

# OHRNET

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## PARSHA INSIGHTS

### NEARER TO LIFE

*"...at the appointed time of the month in the springtime, for at that time you left Egypt..." (23:15)*

The man stood at the front desk of the inn after a long and tiring journey. Despite his fatigue, or maybe because of it, he had the disquieting feeling that something was out of place in this inn. But what was it... what was it?

As he finished checking in he suddenly became aware of a sound; a sound as familiar as it was out of place. *Tick, tock, tick, tock.* That was it! The watch! The innkeeper's watch!

"That watch..." he said to the innkeeper. That watch is my rabbi's watch!"

"How do you know?" said the innkeeper.

"Because my rabbi's watch is different than any other watch in the world."

"How so?"

"With each tick, every watch in the world says, 'One more second of your life gone. Tick! One step nearer to death, Tock! Nearer to death, tick! Nearer to death, tock!...' Every watch in the world is like that except for my rabbi's watch; his watch says, 'One second closer to the *Geula* (redemption), tick! One step closer to the World of Truth, tock! One step nearer to eternal life, tick! Nearer to life, tick! Nearer to life, tock...' I have no doubt that that watch is my rabbi's watch."

"A few year's ago," said the innkeeper, "there was a

rabbi staying here at the inn. When he came to pay the check he realized he didn't have enough money to pay, so instead he gave me this watch."

The first mitzvah that the Jewish People received while they were still in Egypt was the sanctification of the moon. It's axiomatic that something that comes at the beginning contains all that is to follow. Thus, as this mitzvah was the first mitzvah, it must be fundamental to Judaism. Ostensibly, however, the sanctification of the moon does not seem such a central pillar of Judaism. If you or I were writing the Torah, I doubt we would have selected this mitzvah to be the first? What, then, is so fundamental about the sanctification of the moon?

When G-d told the Jewish People to sanctify the new moon, He was giving them much more than a mitzvah. He was giving them a entirely different system of time.

In Hebrew, the word for time is *zman*. The root of *zman* is the same as *hazmana*, which can mean "preparation", or "invitation." When G-d took the Jewish People out of Egypt, they left a world of time which leads nowhere except to the grave, and entered a system of time where every second is a preparation, an invitation to something beyond time.

A step nearer to life.

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## PARSHA OVERVIEW

The Jewish People receive a series of laws concerning social justice. Topics include: Proper treatment of Jewish servants; a husband's obligations to his wife; penalties for hitting people and for cursing parents, judges and leaders; financial responsibilities for damaging people or their property, either by oneself or by one's animate or inanimate property, or by pitfalls that one created; payments for theft; not returning an object that one accepted responsibility to guard; the right to self-defense of a person being robbed.

Other topics include: Prohibitions against seduction; witchcraft, bestiality and sacrifices to idols. The Torah warns us to treat the convert, widow and orphan with dignity, and to avoid lying. Usury is forbidden and the rights over collateral are limited. Payment of obligations to the

Temple should not be delayed, and the Jewish People must be holy, even concerning food. The Torah teaches the proper conduct for judges in court proceedings. The commandments of Shabbat and the Sabbatical year are outlined. Three times a year — Pesach, Shavuot and Succot — we are to come to the Temple. The Torah concludes this listing of laws with a law of kashrut — not to mix milk and meat.

G-d promises that He will lead the Jewish People to the Land of Israel, helping them conquer its inhabitants, and tells them that by fulfilling His commandments they will bring blessings to their nation. The people promise to do and listen to everything that G-d says. Moshe writes the Book of the Covenant, and reads it to the people. Moshe ascends the mountain to remain there for 40 days in order to receive the two Tablets of the Covenant.

## ISRAEL *Forever*

### RELIGION AND THE ENVIRONMENT

“New Environmental Group Aims to Enlist *Chareidim*” read the headline of a recent story on awareness in *chareidi* (very observant) circles of protecting the environment.

The Torah's concern for the environment finds perhaps its most practical expression in what we learn in this week's Torah portion about the responsibility one has for creating an obstacle on public property.

“The owner of the pit shall pay for the damage he caused” (*Shmot* 21:34) is the succinct manner in which the Torah sums up the responsibilities of hole-diggers and litterers who endanger the public.

