

OHRNET

SHABBAT PARSHAT VAYEITZEI · 12 KISLEV 5761 · DEC. 9, 2000 · VOL. 8 NO. 7

PARSHA INSIGHTS

BIG BROTHER

“Yaakov said to them, ‘My brothers, where are you from? ...Look, the day is still long; it’s not time to bring in the livestock. Water the flock and go on grazing.’” (29:4,7)

One of the hippie bequests to the “New Age” is that everyone is “my brother.” “Like, man, he’s my brother.” A perfect stranger is “my holy brother.” Even my sister is “my holy brother.” We live in a world where words have ceased to have any meaning more than the current fads accord them.

But this was not always so.

One of the most difficult things is to give constructive criticism. Most people close like a clam when given critical advice. Our feathers are ruffled and our defenses come up as soon as we sense that someone is telling us what to do.

This is human nature. No one likes to think they’re wrong. If someone tells me things could be better, that implies a certain degree of wrongdoing, however slight. And I suspect the intentions of the person who criticizes me. Maybe their criticism doesn’t come from a selfless desire to see me do better; maybe it’s really a masked put-down.

Why did Yaakov call the shepherds “my brothers?” He had never seen them in his life. It was hardly some kind of spacey “new-age” greeting. And right after calling the shepherds “my brothers,” Yaakov tells them what to do: “Look,” he says, “the day is still long; it is not time to bring in the livestock. Water the flock and go on grazing.” What gave him the right to start offering unsolicited advice to perfect strangers?

When Yaakov, the father of the Jewish People, calls someone “his brother,” it’s not some empty hippie platitude; it meant that he literally saw them as his brothers. And the shepherds knew that’s how he felt. That’s why Yaakov was able to give them criticism, and that’s why they were able to receive it. He really loved them and they really knew it.

If we want to give critical advice to friends, children, spouses, etc., we must make sure that both we and they know that we are expressing our confidence in them and our love for them. That our voice is the voice of their “brother.” Not Big Brother.

Sources:

• *The Ponevezer Rav, as heard from Rabbi Chaim Zvi Senter*

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Fleeing from Esav, Yaakov leaves Be’er Sheva and sets out for Charan, the home of his mother’s family. After a 14 year stint in the Academy of Shem and Ever, he resumes his journey and comes to Mount Moriah, the place where his father Yitzchak was brought as an offering, and the future site of the *Beit Hamikdash*. He sleeps there and dreams of angels going up and down a ladder between Heaven and earth. Hashem promises him the Land of Israel, that he will found a great nation and that he will enjoy Divine protection. Yaakov wakes and vows to build an altar there and tithe all that he will receive. Then he travels to Charan and meets his cousin Rachel at the well. He arranges with her father, Lavan, to work seven years for her hand in marriage, but Lavan fools Yaakov, substituting Rachel’s older sister, Leah. Yaakov commits himself to work another seven years in order to also marry Rachel. Leah bears four sons —

Reuven, Shimon, Levi and Yehuda — the first Tribes of Israel. Rachel is barren, and in an attempt to give Yaakov children, she gives her handmaiden Bilhah to Yaakov as a wife. Bilhah bears Dan and Naftali. Leah also gives Yaakov her handmaiden Zilpah, who bears Gad and Asher. Leah then bears Yissachar, Zevulun, and a daughter, Dina. Hashem finally blesses Rachel with a son, Yosef. Yaakov decides to leave Lavan, but Lavan, aware of the wealth Yaakov has made for him, is reluctant to let him go, and concludes a contract of employment with him. Lavan tries to swindle Yaakov, but Yaakov becomes extremely wealthy. Six years later, Yaakov, aware that Lavan has become dangerously resentful of his wealth, flees with his family. Lavan pursues them but is warned by Hashem not to harm them. Yaakov and Lavan agree to a covenant and Lavan returns home. Yaakov continues on his way to face his brother Esav.

