

O H R N E T

SHABBAT PARSHAT BESHALACH · 17 SHEVAT 5761 · FEB. 10, 2001 · VOL. 8 NO. 16

PARSHA INSIGHTS

ANYBODY UP THERE?

“And the Children of Israel went in the midst of the sea on the dry land, and the waters were a wall to them...”14:22

The night was wet. The road was like an ice rink. Before he knew it, two blinding headlights pierced his windshield. He couldn't keep the car straight. He threw the wheel violently to the left to avoid the lights and suddenly felt himself plummeting into nothingness. Adrenaline coursed through his body like a high pressure oil-line. He threw open the door and jumped into the blackness.

What was that below him? He reached out with his last ounce of strength and grabbed the branch. The *g-shock* as the branch arrested his fall practically wrenched his arms from their sockets.

And then everything became very quiet. A thousand feet above the canyon floor, he swung from a lone branch sticking out of the sheer rock face. The wind whistled through his fingers. The branch started to groan and creak; his weight was too much for it. Never having been too religious, he now raised his eyes heavenward and cried out: “Is there Anyone up there?” “Is there Anyone up there?”

“Let go of the branch and I will save you,” came a voice from above.

He thought for a moment, then shouted: “Is there anyone else up there!?”

There's an expression in Yiddish: *A sheine gelechte*. If it weren't so tragic — it would be funny.

The Jewish People are at war. This war is not being fought in Gaza. It's not being fought in Chevron or Gilo. The war is being fought in the heart of every Jew.

History repeats itself. Since the Jewish People have started to return to their ancestral home in the Land of Israel, the oft repeated cry of every Arab nation is “We will drive the Jews into the sea.” (This, by the way, is not an invitation for us to hire them as our chauffeurs.)

I don't know if the Arabs are aware of it, but our Sages teach us that the eventual redemption of the Jewish People will be a clone of the original redemption from the slavery of Egypt. “*I have redeemed them — the last as the first.*” In this week's Torah reading we read of the mighty Egyptian army bearing down on the Jewish People whose backs are to the sea. Pharaoh and his army wanted literally to “drive the Jews into the sea.”

Our present enemy is trying to drive us into the sea in a more subtle way. Their insistence on a “Law of Return” which would involve the immigration of 3 million of their ilk into the Land of Israel would effectively drive any Jewish dominated democracy into the sea. Democracy's great weakness is that it is based on quantity and not quality. It's a numbers game — that's all. An extra 3 million Arabs in the Land of Israel will present a demographic bombshell to the State of Israel which even the wholesale import of non-Jews from Russia will not stem.

The last will be as the first.

Among other things, the Torah is like a time-capsule. It contains a message for every generation. Ours in no different. The Torah tells us in this week's *parsha* how to respond to a nation who would drive us into the sea:

“And the Children of Israel went in the midst of the sea on the dry land, and the waters were a wall to them...”

In this verse the Torah says the Children of Israel walked *through the sea on the dry land*, but seven verses later the order is reversed and it says they walked on the *dry land in the sea*. The Vilna Gaon explains that when the Jews arrived at *Yam Suf*, the sea looked like it was going to do anything but split. The Egyptians were bearing down on them. Not until Nachshon ben Aminadav, Aharon's brother-in-law, literally took the plunge and waded into the water up to his neck, did the waters finally part.

The first verse is referring to Nachshon: For him the sea became dry land, but for the rest of the people, they only walked on the dry land created by Nachson's trust in G-d.

The Jewish People should never rely on a few hand-picked heroes. Each one of us is expected to be a Nachshon. Each and every Jew is expected to be a pioneer of faith, to dive into the sea of fear. Each and every one of us must put our trust in the Rock who has brought us to this day.

There is no one else up there.

Pharaoh finally sends *B'nei Yisrael* out of Egypt. With pillars of cloud and fire, Hashem leads them toward *Eretz Yisrael* on a circuitous route, avoiding the Pelishtim (Philistines). Pharaoh regrets the loss of so many slaves and chases the Jews with his army. The Jews are very afraid as the Egyptians draw close, but Hashem protects them. Moshe raises his staff and Hashem splits the sea, enabling the Jews to cross safely. Pharaoh, his heart hardened by Hashem, commands his army to pursue, whereupon the waters crash down upon the Egyptian army. Moshe and Miriam lead the men and women, respectively, in a song of thanks. After three days travel only to find bitter waters at Marah, the people complain.