A new organization whose catchy name has a double

meaning has launched a campaign to increase the awareness of the *chareidi* community in Israel to these dangers and to other environmental issues such as recycling, air and noise pollution, and the effects of cellular phone antennas.

“*Chareidim* for the Environment” means that *chareidi* Jews are the target for the new organization's efforts but it also means that these Jews are indeed “*chareidim*” (the Hebrew word for “fearful”) about the lack of concern for the environment shown by the general public.

The new organization held its first conference in Bnei Brak in early January with the participation of the Tel Aviv Chief Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau and Environment Minister Gideon Ezra.

## LOVE OF THE LAND - THE PLACES

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

### BNEI AYISH – THE HEBREW HEART

In the south of Israel is a rural settlement called Bnei Ayish. The Hebrew letters that make up the second half of this name are abbreviations of the name Akiva Yosef Shlesinger.

A colorful Torah personality who settled in



Jerusalem upon his arrival from Eastern Europe, Rabbi Shlesinger wrote a well-known work that he called *Lev Ivri* – Heart of a Hebrew. He is famous for having written a manifesto for the creation of a Jewish state based on Torah Law.

## PARSHA Q&A ?

1. In what context is a *mezuzah* mentioned in this week's parsha?
2. What special mitzvah does the Torah give to the master of a Hebrew maidservant?
3. What is the penalty for wounding one's father or mother?
4. "A" intentionally hits "B." As a result, B is close to death. Besides any monetary payments, what happens to A?
5. What is the penalty for someone who tries to murder a particular person, but accidentally kills another person instead? Give two opinions.
6. A slave goes free if his master knocks out one of the slave's teeth. What teeth do not qualify for this rule and why?
7. An ox gores another ox. What is the maximum the owner of the damaging ox must pay, provided his animal had gored no more than twice previously?
8. From where in this week's parsha can the importance of work be demonstrated?
9. What is meant by the words "If the sun shone on him"?
10. A person is given an object for safe-keeping. Later, he swears it was stolen. Witnesses come and say that in fact he is the one who stole it. How much must he pay?
11. A person borrows his employee's car. The car is struck by lightning. How much must he pay?
12. Why is lending money at interest called "biting"?
13. Non-kosher meat, "*treifa*," is preferentially fed to dogs. Why?
14. Which verse forbids listening to slander?
15. What constitutes a majority-ruling in a capital case?
16. How is Shavuot referred to in this week's parsha?
17. How many prohibitions are transgressed when cooking meat and milk together?
18. What was written in the *Sefer Habrit* which Moshe wrote prior to the giving of the Torah?
19. What was the *livnat hasapir* a reminder of?
20. Who was Efrat? Who was her husband? Who was her son?

## PARSHA Q&A!

### Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

1. 21:6 - If a Hebrew slave desires to remain enslaved, his owner brings him "to the doorpost *mezuzah*" to pierce his ear.
2. 21:8,9 - To marry her
3. 21:15 - Death by strangulation.
4. 21:19 - He is put in jail until "B" recovers or dies.
5. 21:23 - 1)The murderer deserves the death penalty. 2)The murderer is exempt from death but must compensate the heirs of his victim.
6. 21:26 - Baby teeth, which grow back.
7. 21:35 - The full value of his own animal.
8. 21:37 - From the "five-times" penalty for stealing an ox and slaughtering it. This fine is seen as punishment for preventing the owner from plowing with his ox.
9. 22:2 - If it's as clear as the sun that the thief has no intent to kill.
10. 22:8 - Double value of the object.
11. 22:14 - Nothing.
12. 22:24 - Interest is like a snake bite. Just as the poison is not noticed at first but soon overwhelms the person, so too interest is barely noticeable until it accumulates to an overwhelming sum.
13. 22:30 - As "reward" for their silence during the plague of the first-born.
14. 23:1 - Targum Onkelos translates "Don't bear a false report" as "Don't receive a false report".
15. 23:2 - A simple majority is needed for an acquittal. A majority of two is needed for a ruling of guilty.
16. 23:16 - *Chag Hakatzir* — Festival of Reaping.
17. 23:19 - One.
18. 24:4,7 - The Torah, starting from Bereishet until the giving of the Torah, and the *mitzvot* given at Mara.
19. 24:10 - That the Jews in Egypt were forced to toil by making bricks.
20. 24:14 - Miriam, wife of Calev, mother of Chur.

