

# OHR NET

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## PARSHA INSIGHTS

### OF FAITH AND TRUST

*“But the seventh year shall be a complete rest for the land. A Sabbath for G-d (25:4)”*

Sometimes trusting G-d isn't so easy. In this week's Torah portion the Jewish People are told to put down tools once every six years and stop working the fields for a year. G-d tells them to trust that He will provide for them. In the sixth year, He promises that miraculously there will be a bumper crop. This will keep them going for that year, and the next year and the eighth year. Because, of course, seeing as nothing will be planted in the seventh year, there will be nothing to harvest in the eighth. In other words, one year's crop becomes three. G-d says this is going to happen with clockwork regularity every seven years. And it did, for hundreds of years.

Sometimes, however, when it comes to our own lives it's not so easy.

That's the difference between *emunah* “faith” and *bitachon* “trust.” We can believe that there is a G-d who created everything in existence, who continues to sustain reality from one second to the next, a G-d who rules over everything, everywhere, everyone, every second. But, when it comes to our own lives, we can still fall short in trusting Him when the going gets tough.

The current global financial situation looks less than rosy. It looks a pretty gloomy picture. What should our

reaction be?

Well, let me tell you how one Rosh Yeshiva looks at it. This is a man who has on his shoulders the burden of supporting an institution whose yearly running costs are in six figures. On his last trip to America, he told his donors to prepare “tanks” to receive the outpouring of wealth that G-d is going to bestow on them.

Supporting Torah is a privilege, not a budgetary burden. In the desert, the Holy Ark needed no wagon to carry it from one encampment to the next because “to the sons of Kehat he (Moshe) did not give (wagons); since the sacred service was upon them, they carried on the shoulder.” (Shmot 6:9)

In fact, no one carried the Aron. The Aron carried itself, and also those who “carried” it. The Aron carries its carriers. The Torah supports its supporters, not the other way round. If the new government budgetary decisions lead to a serious reduction in support of Torah, G-d will find other channels. “G-d has many agents.”

Which is not to say that there may not be individual cases of hardship. For, after all, trusting G-d doesn't mean that He's going to do what we want. It means that whatever He does is for the best, even when we can't see it.

The Aron carries its carriers. The Torah supports its supporters, not the other way round.

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## PARSHA OVERVIEW

The Torah prohibits normal farming of the Land of Israel every seven years. This “Shabbat” for the Land is called “*shemita*”. The year 5768 was a *shemita* year in Israel. After every seventh *shemita*, the fiftieth year, *yovel* (jubilee), is announced with the sound of the shofar on Yom Kippur. This was also a year for the Land to lie fallow. G-d promises to provide a bumper crop prior to the *shemita* and *yovel* years. During *yovel*, all land is returned to its original division from the time of Joshua, and all Jewish indentured servants are freed, even if they have not completed their six years of work. A Jewish indentured servant may not be given any demeaning, unnecessary or excessively difficult work,

and may not be sold in the public market. The price of his labor must be calculated according to the amount of time remaining until he will automatically become free. The price of land is similarly calculated. Should anyone sell his ancestral land, he has the right to redeem it after two years. If a house in a walled city is sold, the right of redemption is limited to the first year after the sale. The Levites’ cities belong to them forever. The Jewish People are forbidden to take advantage of one another by lending or borrowing with interest. Family members should redeem any relative who was sold as an indentured servant as a result of impoverishment.

## ISRAEL Forever

### IN “DEPENDENCE” LIES “INDEPENDENCE”

The celebration of Israel’s 63rd Independence Day took place in the week when Jews throughout the world heard the weekly Torah reading that begins with the words “When you come to the land that I give you...”

When G-d instructed Moshe to speak to the Children of Israel and relay to them the laws of the *Shemita* sabbatical year, He referred to the gift of the Land of Israel in the present tense (I give you). This was a reminder that our

presence in the Holy Land is a perpetual gift, and that we must avoid the human conceit of thinking that it is we who are the masters of our fate.

The age-old dream of independence can only come true in all its glory if we internalize the sense of dependence on He who gave us this Land and Who alone can make this gift last forever.