Moshe miraculously produces potable water. In Marah they receive certain *mitzvot*. The people complain that they ate better food in Egypt. Hashem sends quail for meat and provides manna, a miraculous bread that falls from the sky every day except Shabbat. On Friday a double portion descends to supply the Shabbat needs. No one is able to obtain more than his daily portion, but manna collected on Friday suffices for two days so the Jews can rest on Shabbat. Some manna is set aside as a memorial for future generations. When the Jews again complain about a lack of water, Moshe miraculously produces water from a rock. Then Amalek attacks. Joshua leads the Jews in battle while Moshe prays for their welfare.

SHOFTIM 4:3 - 5:31

TWO GREAT WOMEN

After 20 years of Canaanite oppression, the core of the Jewish People are led to repentance by Devorah the Prophetess. The Sages compare the results of her inspirational leadership to “the restoration of the wick for the light of the Sanctuary.” Through her shining

example, she rejuvenated the bearers of the light of Torah.

In the merit of this mass repentance Devorah receives a prophecy that she should lead 10,000 men into battle and that G-d would deliver the Canaanite General Sisera into the hands of the Jewish army. G-d causes confusion amongst Sisera’s camp, and the Jews overpower them. Sisera flees to the encampment of Chever, who was at peace with the King of Canaan. There he seeks refuge in the tent of Yael, Chever’s wife. Yael invites him into her tent, guaranteeing his safety. When he requested water to drink, she gave him milk to make

him drowsy. When he was fast asleep, she picked up a hammer and drove a tent-peg through his temple. Thus Israel was saved. After the victory, Devorah leads the nation in a song of praise to G-d. This song outlines the recurring theme in the history of Israel: Oppression — Repentance — Victory.

Both the Parsha and the *haftara* contain a national song of praise to G-d. Perhaps another similarity is to be found in the words of our Sages that the Exodus took place in the merit of the righteous women of Israel, who played as great a role then as would Devorah and Yael in the future.

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I DIDN'T KNOW THAT!

“Macho Emche ... I [G-d] will obliterate the remembrance of Amalek” (Shemot 17:14).

The phrase “I will obliterate” (*macho emche*) has the same numeric value as the phrase “this refers to Haman” (*ze Haman*), Amalek’s most infamous descendant.
 • *Ba'al HaTurim*

לע"נ

ר' פנחס יקותיאל בן נפתלי ז"ל

נלב"ע י"א שבט תשנ"ה

ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

OUR HANDS DID NOT SHED THIS BLOOD

The final *perek* of Mesechta Sotah deals with the Torah's instructions of what to do when a man is found on the road a victim of murder and his slayer is unknown. After judges from the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem have determined which is the nearest city to the corpse, the elders of that city must carry out the ritual of *eglah arufah*. A calf is beheaded at a hard, rocky spot. The elders wash their hands upon the beheaded calf and declare: "Our hands did not shed this blood nor did our eyes see it happen." (*Devarim* 21:7)

Is it at all imaginable, asks the *gemara*, that the elders are guilty of murder? What their statement really means, it is explained, is that "we did not send him away without food after coming to us, nor did we see him and fail to provide him with safe escort."

The elders of the community have the responsibility to care for a wayfarer and their declaration is an affirmation that they were not negligent in fulfilling that responsibility. We can easily understand that there is a measure of guilt involved in failing to provide escort which might have saved the traveler from his attacker. But what connection is there between failing to provide him with food and his death at the hands of a murderer, since it was not hunger which caused his death but the sword of his attacker?

Two different approaches are offered to this problem. Some commentaries (*Korban Eidah and Tiferet Yisrael*) suggest that perhaps if he had been properly fed he would have had the strength to ward off the murderous attack. Rashi, however, offers a very innovative approach. In speculating what might have been the motive of the murderer, we must also take into account the possibility that it was an over-reaction to the attempt of a desperately hungry man to take his food away from him. The declaration of the elders is that they were not guilty, through their failure to provide the traveler with food, of placing him in a situation where he was so desperate for nourishment that he tried to steal some from another traveler who over-reacted and slew him.