NO GLAMOUR

For a nation with a history rich with miracles, many Biblical events seem to lack one ingredient: Glamour. Where was the knight in shining armor in the episode of Yaakov's marriage? Yaakov was made to work 14 years in order to marry his chosen Rachel. Where was the mighty warrior in the story of the Exodus? Moshe, although the greatest prophet who ever lived, was far from being a mighty warrior or charismatic leader. It is to these humble beginnings that the

prophet Hoshea refers the Jewish people. Sometimes we may have to work hard like Yaakov and other times we may witness miracles akin to those of the Exodus, but there are no guarantees of victory. Our leaders have not been given supernatural powers to use at whim. If through our haughtiness we forget G-d and follow our desires, then our nation will become weak enough to be driven away by the wind. However, the gates of repentance are always open no matter how far we may stray. If we return to G-d completely then we will merit His special protection.

JUST DO IT?

"And now they sin more and make for themselves molten images...they slaughter men and kiss calves." (Hoshea 13:2)

Adam was placed above the animal kingdom when he was given free will, the ability to rise above animalistic instinct. When "just do it" becomes the byword of society, then humanity has lost its spiritual essence. This is what Hoshea tells Israel: "They slaughter men and kiss calves" — they have sacrificed their most noble human quality in their worship of animal instinct.

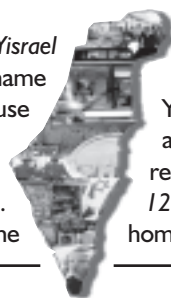
LOVE OF THE LAND

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

BETH EL

Abraham's first encampment upon entering Eretz Yisrael was east of this city (Bereishet 12:8). (The same name

meaning "House of G-d" was applied by Yaakov to Mt. Moriah where the



Beit Hamikdash would eventually be built.) It was in Beth El that the patron angel of Esav who wrestled with Yaakov (Bereishet 32:25) eventually conceded to the patriarch Yaakov that he was entitled to the blessings he received from his father Yitzchak in place of Esav (Hoshea 12:5). The modern settlement bearing this name is the home of a Yeshivat Hesder.

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I DIDN'T KNOW THAT!

"And Lavan gathered all the people of the place and made a feast (lit. drinking repast)." (Bereishet 29:22)

Lavan wanted Yaakov to get intoxicated so that he could more easily fool him into marrying Leah. That's why he made a festive meal which included alcoholic beverages. But when Yaakov married Rachel, Lavan made no feast at all.

• *Da'at Zekeinim Miba'alei Hatosafot*

RECOMMENDED READING LIST

	RAMBAN		SFORNO
28:12	Yaakov's Dream	28:12-13	Yaakov's Dream
29:2	Three Flocks	29:6	A Proper Guest
30:2	Yaakov's Anger	29:11	Why Yaakov Cried
31:19	The Terafim	31:32	Yaakov's Curse
		32:1	A Father's Blessing

THE SAGES AND THE PATHOLOGIST

If a *nazir* comes into contact with even the spine and skull of a corpse, his *nezirut* is interrupted because he has become ritually impure. He must go through a purification process and shave his hair before beginning all over again to fulfill his vow. In the course of its discussion of whether the *mishna* means “spine and skull” or “spine or skull” the *gemara* cites a statement made by Rabbi Yehuda (*Tosefta Oholot* 4:2) about the position of his master, Rabbi Akiva.

On six issues regarding ritual impurity did Rabbi Akiva differ from the majority of the sages but eventually conceded to them. One such issue was whether a skeleton made up of the parts of two corpses can generate the ritual impurity that comes from contact with a dead body. Rabbi Akiva even recalled an incident in which a box full of human bones was brought to the synagogue of the coppersmiths and placed in an unroofed part of the building. (*Tosefot* explains that this was a precaution to protect anyone entering the building from becoming impure by being under the same roof as the bones, if it should be ruled that they generate impurity.) The physician Todos and all the other medical experts — the pathologists of their day — entered the synagogue and after examining the bones determined that there was no complete spine from a single corpse. Since a complete spine made up of the parts of two corpses was a subject of dispute between Rabbi Akiva and his colleagues, it was decided to take a vote in order to determine the status of the bones. They started with Rabbi Akiva and when he surprisingly declared that the bones did *not* generate impurity, they realized that he had reversed his position and had conceded to his colleagues.

