

# OHRNET

THE OHR SOMAYACH TORAH MAGAZINE ON THE INTERNET

## PARSHA INSIGHTS

### ROCK OF AGES

***“And it will be on the day that you will cross over the Jordan to the Land which Hashem your G-d is giving you. And you will erect for yourselves large stones and cover them with plaster...and you will write upon the stones all the words of this Torah with a clear explanation. (27:2-8)***

*“I met a traveller from an antique land  
Who said: Two vast and trunkless legs  
of stone Stand in the desert... Near  
them, on the sand, half sunk, a shat-  
tered visage lies, whose frown, And  
wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold com-  
mand, Tell that it’s sculptor well those  
passions read, Which yet survive,  
stamped on these lifeless things, The  
hand that mocked them, and the  
heart that fed: And on the pedestal  
these words appear: “My name is  
Ozymandias, king of kings: Look upon  
my works ye Mighty, and despair!”  
Nothing beside remains. Round the  
decay Of that colossal wreck, bound-  
less and bare The lone and level sands  
stretch far away.”*

Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822)

If you drive down the A38 to Salisbury Plain in England, there will appear in the distance a strange forlorn group of enormous stones erected in a circular pattern. These stones are called Stonehenge.

Somewhere between 300 and a thousand years after the Jewish People left Egypt, Stonehenge was erected. Its origin and purpose remain a mystery. Some say that Stonehenge was a Druid temple. Others say it was an astronomical observatory. Others say it marks the grave of King Arthur.

When the nations of the world wish to immortalize their conquests, they erect large stones as memorials to their military prowess and their

dominion. When the Jews set up large stones it is because they are commanded to write on them “all the words of this Torah.”

Ozymandias, the Druids and King Arthur are wraith-like memories, faded by time, while “Am Yisrael Chai!” — The People of Israel and the Torah of Moshe live and endure.

“Ozymandias, the  
Druids and King  
Arthur are wraith-like  
memories, faded by  
time, while Am  
Yisrael Chai!”

### GOING THROUGH THE MOTIONS

***“Because you did not serve Hashem, your G-d, amid gladness and goodness of heart...” (28:47)***

Reading this week’s Parsha is like watching a film of two cars about to collide in slow-motion. We feel inexorably chilled when we read the dire warnings of the results of failing to keep the Torah and compare these all too accurate predictions with the grim reality of Jewish history.

One of the strangest predictions that the Torah makes is that the Jewish People will be punished “Because you did not serve Hashem, your G-d, amid gladness and goodness of heart...” Why doesn’t the Torah talk about idol worship, immorality,

baseless hatred? Aren’t those better reasons for exile and tragedy? What’s so wrong about not serving G-d with “gladness and goodness of heart” that provokes such terrible consequences?

“Manner reveals his matter.” When you ask someone to help you to do the dishes, you can tell whether he really wants to help or not. If he says to you “Is there anything else I can do?” his help is sincere. But if he says “Can I go now?” then you know he had one foot out the door the whole time.

Similarly, when the Jewish People fail to serve Hashem “amid gladness and goodness of heart,” it is symptomatic of the fact that their whole reason for serving Hashem is selfish.

People worshipped idols because they wanted to control their deities. They thought they could ‘buy off’ the rain god with a sacrifice or two. Or they could get the sun god to behave by a few quick libations. When the Jewish People serve Hashem without gladness and goodness of heart, they are revealing that they relate to G-d in the way of idol worship — trying to “buy off” Hashem by merely going through the motions.

### HANDS UP!

***“And the Kohen shall take the basket from your hands...” (26:4)***

Hands are unique.

Hands are different from the other limbs of the body. The other limbs of the body are fixed and static, whereas the hands may be lowered lower than the feet or raised higher than the head.

The same is true on an allegori-

*continued on page four*

# PARSHA OVERVIEW

When the *Bnei Yisrael* dwell in the Land of Israel, its first fruits are to be taken to the Temple and given to the Kohen in a ceremony which expresses recognition that it is Hashem who guides the history of the Jewish People throughout all the ages. This passage forms one of the central parts of the Haggadah that we read at the Seder. On the last day of Pesach of the fourth and the seventh years of the seven-year cycle of tithes, a person must recite a confession that he has indeed distributed the tithes to the appropriate people in the prescribed manner.