Rambam, in *Moreh Nevuchim*, writes that one of the reasons for the entire ritual of *eglah arufah* was to generate broad public interest in the murder and thus increase the chances of apprehending the murderer.

• Sotah 46b

FOR HER SAKE ONLY

Mesechta Gittin begins with the ruling of the *mishna* that one who brings a *get* (divorce document) from outside *Eretz Yisrael* to *Eretz Yisrael* must declare to the court that the *get* was written and signed in his presence. The Sage Rabba states that one of the reasons the Sages

instituted this procedure is that many people outside of *Eretz Yisrael* are not familiar with the Torah's requirement that a *get* must be written (and/or signed according to the various opinions of sages) *lishmah* — specifically for the woman involved. In order to determine whether the scribe did indeed write this *get lishmah*, the agent bringing it declares that it was written in his presence. His declaration will invite a query from the court as to whether it was written *lishmah* and thus will be established the validity of the *get*. This is all according to Rashi's commentary.

Tosefot raises the question why the sages were concerned about people outside of *Eretz Yisrael* lacking expertise only in regard to the law of *lishmah* and not in regard to the other requirements for a kosher *get*, such as writing it on a surface detached from the earth, making sure to write the correct names of husband and wife and avoiding writing the *get* during the day and signing it at night.

Rabbeinu Tam, one of the leading Tosefists, departs from the approach of his maternal grandfather, Rashi, and explains that there is no reason to assume that the people outside *Eretz Yisrael* are not expert in all the laws of *get*. The problem with *lishmah* is that this requirement is not explicit in the Torah and is deduced from the phrase "He shall write for her" which indicates that it must be written specifically for the purpose of divorcing a particular woman. This caused many people outside *Eretz Yisrael* to disregard this requirement and necessitated an investigation by the court to determine that the scribe did write it *lishmah*. Tosefot also disagrees with Rashi's approach that subsequent to the agent's declaration that the *get* was written in his presence the court asks him whether it was written *lishmah*. Since we find no mention in the *gemara* of such a question being put to the agent Tosefot concludes that when the agent testifies that it was written in his presence it is implicit in his words that it was written properly, i.e. *lishmah* (as Rashi himself suggests on the very next *daf*).

The *gemara* (5a) points out that at a later stage, even the people outside *Eretz Yisrael* "learned" the requirement of *lishmah*. According to Tosefot this means that they eventually accepted the requirement based on the interpretation of "He shall write for her" which they had previously been reluctant to accept.

• Gittin 2b

The Ohr Somayach Web Site
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PARSHA Q&A ?

1. What percentage of the Jewish people died during the plague of darkness?
2. Why did the oath that Yosef administered to his brothers apply to Moshe's generation?
3. Why did the Egyptians want to pursue the Jewish People?
4. Where did the Egyptians get animals to pull their chariots?
5. What does it mean that the Jewish people "took hold of their fathers' craft" (*tafsu umnut avotam*)?
6. How did Hashem cause the wheels of the Egyptian chariots to fall off?
7. Why were the dead Egyptians cast out of the sea?
8. To what future time is the verse hinting when it uses the future tense of "Then Moshe and *Bnei Yisrael* will sing"?
9. Why are the Egyptians compared to stone, lead and straw?
10. The princes of Edom and Moav had nothing to fear from the Jewish People. Why, then, were they "confused and gripped with trembling"?
11. Moshe foretold that he would not enter the Land of Israel. Which word in the Parsha indicates this?
12. Why is Miriam referred to as "Aharon's sister" and not as "Moshe's sister"?
13. The Jewish women trusted that Hashem would grant the Jewish People a miraculous victory over the Egyptians. How do we see this?
14. Which sections of the Torah did the Jewish People receive at Marah?
15. When did *Bnei Yisrael* run out of food?
16. What lesson in *derech erez* concerning the eating of meat is taught in this week's Parsha?
17. How did non-Jews experience the taste of the manna?
18. The Prophet Yirmiyahu showed the Jewish People a jar of manna prepared in the time of Moshe. Why?
19. Which verse in this week's Parsha alludes to the plague of blood?
20. Why did Moshe's hands become heavy during the war against Amalek?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