If pathologists were needed to establish that the bones making up the spine were not from one corpse, points out *Tosefot*, we must assume that they were fragmented and required expert analysis. If this is so, he asks, how could they generate impurity, since only a few lines earlier we learned that a shattered spine cannot generate impurity (*Tosefta Oholot* 2:3)? In response, *Tosefot* refers us to the second half of the *halacha* cited from this *Tosefta* which states that if that shattered spine is in a grave, it *does* generate impurity because we have a tradition from Sinai that the grave serves as a combining agent. The issue before the sages, concludes *Tosefot*, was the status of a man who had come into contact with a grave in which these bones had been buried. Had there been enough of them to constitute the spine of a single person, they may therefore have generated impurity, and for this reason Todos and his pathologists were called upon for their expertise.

As a footnote the *gemara* cites Rabbi Shimon, another disciple of Rabbi Akiva, taking issue with this report of Rabbi Yehuda that their master had reversed his position on this issue. To bring home his point emphatically he declared:

“Until his last day Rabbi Akiva held that even a spine from two corpses generates impurity. If he changed his position since his death, I am not aware of it!” Upon subsequent reflection that this statement smacked of irreverence for his master, Rabbi Shimon repented with so much fasting that his teeth turned black.

• *Nazir* 52a

BACK TO THE PROPHETS

A major dispute raged among the sages as to whether a *nazir* must interrupt his *nezirut* if he comes into contact with a quarter *kav* of the bones of a dead man. A later generation of sages decided that even though a quarter *kav* is sufficient to cause ritual impurity which prevents a *kohen* from eating *terumah* and prevents anyone from eating sacrificial meat, a *nazir* need only interrupt his *nezirut* if he contacts half a *kav*.

What gave this later opinion so much weight that it is recorded as law in our *mesechta* (49b) and in *Mesechta Oholot* — says Rabbi Yaakov bar Idi — is the fact that the sages who stated it received this tradition from the Prophets Chaggai, Zecharia and Malachi.

This idea of sages quoting *halachot* from the last of the prophets appears in a number of places in the Talmud, and it deserves attention both in regard to the authority of such a source and the nature of its transmission.

Tosefot (*Mesechta Bechorot* 58a) takes issue with Rashi who writes that what the sages received from Chaggai, Zecharia and Malachi they viewed as prophecy which must be accepted even without understanding its logic. The mention of prophecy, says *Tosefot*, is inaccurate, because no prophet was given a mandate to introduce prophecy into the halachic process; it would be more accurate to refer to this as a halachic tradition received from those prophets based on their Torah knowledge.

The other issue is an historic one. Although the text of the *gemara* — that the tradition was received “from the mouths of Chaggai, Zecharia and Malachi” — would seem to indicate that these sages heard it *directly* from those prophets, this is hardly likely. Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Chayot points out in regard to what the *gemara* says (*Mesechta Megillah* 3a) that Yonatan ben Uziel wrote that *targum*-translation of *Nevi'im* (The books of the Prophets) from the mouths of Chaggai, Zecharia and Malachi that it cannot mean a literal transmission from them to him, because he lived more than 300 years after them. In all such cases the meaning must be that the sages citing these prophets had a tradition from generation to generation going back to these prophets, although they did not hear it directly from them.

• *Nazir* 53a

PARSHA Q&A?

