “*asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu*” [that G-d sanctified us with his commandments, and commanded us] are reserved for ones that originate in the Torah. Yet the first blessing for lighting the chanukia also contains this phrase even though the holiday isn't in the Torah. Is this an exception?

Dear Avner Stein,

Lighting Chanukah candles is not one of the 613 mitzvot of the Torah. Rather, it is a Rabbinic mitzvah that was enacted by the Sages of the Sanhedrin (Supreme Torah Court) during the Second Temple period. Yet, the blessing we say when we light the Chanukah candles — “*v'tzivanu l'hadlik ner shel Chanukah*” — means that Hashem commanded us

to light them! How can we say that G-d commanded us to perform a Rabbinic mitzvah? The answer is this: One of the 613 mitzvot in the Torah is the commandment to obey the Sanhedrin (*Deuteronomy 17:11*), and since the Sages enacted the lighting of Chanukah candles, therefore lighting the candles indeed becomes like a commandment from the Torah.

We say a similar blessing for other Rabbinic commandments as well, such as lighting Shabbat candles Friday afternoon and reading the Scroll of Esther on Purim. Both of these are not commanded in the Torah; yet in the blessing we say that G-d commanded these things, because G-d commands us to listen to the Sages who instituted them.

I HAD A LITTLE DREIDLE

Caren from Indianapolis, Indiana <clf@iquest.net> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,
How does the dreidle (four-sided spinning top) fit in with the story of Chanukah? My theory is that since Jews were not allowed to congregate, but they were allowed to play Greek games, they pretended to play this game while they planned their next move. Am I even close?

Dear Caren,

Close but no dreidle! The ancient Greeks forbade studying the Torah, so the people would gather together in secret. If the Greeks interrupted them, they would pull out the dreidels and pretend that they had gathered to gamble.

For deeper meanings of the dreidel, see “*The Secret of the Dreidel*” at the Ohr Somayach Web Site: www.ohrnet.org/chanukah/chan95.htm

CHANU-KAH

Alan Litchman from Brooklyn, New York <alitchman@aol.com> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

Do the words Chanukah and Chinuch (education) have the same root? If so, what is the connection?

Dear Alan Litchman,

Yes, these words are connected. Chanukah means inauguration, as Chanukah celebrates the “*Chanukat Hamizbe'ach*,” the re-inauguration of the altar by the Maccabees after its defilement.

Chinuch is an expression indicating the beginning of something. Thus, it means inauguration, but it also means education, which begins and initiates a person in the way that it is hoped that he will follow. As King Solomon wrote, “*Chanoch l'na'ar al pi darko* — teach a child according to his way...”

Chanukah when read as two words (*chanu kaf-hey*) means “they encamped on the 25th,” indicating that the Maccabees were victorious in battle and rested from their enemies on the 25th of Kislev.

Sources:

Rashi, Tractate Shavuot 15a

EXERCISE

Jechezkel Frank from Holland <jbfrank@xs4all.nl> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

Did our Sages exercise at all? How could the Maccabees be so strong and know about warfare without practicing and working out? Of course this was one of the miracles which happened on Chanukah, but is there more we can say about this? Are there any sources about rabbis who knew how to

sport or exercise? Or sources about the importance of exercising?

Dear Jechezkel Frank,

In the Chanukah prayers, we say that G-d delivered the "strong into the hands of the weak." So it is clear that the Maccabees were "weak." In fact they had no military training, since the only people who did not go to war were priests, and the Maccabees were all priests.

This is not to say that they weren't healthy and vital. Maimonides writes: "Having a healthy and complete body is following in the ways of G-d, as it is impossible to understand and to perceive the knowledge of the

Creator when one is sick; therefore people must distance themselves from things that are destructive to the body, and conduct themselves in ways that are strengthening and therapeutic."

Maimonides highly recommends exercise as part of his overall prescription for health. He even ranks it higher than proper diet, saying that, "anyone who exercises and engages in a lot of physical activity, doesn't overeat and maintains regularity, sickness will not come upon him, and his strength will increase, even if he eats unhealthy foods."

Sources:
Maimonides, *Hilchot Deot* 4:1, 2, 15

PUBLIC DOMAIN

Comments, quibbles and reactions concerning previous "Ohrnet" features

Re: Gather Round the Chanukah Fire:

Last year an **Ohrnet** reader asked about the validity of a menorah, the arms of which are arranged in circular fashion. It's interesting to note that there is an opinion, recorded in the classic rabbinic literature, which maintains that the Menorah in the Tabernacle in the desert (and in the Temple in Jerusalem) was in just such a shape, "like a crown."

This opinion is found in Midrash ha-Gadol, as well as the Midrash Me'ohr Ha'afelah, both cited by Rabbi Yoseph Kapach in his edition of Maimonides' Commentary on the Mishnah, Tractate Menachot 3:7 n. 57* (p. 78).