1. 13:18 - Eighty percent (four-fifths).
2. 13:19 - Yosef made his brothers swear that they would make their children swear.
3. 14:5 - To regain their wealth.
4. 14:7 - From those Egyptians who feared the word of Hashem and kept their animals inside during the plagues.
5. 14:10 - They cried out to Hashem.
6. 14:25 - He melted them with fire.
7. 14:30 - So that the Jewish People would see the destruction of the Egyptians and be assured of no further pursuit.
8. 15:1 - Resurrection of the dead during the time of *mashiach*.
9. 15:5 - The wickedest ones floated like straw, dying slowly. The average ones suffered less, sinking like stone. Those still more righteous sunk like lead, dying immediately.
10. 15:14 - They felt horrible seeing Israel in a state of glory.
11. 15:17 - "*T'vi-aimo...*" — "Bring them" (and not "bring us").
12. 15:20 - Aharon put himself at risk for her when she was struck with *tzara'at*. (See *Bamidbar 12:12*)
13. 15:20 - They brought musical instruments with them in preparation for the miraculous victory celebration.
14. 15:25 - Shabbat, Red Heifer, Judicial Laws.
15. 16:1 - 15th of Iyar.
16. 16:8 - One should not eat meat to the point of satiation.
17. 16:21 - The sun melted whatever manna remained in the fields. This flowed into streams from which animals drank. Whoever ate these animals tasted manna.
18. 16:32 - The people claimed they couldn't study Torah because they were too busy earning a livelihood. Yirmiyahu showed them the manna saying: "If you study Torah, G-d will provide for you just as he provided for your ancestors in the desert."
19. 17:5 - "And your staff with which you smote the river..."
20. 17:12 - Because he was remiss in his duty, since he, not Yehoshua, should have led the battle.

KASHA! (KASHA MEANS "QUESTION")

How would you answer this question on the Parsha?

"Behold I am going to rain bread from the Heavens..."
(*Shemot 16:4*)

Shlomo Kagan <email@withheld> asked:

We say a blessing on all food before we eat it, and different types of food have different blessings. So, what blessing did they say when they ate manna in the dessert?

Answer: The Rama from Pano writes that they said "Blessed are You, Hashem our G-d, Master of the Universe, Who brings

forth bread from the Heavens." Others write that no blessing was said, as the obligation is only to bless upon food that comes from this world, whereas the manna was Heavenly food from the World to Come. A third opinion is that they said "*borei minei mezonot...*Who creates types of sustenance." And a fourth view is that there was no fixed blessing because each person tasted in the manna any flavor he desired; therefore, the blessing said depended on the flavor that the person wanted to taste.

• Source: *Sefer Ebya Lehu, R. Greenbaum p.107*

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

TAKING STOCK

From: Marvin Peyser
<Mnpeyser@aol.com>

Dear Rabbi,

Here is a question for you. I own stocks in some companies that are not doing too well these days. (What stock is?) Anyway, some of these companies just announced massive layoffs, in the tens of thousands. This will result in lower costs, therefore greater profits, and I'm liable to make some money on it when the stock subsequently rises. (One company's stock went up 5% just with the announcement of the layoffs.)

My question is: I would like to feel joyful that my stock will rise, but then I am reminded that tens of thousands of families will have lost their income. This is a dilemma. Is there any Torah insight on this?

Dear Marvin Peyser,

First, I'd like to say that your question shows a great deal of sensitivity, compassion, and market savvy.

How should you feel when others lose their jobs while your stock rises? Bad and good. Feel bad that others have lost their jobs, and glad that your stocks went up.

The Talmud actually deals with this idea of relating to contradictory emotional stimuli. The Talmud's example regards how to relate to a parent's death when at the same time that death brings financial relief to the child.