1. When Yaakov traveled to Charan, the Torah stresses that he departed from Be'er Sheva. Why?
2. On the night of his dream, Yaakov did something he hadn't done in 14 years. What?
3. Hashem compressed the entire Land of Israel underneath the sleeping Yaakov. What did this symbolize?
4. Yaakov said "I will return with *shalom*." What did he mean by "*shalom*"?
5. Why did Yaakov rebuke the shepherds?
6. Why did Rachel, and not her brothers, tend her father's sheep?
7. Why did Yaakov cry when he met Rachel?
8. Why did Lavan run to greet Yaakov?
9. Why were Leah's eyes tender?
10. How old was Yaakov when he married?
11. What did Rachel find enviable about Leah?
12. Who was Yaakov's fifth son?
13. Who was Leah's handmaiden? Was she older or younger than Rachel's handmaiden?
14. How do you say "*dudaim*" in Arabic?
15. "Hashem remembered Rachel" (30:22). What did He remember?
16. What does "Yosef" mean? Why was he named that?
17. G-d forbade Lavan to speak to Yaakov "either of good or of bad." Why didn't G-d want Lavan to speak of good?
18. Where are there two Aramaic words in this week's Parsha?
19. Who was Bilhah's father? Who was Zilpah's father?
20. Who escorted Yaakov into *Eretz Yisrael*?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

1. 28:10 - The departure of a righteous person leaves a noticeable void in that place.
2. 28:11 - Sleep at night lying down.
3. 28:13 - That the Land would be easy for his descendants to conquer.
4. 28:21 - Completely without sin.
5. 29:7 - He thought they were loafing, stopping work early in the day.
6. 30:27 - Her brothers weren't born yet.
7. 29:11 - He saw prophetically that they would not be buried together; or because he was penniless.
8. 29:13 - He thought Yaakov was carrying money.
9. 29:17 - She cried continually because she thought she was destined to marry Esav.
10. 29:21 - Eighty-four.
11. 30:1 - Her good deeds, thinking they were the reason Leah merited children.
12. 30:5 - Dan.
13. 30:10 - Zilpah. She was younger.
14. 30:14 - Jasmine (*Yasmin*).
15. 30:22 - That Rachel gave Leah the "signs of recognition" that Yaakov had taught her, so that Leah wouldn't be embarrassed.
16. 30:24 - "Yosef" means "He will add." Rachel asked Hashem for another son in addition to Yosef.
17. 31:24 - Because the "good" that comes from wicked people is bad for the righteous.
18. 31:41 - *Yagar Sahaduta*, meaning "wall of testimony."
19. 31:50 - Lavan.
20. 32:1 - The angels of *Eretz Yisrael*.

KASHA! (KASHA MEANS "QUESTION")

How would you answer this question on the Parsha?

G-d said: "Beware lest you speak with Yaakov either good or bad." (31:24)

G-d told Lavan not to talk to Yaakov at all, yet we see that Lavan did indeed meet Yaakov and speak with him. Did Lavan simply ignore G-d's command?

Answer:

G-d's command that Lavan speak "neither good nor bad" meant that Lavan should make no offers to entice Yaakov to return, nor threaten him with punishment if he failed to do so.

• Ramban

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

YOU VOTED FOR WHO!

From: David, USA
<david@mayer.net>

Dear Rabbi,

Recently in one of our northeastern states, the voting location for elections was moved from a Jewish synagogue to, I believe, a Lutheran church. Evidently, last spring, voting was going to be during Pesach and the synagogue requested not to have the voting there, so the location was moved. Voting was to be located in the office area of the church, not in the worship area. An article in the newspaper quoted an area rabbi who suggested that the Orthodox Jews were being discriminated against because they couldn't go to vote at the Lutheran site because they were forbidden to go into a church. I am very confused; where is it written that a Jew cannot go into the place of worship of another religious group? Does that same interpretation mean that a Jew couldn't go to the church wedding of a friend who was not Jewish? Or, attend a funeral or a baby naming?