## LOVE OF THE LAND - THE PEOPLE

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

### SANCHERIV – A TITLE FOR A TRIBUTE

“A land like your own” is what this mighty king of the Assyrian Empire offered the besieged Jews of Jerusalem if they would surrender to his forces. Just as he had exiled the Ten Tribes of the Kingdom of Israel to some foreign land, he promised to do the same with the residents of the Kingdom of Judea, the last holdout against his conquest of the entire world.

Although he could have diplomatically tried to



persuade them by offering them a better land, this would-be conqueror of the entire Eretz Yisrael refrained from doing so because he could not bring himself to claim that any land could really be better.

Sancheriv’s mighty army was destroyed in one night by a Heavenly angel, but the respect he showed for Eretz Yisrael earned him the title of “the great and noble Asnappar” in a reference to him in the Book of Ezra (4:10). He also merited great Jewish descendants the Sages Shemaya and Avtalyon.

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## PARSHA Q&A ?

1. Why does the Torah specify that the laws of *shemita* were taught on *Har Sinai*?
2. If one possesses *shemita* food after it is no longer available in the field, what must he do with it?
3. The Torah commands, "You shall sanctify the fiftieth year." How is this done?
4. Which two "returns" are announced by the shofar during *yovel*?
5. From where does the *yovel* year get its name?
6. What prohibitions are derived from the verse "*v'lo sonu ish es amiso* — a person shall not afflict his fellow"?
7. What is the punishment for neglecting the laws of *shemita*?
8. If *shemita* is observed properly, how long is the crop of the sixth year guaranteed to last?
9. After selling an ancestral field, when can one redeem it?
10. Under what circumstance may one sell ancestral land?
11. If a home in a walled city is sold, when can it be redeemed?
12. What does the word "days" mean in this week's *Parsha*?
13. What is considered a walled city?
14. What is the definition of a "*ger toshav*"?
15. To what is one who leaves *Eretz Yisrael* compared?
16. Why does Rashi mention the plague of the firstborn in this week's *Parsha*?
17. List three prohibitions which demonstrate the dignity with which one must treat a Jewish indentured servant.
18. Who supports the family of the Jewish indentured servant during his years of servitude?
19. If a Jew is sold as a servant to a non-Jew, does he go free after six years?
20. Where is it permitted to prostrate oneself on a stone floor?

## PARSHA Q&A!

### Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

1. 25:1 - To teach us that just as *shemita* was taught in detail on *Har Sinai*, so too, all the *mitzvot* were taught in detail on *Har Sinai*.
2. 25:7 - Remove it from his property and declare it ownerless.
3. 25:10 - At the beginning of the year the Beis Din declares, "This year is *kadosh* (sanctified)."
4. 25:10 - The return of the land to its original owner, and the "return" (freedom) of the slave from slavery.
5. 25:10 - From the sounding of the shofar. A ram's horn is called a *yovel*.
6. 25:17 - One may not intentionally hurt people's feelings, nor give bad advice while secretly intending to reap benefit.
7. 25:18 - Exile.
8. 25:21,22 - From Nissan of the sixth year until Sukkot of the ninth year.
9. 25:24 - After two years following the sale, until *yovel*. At the beginning of *yovel* it returns to the family automatically.
10. 25:25 - Only if one becomes impoverished.
11. 25:29 - Only within the first year after the sale. Afterwards, even in *yovel*, it does not return.
12. 25:29 - The days of an entire year.
13. 25:29 - A city that has been surrounded by a wall since the time of Yehoshua.
14. 25:35 - A non-Jew who lives in *Eretz Yisrael* and accepts upon himself not to worship idols.
15. 25:38 - To one who worships idols.
16. 25:38 - The prohibition against taking interest is accompanied by the phrase, "I am the L-rd your G-d who took you out of Egypt." Rashi explains that just as G-d discerned in Egypt between those who were firstborn and those who were not, so too will G-d discern and punish those who lend with interest, pretending they are acting on behalf of others.
17. 25:39-43 - a) Do not make him perform humiliating tasks; b) Do not sell him publicly; c) Do not make him perform unnecessary jobs.
18. 25:41 - His master.
19. 25:54 - No. If he is not redeemed with money, he must wait until the *yovel* to go free.
20. 26:1 - In the *Mikdash*.