If someone hears that his father has died, leaving him and his brothers an inheritance, what blessing does he say? Should he say, "Blessed is G-d, the True Judge," which is the blessing accepting G-d's will upon hearing sad news? Or, should he say "Blessed is He who is Good and who bestows good," which is the blessing for good news which benefits him and others, such as here where he and his brothers have become wealthy?

The Talmud states that he should say *both* blessings. First the blessing for the bad news, and afterwards the blessing for the good news.

This can be understood as recognition that people can feel contradictory emotions; an event which has positive and

negative aspects can be experienced as such. I think an important part of this lesson is that a person shouldn't feel *guilty* for experiencing the happy aspects of a bad situation. It doesn't necessarily mean that he is insensitive.

With that, I would like to tell you a true story. A rabbi I know once called the police to report his teenage son, last seen riding his bicycle, missing. Later that day the police phoned asking the rabbi to come and view the body of a boy, matching his son's description, who had been hit by a car while riding his bike.

The Rabbi later told that while he and his wife were in the car on their way to identify the body, he had hoped for a fleeting moment that the sight which would greet his eyes would *not* be that of his son. "But if it's *not* my son," he realized, "then it will be someone *else's* son, and my joy will be someone else's tragedy. If it is *my* son, others will be spared."

That thought gave him courage and helped him accept the sight that did greet his eyes, the sight of his beloved son.

Sources:

- Tractate Berachot 59b

THE GREAT DEBATE

From: Bill Hoffman
<UpsideBill@aol.com>

Dear Rabbi,

What blessing or prayer is inside a mezuzah? Please answer a debate I am having with a relative. I say it is the "Shema!" Thank you!

Dear Bill Hoffman,

What does your relative say?

But seriously, a *mezuzah* is a scroll which the Torah tells us to put on our doorways. Written upon this scroll are the first two paragraphs of the "Shema." That is, the 15 verses from Deuteronomy 6:4-9 and 11:13-21.

So, Bill, it looks like you've won the first round! But Jewish study is an ongoing process, and the World Champion is the person who never gives up the fight!

PUBLIC DOMAIN

Comments, quibbles and reactions concerning previous "Ohrnet" features

Re: Simcha's Torah Stories

I am a girl from Portland Oregon (yes, there are some religious people here...) And I want to say how much I appreciate the last "Simcha's Torah Stories" email you sent out. You really got me to try and make sure that I should do more *mitzvos*. Thank you again.

• T.I., Portland, Oregon <Tzofia@aol.com>

Quote of the Week:

"...You declare, my friend, that you do not hate the Jews, you are merely 'anti-Zionist.' And I say, let the truth ring forth from the high mountain tops, let it echo through the valleys of God's green earth: When people criticize Zionism, they mean Jews —

this is God's own truth... All men of good will exult in the fulfillment of God's promise, that his People should return in joy to rebuild their plundered land. This is Zionism, nothing more, nothing less... And what is anti-Zionist? It is the denial to the Jewish people of a fundamental right that we justly claim for the people of Africa and freely accord all other nations of the Globe. It is discrimination against Jews, my friend, because they are Jews. In short, it is anti-Semitism... Let my words echo in the depths of your soul: When people criticize Zionism, they mean Jews — make no mistake about it."

• From "This I Believe: Selections from the Writings of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr." (New York, 1971), pp. 234-235.
Submitted by an Ohrnet Reader

Tu B'Shevat: Just a Jewish Arbor Day?

by Rabbi Avraham Zuroff

Tu B'Shevat 5761, the 15th of Shevat, will commence this year at dusk, February 7 and continue until nightfall of February 8.

What is Tu B'Shevat and what are some of its customs? It was in 1913, the early days of modern Jewish settlement in the nascent Jewish colonization of Palestine. The Israel Teacher's Association, along with 1500 Jewish students, traveled to the Jewish colony of Motza, three miles west of Jerusalem. The students planted trees and exchanged fruits with each other. This Jewish Arbor Day was further cultivated by the Jewish National Fund in an effort to combat the deadly disease of malaria in the swamplands of the Hula Valley. The JNF planted eucalyptus trees in order to drain the malaria-infested areas, saving Jewish pioneers' lives.