Dear David,

According to Jewish Law, it is prohibited to enter any place of worship that is not purely monotheistic. This would include weddings, funerals, baby namings, etc.

Regarding actual application of this law, consult your local Orthodox Rabbi.

Sources:

Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah, 150, Darchei Teshuva ad loc., Shearim Metzuyanim Behalacha 187:9; Igrot Moshe Yoreh Deah 3 Teshuvah 129:6

THE OTHER SIX DAYS

From: Mike S.
<perchik@compuserve.com>

Dear Rabbi,

So I sit down at my desk and start the workday...is there a prayer I should be saying right then? How does a person bring Hashem to work?

Dear Mike S.,

What an interesting question, and one that everyone should really ask himself!

Working gives you a chance to do countless *mitzvot* and good deeds: Keeping your word to employers, employees and clients, paying workers on time, treating fellow workers with respect, fulfilling obligations to support your family, contributing to the good of society. These are all important parts of Jewish Law which you can fulfill at work!

And simply supporting oneself is a *mitzvah* because it helps eliminate temptation to steal.

In the words of the Sages, it is possible for a shoe-maker to stitch every stitch in the Name of Hashem. And the Talmud says, "Work is great, because it brings honor to the one who does it."

So, approach your work as an opportunity to serve Hashem by doing all that is required according to Jewish Law, and pray for success in this.

And, above all, if you set aside time to study Torah in the course of your busy schedule (not at your employers' expense), it is possible to elevate the mundane workday to a spiritual plane.

PUBLIC DOMAIN

Comments, quibbles and reactions concerning previous "Ohrnet" features

The Gift of "Simcha":

For the past several months, we have publishing (with credit and permission from the author Simcha Groffman) "Simcha's Torah Stories" from OHR.EDU. We publish these in our Temple newsletter, "The Shofar," for the enjoyment and enlightenment of our congregation. Temple Beth Am is a reform Temple here in Las Vegas. We have a relatively small membership of about 160 families, and we all enjoy "Simcha's Torah Stories."

The reason for this email is that our Temple Brotherhood always presents a gift to Bar and Bat Mitzvah children. Up until now we have been giving a different book, but after a bit of discussion we have decided that a small volume, containing a complete set of your "Simcha's Torah Stories" (one for each *parsha*), would be an even more desirable gift. Can you please tell me about the availability of such a book?

Many thanks for your wonderful stories.

• Larry Steckler, Las Vegas <lartronics@aol.com>

OHR.EDU Responds:

Dear Larry Steckler,

Thanks for writing. The book Simcha's Torah Stories is available from Feldheim Publishers (www.feldheim.com).

One Deed, Many Blessings (Ohrnet Toldot):

In a recent Yiddle Riddle, we asked: *What Torah mitzvah is it*

that, if done one way, one blessing is said, and if done another way a different blessing is said?

Here are some reader responses:

When putting on a "talit katan" (small *tallit*) you say "*al mitzvat tzitzit*," but when putting on a large "talit" you say "*lehit'atef batzizit*." The blessings before (and after) the morning "*shema*" are different than those for the evening *shema*. Before putting on the hand *tefilin*, you say "*lehaniach tefilin*." But if you put on first (by error) the head *tefilin*, or if you only have the head *tefilin* but not the hand *tefilin*, you bless "*al mitzvat tefilin*."

• Raffi <RaffiAs@shaam.gov.il>

When you dunk one new vessel in a *mikva* you say "*al tevilas kli* — on immersing a vessel" (i.e., singular), but for many vessels you say "*al tevilas kelim* — on immersing vessels" (i.e., plural).

• <Unikanunie@aol.com>

When you make kiddush on wine, you say "*borei p'ri hagafen*." But if you are out of wine and you have to substitute some other beverage or challah, then you would say a different blessing, the blessing appropriate for either the beverage or the challah.

• Neil Parks <nparks@torah.org>