- Harvesting the grain for the Omer mincha offering
- Two debates between the Sages and heretical sects
- The proofs that Shavuot did not have to be on Sunday
- The mitzvah of counting the days of the Omer
- Processing the Omer grain
- Tithing and challah-taking from Omer and other grains
- The procedure of the Omer offering and its impact on the public
- When new produce became permitted for use in time of *Beit Hamikdash* and in later times
- If grain that came down from Heaven qualifies for the offering of the two loaves on Shavuot
- Some laws concerning the taking of challah
- Harvesting grain before offering of Omer

## TWO CHALLENGES – TWO HOLIDAYS

In the era of the Second *Beit Hamikdash* there were special days that were celebrated in special ways. *Megillat Ta'anit*, the Talmudic record of those days, points out that on some of those days it was forbidden to declare a public fast but it was permitted to say eulogies for the deceased. On other days, which celebrated even more important events, it was forbidden even to mar their joy by having eulogies.

Examples of both are recorded in our *gemara*.

The Talmudic Sages encountered great difficulty in successfully refuting the innovations of two politically powerful sects who rejected the authority of the Oral Law. In the first case it took them from the first until the seventh day of Nissan to disprove the claim of one such sect that the animal used for the daily sacrifice offered in the *Beit Hamikdash* could be donated by an individual, rather than purchased from communal funds. Those seven days were

therefore declared special days in which there could be no public fasting or eulogies.

In the second case, in another year, it took from the eighth day of Nissan until the end of Pesach to refute the argument that the holiday of Shavuot must always be on Sunday. Those days were also declared to be special days but only in regard to fasting.

Rashi explains that the joy arising from the first victory was greater because the challenge to the Sages was based on a Torah passage, although it failed to take into account the qualification provided by another passage. In the second case, however, the challenge was based on the flimsy and foolish argument that Moshe, out of love for his people, established the one-day holiday of Shavuot on Sunday so that Jews could enjoy a long weekend. Overcoming such a challenge was therefore an occasion for only a limited celebration.

• *Menachot 65a*

## What the SAGES Say

“The mitzvah of counting the days of the Omer includes counting the days and the weeks (between Pesach and Shavuot).”

• *The Sage Abaye - Menachot 66a*

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## ANTI-SEMITISM

**From: Jason in Buffalo, NY**

*Dear Rabbi,  
Why is there so much anti-Semitism and anti-Jewish sentiment in the world?*

Dear Jason,

I will try to offer a logical explanation, although I personally believe there is a mystical reason as well.

Many different forms of Jew-hatred spring up from time to time. Several different reasons lie behind them. These include:

- 1) Jealousy towards us for having the original Bible
- 2) Anger at our continued resistance to being converted
- 3) Ideological clash

But why is it so universal? Why are the Jews always the bad guys? Other nations and religions guilty of the same “crimes” are not victim to this hatred to the extent that we are.

To trace the roots of anti-Semitism we must journey back over 3,300 years to the revelation at Mt. Sinai.

Before presenting the Torah to the Jews, G-d offered it to all the other peoples of the world. It was up for grabs, yet every nation turned the offer down. They simply weren’t willing to change their lifestyles in order to accommodate the Torah into their daily living.

When the Jews accepted the Torah, the jealousy of the nations was aroused. “They now have an advantage that we neglected and we can never forgive them for it.”

We have something that the other nations lack. We

were chosen for the task to be G-d’s “emissaries” to the rest of the world. Exemplary, Torah-true lives should impact on others and cause them to draw closer to G-d.

Nobody likes being told what to do, and the flag that we wave flaps irritatingly in their faces. We represent a threat to them, an irritating reminder that maybe they should be striving for higher things.

This hatred frequently lies dormant in the subconscious, flaring up when an excuse can be found. Often it’s intensified at times when we enjoy material success. The Jew in the Mercedes “runs them down”! Not only do we have the audacity to advocate a Torah; we also have the chutzpah to live luxurious lives.

The State of Israel especially is a thorn in the side of many of our enemies. From the brink of annihilation in the Holocaust we have risen to become a modern, relatively wealthy nation with a powerful military.

The paupers from the shtetl are now high-tech tycoons.

Is anti-Semitism only a bad thing? Strange as it may sound, it may also be the best thing that the non-Jew have ever bequeathed us with! Should it happen that we begin to neglect our responsibilities as Jews, G-d nudges us to remind us who we are and what we are doing here. Anti-Semitism works as shock treatment. Never forget that you are a Jew. And a Jew has duties that may never be abandoned.