With this *mitzvah* Moshe concludes the commandments that Hashem has told him to give to the Jewish People. Moshe exhorts them to walk in Hashem's ways, because they are set aside as a treasured people to Hashem. When the *Bnei Yisrael* cross the Jordan River they are to make a new commitment to the Torah. Huge stones are to be erected and the Torah written on them in the seventy primary languages of the world, after which they are to be covered over with a thin layer of plaster. Half the tribes will stand on *Mount Grizim*, and half on *Mount Eval*, and the Leviim will stand in a valley between the two mountains and recite twelve commandments and all the people will answer "Amen" to the blessings and the curses. Moshe then details the blessings that will be bestowed on the *Bnei Yisrael*. These blessings are both physical and spiritual. However if the Jewish People do not keep the Torah, Moshe details a chilling picture of destruction, resulting in exile and wandering among the nations.

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## FATHERLY ADVICE

*Tidbits From the 'Ethics of the Fathers'  
Traditionally Studied on Summer Sabbaths*

**"JUDGE EVERY MAN FAVORABLY  
(GIVE HIM THE BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT)."**

• *Rabbi Yehoshua Ben Prachya, Avos 1:6*

Judging people favorably is not only an exercise in justice, but also an investment in your own spiritual security.

One of the most powerful deterrents in improper behavior is the fear of incurring the disapproval of your society. But this is only effective if you respect your friends and neighbors as being peo-

ple with high moral standards. If you harshly judge any questionable behavior which is an inevitable component of human conduct, then you may arrive at the conclusion that none of the people around you are of good character and therefore you will no longer be ashamed of misbehaving in their presence.

לע"נ  
מלכה (מלי) בת מנשה טורגוב ז"ל  
MALKA (MOLLIE) TORGOW ז"ל  
ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

# PARSHA Q&A ?

1. When did the obligation to bring *bikkurim* (first fruits) begin?
2. From which crops must one bring *bikkurim*?
3. What does 'v'anisa v'amarta' mean (verse 26:5)?
4. How does one designate *bikkurim*?
5. Who shakes the basket containing the *bikkurim*?
6. "An Arami tried to destroy my father....(26:5)" Who was that Arami?
7. Starting when in the year are *bikkurim* brought? Until when are the special verses recited?
8. Someone declaring that he separated *trumah* and *maaser* says "and I didn't forget (26:13)." What didn't he forget?
9. Eleven curses were spoken on Mt. Eval. What is the significance of this number?
10. What were the Jewish People to do with the 12 stones on Mount Eval?
11. Six tribes were to stand on Mount Eval, and six on Mount Grizim. Who and what were in the middle?
12. Who "causes the blind to go astray?"
13. How does one "strike another secretly?"
14. Why is the word "ashteros" used in reference to sheep?
15. How is the manner of expressing the curses in *Parshas Bechukosai* more severe than in this week's *Parsha*?
16. What is meant by "the Jewish People will become a proverb?"
17. "...And there you will serve other gods...." What does this mean?
18. "In the morning you shall say, 'If only it were (last) evening' and in the evening you will say, 'If only it were (this) morning' (28:67)." Why?
19. To which tribe did Moshe give the Torah first?
20. How long does it take to understand the depth of one's teacher's wisdom?

## BONUS QUESTION?

Even though the Mitzva of bringing *bikkurim* to Jerusalem is no longer applicable, there are two customs that we perform up to this very day, whose origins are found in the ceremony of bringing the *bikkurim*. What are they?

## I DIDN'T KNOW THAT!

The promise that the Jewish People would be exiled from the Land of Israel was fulfilled twice. Once with the destruction of the First Temple and again when the Second Temple was destroyed. However, the first exile was for seventy years whereas the second, current, exile has been for almost two thousand. Why is there such a huge difference? The three cardinal sins, murder, idolatry and immorality, were the cause of the destruction of the First Temple, but it was baseless hatred that was the reason for the destruction of the Second Temple. The three cardinal sins are generally more obvious and therefore it is simpler to atone for them. Baseless hatred is something that is frequently kept hidden from view and is difficult to identify. Often a person is not even aware of the fact that such feelings are baseless hatred, making it that much more difficult to atone for. As long as such a state remains our exile will continue.

• Yoma 9a

## HAFTORAH: YESHAYAHU 60:1-22

In this, the last of the seven *Haftorahs* of *Consolation*, the prophet Isaiah calls on Jerusalem to arise from the pain of darkness and shadow, and to shine to the world in her full glory. The light of redemption, both physical and spiritual, is being radiated on her. Her long-banished children are returning, and in their wake are the nations of the world who have acknowledged Hashem, and that the Jewish People are his emissaries.