• Rashi Simon, *KESHER*, London, England
<rsimon@keshher.org.uk>

Re: Unkosher Kritters (Ohrnet Vayishlach):

Regarding the question posed regarding the scuba diver who wondered if it was "kosher" to wear his shirt with pictures of lobsters on it, I would like to add that there exists in fact a custom of not wearing clothing with non kosher animals drawn in it. Some people are strict about this espe-

cially in regard to children's clothes, because they believe the first images a child has are very important in his spiritual development. That's why many people adorn a baby's room with religious articles or pictures of rabbis, and don't let them wear or be surrounded by objects with non kosher animals engraved in them.

DF, Sao Paulo, Brazil

Re: Talking Turkey (Ohrnet Vayetzei):

Two comments regarding Thanksgiving: Us non-Americans will never understand how religious Jews in the U.S. celebrate a "non-Jewish" festival.

I have heard that the custom of eating turkey on Thanksgiving is a Jewish one. The Hebrew word for turkey is "Hodu." And how does one thank G-d? By saying "Hodu la'Shem ki tov...."

Dani Wassner, Jerusalem <dani@moit.gov.il >
State of Israel Ministry of Industry and Trade
Publications and Economic Information

YIDDLE RIDDLE

Last week we asked:

How many times did Joshua's troops encircle the city of Jericho?

Answer:

13. Joshua was commanded to encircle the city once a day for 6 days, and on the seventh day to encircle it 7 times. (Joshua 6:3,4)

Stretch your imagination in order to judge favorably, and you will often be right on the money. In the following story, what seems far-fetched is really just...

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE COIN

Over a hundred years ago at a festive gathering of prestigious rabbis, the Rabbi of Pressburg, known as the Ktav Sofer, got up to speak. He announced that he had brought along a rare treasure that he wanted to display. To amazement of all those gathered, the Ktav Sofer took out an authentic “*machtzit hashekel*,” the half-shekel coin used in Temple times.

The coin was passed around for each person to see and feel; until finally the Ktav Sofer asked for its return. But it was gone. “Who had it last? Have you seen it?” Everyone looked around his place, but it was nowhere to be found. “Perhaps,” it was suggested, “someone put it in his pocket by mistake; let’s all empty our pockets just to make sure.”

At this suggestion, the elderly Rabbi Yehuda Asad of Hungary got up and said, “I ask that we wait twenty minutes before emptying our pockets.” All were puzzled by his request, but they agreed out of respect for the elder-

ly sage. After 20 minutes, Rabbi Asad rose and said, “I have one more request which may seem odd, but please, let us wait just 10 more minutes.” Now the guests were more puzzled than before, but agreed to wait just 10 more minutes.

Suddenly, a waiter emerged from the kitchen shouting, “I found it! I found the *machtzit hashekel!*” Apparently, it had been placed on the table and then accidentally cleared away with the dishes. The mystery was solved.

Now all eyes turned toward Rabbi Asad: What was the explanation of his strange request? Rabbi Asad explained: “I wanted to keep it secret, but now I feel I must explain. You see, I too have a *machtzit hashekel*,” he said, and he reached into his pocket and pulled out an ancient coin. “And I, too, brought it along to display. But when I saw the Ktav Sofer’s delight in displaying his coin, I decided to keep mine a secret so as not to diminish his joy in any way.”

This story shows the great sensitivity of the elderly rabbi. But also, it shows how far we must go to judge favorably, for imagine if the Ktav Sofer’s coin had not been found. Would anyone have believed that another person in attendance not only owned a duplicate, but had brought it along as well?

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ativity. When the first man was created, his Creator commissioned him to “conquer the world,” i.e., to fill the world with his progeny and harness all of nature to serve them. Creativity and conquest can, however, lead to overkill, with the created man gaining the illusion that he is the creator. The halt to creative effort that is mandated by Shabbat is the liberator from this enslavement to creativity and conquest.

Milah — First commanded to Avraham, the father of the Jewish Nation, the *mitzvah* of circumcising male children is the key to liberation from physical passion. Before he circumcised himself his name was Avram, whose letters have a *gematriya* (mathematical value of Hebrew letters) of 243. Afterwards he is Avraham whose *gematriya* is 248. Our Sages explain that there are 248 organs and limbs in the human body. Before circumcision, our Patriarch had complete control over 243 of them, but lacked such power over his two eyes, two ears and his reproductive organ. After circumcision he achieved the goal that his Creator had set for him — “to be complete.” He achieved for him-

self, and for all his descendants who would follow his example, liberation from the physical passions stimulated by what they see and hear.

The Greeks are touted as champions of democracy and political freedom. But, paradoxically, their Hellenist culture was founded on enslavement to time, to creativity and to passion. They saw the Jewish fulfillment of the aforementioned *mitzvot* as a challenge to their culture and therefore attempted to eradicate it through cruel decrees. Many Jews died martyrs’ deaths in order to preserve their sacred heritage of freedom until Hashem inspired the Maccabees to revolt against the superior Greek forces and rewarded them with a miraculous victory.

Freedom versus slavery is also the classical struggle between light and darkness. Chanukah gives us an opportunity to kindle the lights representing freedom from the darkness of *all* forms of enslavement, and to thank Hashem for enabling us to enjoy the fruits of such liberation in every generation — “*in those days and in our own time.*”