- Use of language other than Hebrew for Torah, *Tefillin* and *Mezuzot*
- Miracle of translation of Torah into Greek
- Comparison of *kohanim gedolim* with different inaugurations and status of a temporary substitute
- Status of altars outside of Sanctuary and whether sacrifices can be offered after destruction of *Beit Hamikdash*
- The significance of the first words in Megilat Esther
- Three traditions which Rabbi Levi received from his ancestors
- Introductions to interpretation of Megilat Esther by 12 different Sages
- Meaning of the name Achashveirosh and details of his kingdom
- Kings who ruled over the entire world
- The mistaken historical calculations of Balshatzar and Achashveirosh
- Why the Jews of that generation were punished with a threat of genocide
- Details of the setting of the great feast and what was served
- The Vashti episode and its aftermath
- The ancestry of Mordechai and the other meaning of “Yehudi”
- Esther’s piety, beauty and her relationship with Mordechai
- Esther’s meeting the king and her preparations for it
- The restraint connection between Rachel, Saul and Esther
- How Mordechai discovered the plot to poison the king
- Haman’s slander of the Jews and the king’s collaboration
- Why reading of Megilat Esther on Purim was the only mitzvah added by a prophet and why Hallel is not said
- The 48 men and 7 women whose prophecy was recorded
- The glorious descendants of Yehoshua and Rachav
- Who was the Prophet Malachi and who were the beauties of history
- The mysterious messenger and the secret message
- Esther’s encounter with the king and her strategy regarding Haman

## WHAT DID ESTHER EAT?

While Esther was in the king’s palace she found favor in the eyes of the keeper of the harem and he singled her out for receiving special food (*Megilat Esther* 2:9).

What this special food was is a matter of dispute not only among the Talmudic Sages but also even among the later commentaries.

The Sage Rav contends that, in contrast to the other candidates to become Achashveirosh’s queen, she was given food that was fit for consumption for Jews. This same approach of Esther being spared from eating non-kosher food is found in the opinion of Rabbi Yochanan, who states that she was given legumes, just as we find in the case of Daniel, Chanania, Mishael and Azariah who avoided eating forbidden food by subsisting on legumes (*Daniel* 1:16).

The Sage Shmuel, however, contends that she was fed *katli dechazire*, which both Rashi and Tosefot translate as bacon and which was considered special by her keeper. Rashi writes that she was compelled to eat this forbidden food in order to stay alive and was therefore not held responsible. Tosefot, however, insists that, while this was indeed served to her as a special favor, she abstained from eating it.

An entirely different approach to understanding the opinion of Shmuel is based on the different text suggested by *Sefar Ha’aruch*. Instead of the above-mentioned Aramaic words which translate as “flanks of the hog”, this text is translated as the “head of a lettuce” and places the position of Shmuel in the same line as the other opinions that Esther was not forced to compromise her commitment to eating only kosher food in her difficult circumstances.

• *Megilah* 13a

## WHAT THE Sages SAY

“Whoever repeats something he heard and names its source brings salvation to the world. Esther told the king in the name of Mordechai about the plot to poison him and this led to the rescue of Jewry.”

• *Rabbi Elazar quoting Rabbi Chanina - Megilah* 15a

## IMMACULATE PREGNANCY

**From: Shaun**

*Dear Rabbi,*

*I read that pregnant women should read things that are holy, and involve themselves in other holy activities. Now, what does a pregnant woman do if she is in grad school reading books that have really bad things in them, and watching videos in class with bad things in them?*

Dear Shaun,

We are all influenced and affected by the things we ingest, smell, hear and see. Good, holy and pure stimuli affect us positively, contributing to our spiritual and physical well-being. Bad, profane and impure stimuli are detrimental to our balance and harmony.

According to Jewish teachings, this applies even more so to pregnant women, who are considered to be in an extra-sensitive state, and who also are viewed as being in a super-spiritual state as partners with G-d in the act of creation. This places upon them an even greater responsibility to maintain holiness, since the things that affect them affect the life being formed within them as well.

The Talmud relates that King Hezekiah became deathly ill. The prophet Isaiah visited him and revealed that he kindled G-d's wrath by refraining from marrying and having children. The king explained his nullification of this important mitzvah by saying that he foresaw with Divine inspiration that his children would be wicked. The prophet answered that a person may not use such calculations and considerations to cancel the word of G-d. At that point, the wise King Hezekiah shrewdly challenged the prophet, "You have a daughter of marriageable age. Let me marry her, and my children will be your grandchildren". Left with little choice, the prophet agreed and the king married his daughter.