One Tu B'Shevat, when I was an American student in Hebrew school, I bought a tree to be planted in Israel. Twelve years later, when I visited Israel for the first time, I expected to find a twenty-foot pine. Not only was I disappointed about the prospects of locating my tree, I found I had been misinformed about what Tu B'Shevat really signifies.

Let's take a look at the typical weather patterns in the Land of Israel. There are two main seasons, the winter rainy season, which starts shortly after Rosh Hashana, and the arid summer season. It typically does not rain at all during the summer. Therefore, the inhabitants of Israel are dependent upon the winter's rainfall. Tu B'Shevat, the 15th of Shevat, is the day by which most of the winter's rain has fallen. Yoram, an Israeli botanist, explained to me that the tree generally responds to the cold winter weather by hibernating. The winter rains do not benefit the future fruit as much as they benefit the dormant tree whose leaves have fallen. However, when Tu B'Shevat comes and spring approaches, the weather intermittently warms and the tree begins to circulate its nutrients to the leaves which begin to

photosynthesize. Israeli almond trees are the first to blossom shortly after Tu B'Shevat, followed by peaches and apricots.

Chanata is the beginning phase of the fruit's development, which occurs shortly after the tree's blossoming. The Tannaim explained that if the *chanata* would occur after Tu B'Shevat, most of the fruit's sustenance would be received from this year's winter rains, whereas the fruits that were to blossom prior to Tu B'Shevat (a very rare occurrence) would have been nourished from the previous year's rains.

Halachic Implications

"Happy New Year" is expressed by divergent cultures on distinct dates. Almost all civilizations express New Year's joy once a year. Jews are able to say "Happy New Year" four times a year!

Jews throughout the world blow the shofar and dip apples into honey on the 1st of Tishrei, commemorating the world's creation, which is actually one of four Jewish New Years.

The Mishna states that the 1st of Nissan is the New Year for counting the reign of Jewish Kings and with reference to the Festive cycle.

The 1st of Elul is the cut-off date for tithing one's livestock.

The 1st of Tishrei is the New Year for judging Mankind; for the count of sabbatical and jubilee years; for counting the first three years (*orlah*) produce of newly planted trees; and for grain and vegetable tithes.

The 15th of Shevat, Tu B'Shevat, the New Year for the trees, is the cut-off point for tithing fruits.

Praying for a Beautiful Etrog

The Mishna refers to Tu B'Shevat as the New Year for the Tree, in singular form, as opposed to "trees" in the plural. Why? The *Bnei Yisaschar* explains that the "tree" refers particularly to the beautiful tree used for the performance

of a mitzvah, the *etrog* (citron), which is one of the four species taken on Sukkot. Many pray on this day for a beautiful, unblemished *etrog*, symbolic of the *tzaddik*, the untainted Jew, in order to aesthetically perform the mitzvah as best as possible.

Eating Fruit

It is customary to partake of fruit on this day, especially from the produce for which the Land of Israel is praised. These species are: Wheat, barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives and dates. By Man's increasing the saying of blessings upon G-d's produce, we become cognizant of G-d's providential role in creation. Not by our toil alone does the land bear fruit. If not for G-d providing rain and sustenance, the farmer's efforts would be wasted.

New Year for Man's Potential

The Torah tells us that if the Jewish People were to go to war and besiege the enemy, it would be forbidden to needlessly destroy fruit-bearing trees. The verse "Is the tree of the field a man that it should come under siege before you?" (*Deuteronomy 20:19*) tells us that Man's life is dependent upon the tree's sustenance.

This ecologically-sound concept is further developed by Rabbi Chanoch Karelstein, who expounds upon the link between Man and his supply of sustenance from the tree, as the tree is symbolic of Mankind's vitality. On Tu B'Shevat, just the beginning of springtime, the tree's potential, the fruit, is yet to be seen. Still, we rejoice, faithful that in a few weeks' time the tree will bear fruit. There are times when one may be sliding downwards, either physically or spiritually. There is an "autumn" and an even colder "winter," but Man should not despair! Just after the coldest part of the winter, when the fruits are still concealed, comes the metaphysical spring of Man. Surely Man's potential shall bear fruit like a nurtured garden!