Nowadays, too, the problems that are rapidly escalating are a signal from G-d. Let us take this warning to heart, and do what we can to strengthen ourselves and others in the service of G-d.

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## CELLPHONE MANNERS

**Question:** My parents gave me a cellular phone for my birthday but my teacher tells me that I have to be careful where I use it. What is the right thing to do?

**Answer:** The lack of discretion that is sometimes connected to the use of the cellphone is illustrated by a true story with a heavy flavor of graveyard humor.

The funeral was over and the mourners who had participated in the burial ceremony were about to depart. Then, from the freshly covered grave, came the sound of a cellphone ringing. After a brief moment of shock at the thought that the Day of Resurrection had arrived, one of the mourners touched his empty breast pocket and realized that he had left his cellphone on and it had fallen into the grave.

But what would have happened if that same cellphone had started ringing in the middle of the rabbi's eulogy or the mourner's recital of Kaddish? Situations such as these have

prompted synagogues, *yeshivot* and other public places to post prominent warnings to all who enter their premises to turn off their cellphones while inside.

Even in public places that do not restrict use of cellphones, such as buses, trains or anywhere where people are captive audiences to your conversations, the tone and nature of your talk can be disturbing to these unwilling listeners. It is almost impossible for them to avoid hearing your end of the conversation because of the proximity and some people have no idea how silly one end of a telephone talk sounds, especially since it deals with matters known only to the caller.

A final observation what happened to the sense of privacy we once all treasured? Does everyone have to know what's doing in your life, or perhaps the cellphone is just a way of showing off?

## THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY \_\_\_\_\_

### THE BLIND RETRIEVER

“Who left behind these bags?” This is the sort of question that can cause great alarm on a bus in terror-conscious Jerusalem. In this case, however, there was nothing to worry about because the forgotten bags were obviously filled with innocent sweets.

But to whom do they belong?

The speculation about his identity soon came to an end when a blind lady announced that she knew exactly who it

was. When he entered the bus she had recognized his voice greeting her as belonging to a very special Jew who was in the habit of visiting the Senior Citizen's Home where she lived and distributing sweets. She thereupon assumed responsibility for returning them to him on his next visit.

It thus took a sightless woman to fulfill the mitzvah of returning lost property.

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# Reflections on the Royal Wedding

BY RABBI YAAKOV ASHER SINCLAIR

Queen Victoria once invited Sir Moses Montefiore to dine at the palace one Friday night. Needless to say, out of respect for her guest, she made sure that the food was kosher.

After the meal, however, the queen offered Sir Moses a large and very beautiful Havana cigar. Sir Moses was in a quandary. To light the cigar would be a serious flouting of Torah law — but to refuse the cigar might be considered an insult to Her Royal Highness.

Taking the cigar Montefiore said, “Your Majesty, such a gift cannot be allowed to merely go “up in smoke”. I will treasure it always.” With which, he placed the cigar into the pocket of his coat.

As loyal subjects of the queen, British Jews have always tried to honor the Crown, but the look on the face of one of the Orthodox Rabbis who was summoned to Westminster Abbey for the wedding must have been very similar to Sir Moses’ expression when faced with the cigar.

One of the things that interested me about the recent royal wedding was its enormous popularity in the United States.

There were around 8,500 journalists in London for event, including some of the biggest names from the major US networks.

Altogether, more than 100 overseas broadcasting organizations covered the event — most of them from the US.

Why are Americans so fascinated by the Royals?

One of the answers could be connected with another news event that happened that same week:

Barack Hussein Obama II, the president of the United States of America, had to vindicate his *yichus*, his lineage, as a native-born American citizen, by revealing to the media his birth certificate that showed he was born in Hawaii to Barack Hussein Obama I, a Nigerian student, and Stanley Ann Dunham from Wichita, Kansas.

Since its inception, the United States has gradually replaced aristocracy with celebrity. The result is that lineage fascinates the American mind. And no one more so than the British Royals.

More than anything, the wedding brought to mind the Talmud’s injunction in *Berachot* that a person should always run to see a King from amongst the nations of the world, so that he will be able to appreciate the regality of the line of King David with the coming of the Mashiach, may we welcome him speedily in our days!

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