One day, immodestly dressed gardeners were working on the king's grounds. The new bride was looking out the window and inadvertently caught a glimpse of the men. That night, while together with the king, the

image she saw during the day momentarily came to her mind. Our Sages taught that that fleeting thought affected conception and resulted in the birth of a son who became the wicked King Menashe.

Similarly, in discussing the urgency of giving a pregnant woman food that she (and the fetus as well – Rashi) craves on Yom Kippur, our sources raise the question of what to do. We are told to whisper in her ear that it is Yom Kippur and forbidden to eat. However, if the craving persists she is allowed to eat the food in order to prevent danger to herself or the child. (The same concept applies throughout the year regarding non-kosher food.) However, in the exceptional case of the rabbi-gone-heretic, Elisha ben Avuya who came to be known as *Acher*, one of the reasons given for his spiritual demise was that his mother craved and was given meat that was roasted for idolatry.

From these few of the many sources dealing with the affects of a pregnant woman's experiences on her child, we see that circumstances such as you describe are not to be taken lightly. On the other hand, the pressures on most people in today's world to get an "education" and acquire a profession are practically unavoidable. Barring outright prohibitions, a religious Jew in general, and a pregnant one in particular, should make educational/vocational choices that are as harmonious with Judaism as possible. If questionable circumstances arise, one should make every effort to avoid being exposed to anything adverse.

In the specific case you raise, if possible, she shouldn't be exposed to such material at all. If that's not possible she must avoid reading and watching at least the "bad" parts of the bad books and videos – not only for the baby's sake, but for herself as well. Concurrently, she should find ways to get the gist and bare minimum of what's needed from such material to make the grade and no more. For example, by reading or being told a summary instead of a reading a whole book; or listening to a video without watching, etc. If exposure to this type of material is par for the course and profession such that it will present an ongoing, long-term predicament, it's worth rethinking her path.

May G-d open our eyes to see the marvels of His Torah.

## PIDYON HABEN BECOMES POPULAR

Secular Jews in Israel are beginning to show interest in fulfilling the mitzvah of *pidyon haben* – redemption of the first-born son.

While circumcision has long been an accepted practice even among the non-religious, the same has not been true of *pidyon haben*, which many secular Israelis have mistakenly viewed as some sort of folklore.

To make such Jews more familiar with the meaning and details of this mitzvah a conference was held last

month in Jerusalem by the Tzohar organization. The organizers said that in the last two, three years great interest about *pidyon haben* has been growing and the conference was intended to provide answers to questions about the practice.

Observers of this phenomenon are hoping that the renewed redemption of the first-born among all Jews will hasten the ultimate redemption of G-d's "first-born" – the People of Israel.

## WHAT'S THE RIGHT THING TO DO?

REAL-LIFE QUESTIONS OF SOCIAL AND BUSINESS ETHICS

## A GUIDE FOR THE GUEST

**Question:** I plan to be studying next year in a seminary in Jerusalem where it is customary for girls to often have their Shabbat meals in the homes of local families. Lacking experience as a guest in the home of strangers, I am anxious to know what the right thing to do is.

**Answer:** Although your hosts will consider it a pleasure to have you enjoy their hospitality and add a special dimension to their Shabbat table, there are some things you should know so that you will not be guilty of abusing their generosity. The most important rule is: come on time and leave on time.

When you receive an invitation for a Shabbat meal, make sure to ask exactly when the meal will begin. Then do some research on how long it takes to walk from your residence to the home of your hosts and schedule

yourself to arrive a few minutes before the start of the meal.

If you are planning to take part in Shabbat services in a local synagogue, make sure that those services end early enough for you to arrive at your hosts' home on time.

It is nice to offer your hosts help both in serving the food and removing the dishes afterwards. At the conclusion of the meal offer your thanks and prepare to leave unless you see that your hosts would like you to stay on for further chatting.

Gifts are not necessary but something of token value will always be appreciated, especially if it can be enjoyed at the meal in which you are participating.

Have a productive year in Israel and a very "good Shabbat" every week.

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# LOVE of the LAND

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