This redemption, unlike those that have preceded it, will be the final and complete one. "Never again will your sun set, nor your moon be withdrawn, for Hashem shall be unto you an eternal light, and ended will be your days of mourning."

## WALLS OF PROTECTION

"The sons of strangers will build your city walls...." (60:10)

As far as the Jewish People are concerned, they really didn't need city walls at all. For no man would dare to wage war on them, and thus they did not need fortresses and strongholds.

However, the "sons of strangers" — non-Jews who had accepted upon themselves the seven *Noachide* laws — certainly needed the walls. For according to the Rambam, the law of the *ger toshav* (non-Jew who has accepted the seven *Noachide* laws) is applicable only during that time when the custom was to have city walls.

Therefore "the sons of strangers" built the city-walls so that they would have the status of *gerim toshavim*. For once they achieved this status, the Jewish People have a mitzvah to provide for their sustenance and welfare.

A wall can be more than just a protection against enemies...

## WEEKLY DAF

### NIDDAH 60 - 66

#### GRANTS AND GRATITUDE

After conquering Sichon and his Emonite forces, the Israelites under Moshe Rabbeinu approached the border of Bashan, where they faced an army led by the giant king Og. Hashem assured Moshe (*Bamidbar 21:34*) that he need not fear Og, for he would be granted victory over him just as in the case of Sichon.

Sichon and Og were both gigantic sons of the fallen angel Shamchazar (Midrash on *Bereishis 6:4*). Why, ask our Sages, did Moshe require reassurance in facing Og, and not in facing the equally formidable Sichon?

The answer lies in the Torah account (*Bereishis 14:13*) of a refugee from the great war of the four kings versus the five kings who reported to Avraham Avinu that his nephew Lot had been taken captive. Who was this mysterious “refugee”? He was none other than Og, who was a refugee from the deluge that had destroyed the world in the days of Noach.

This kindness which Og showed to Avraham by alerting him about the danger facing Lot and thus enabling him to rush to his rescue was considered such a great merit for him that Moshe was afraid that it would render him invincible to the Israelite forces. He therefore needed Hashem’s reassurance that he would nevertheless be victorious.

What place does this reference to Og have in our section of the Talmud which has just dealt with the issue of an “evil tongue” and how to relate to gossip? Tosefos points out that Og’s report to Avraham was also an example of an “evil

tongue”, because his intention in spurring Avraham to take his tiny household to war against the mighty armies of the four conquering kings was to assure that he would fall in battle and thus enable Og to marry his widow Sarah.

If Og’s report to Avraham was so selfishly motivated, why was Moshe afraid that he would not be able to overcome him because of this merit?

Man owes a debt of gratitude to anything or anyone from whom he has benefited, regardless of a lack of any kind of intention on the part of the benefactor. Moshe could not strike the water or the sand of Egypt to precipitate the first three plagues because he had been saved by these elements in his early years. “Do not distance the Egyptian,” says the Torah (*Devarim 13:8*) “for you were a sojourner in his land.” Even though the Egyptians welcomed the Israelites into their land for selfish reasons, and eventually turned upon them in such cruel fashion, they nevertheless provided us with hospitality when we were in need, and we have a debt of gratitude. Even Og’s selfishly motivated action demanded a gratitude which virtually neutralized Moshe from battling against him until he received Divine reassurance.

• *Niddah 61a*

#### SHARING THE PROBLEM

A woman once came before Rabbi Yochanan with a strange medical problem which prevented her from maintaining a normal family life. Rabbi Yochanan analyzed that she must be the

victim of other women in her community who were jealous of the very special relationship between her and her husband. He therefore urged her to divulge her problem to these women.

There are different versions of why he urged her to share her problem with the others. One version is that by divulging to them that her problem was straining her relations with her husband, she would remove their envy which was having such a harmful impact on her. Another version is that by letting others in on her problem she would motivate them to pray for her recovery.

The source of this latter approach, says the Talmud, is the Torah command (*Vayikra 13:45*) for the *metzora* to call out to those who pass him by while he lingers in isolation outside the camp that he is “*tamei, tamei*” (impure). The apparent purpose of such an announcement is to warn the passersby that he is impure and that they should keep their distance from him to avoid spiritual contamination. But our Sages saw in the Torah’s use of a double proclamation of his impure state a *lesson* that one who suffers from a problem should share it with others so that they will be moved to pray for his relief.

In reference to this approach Rabbi Yosef told of an incident which took place in the Babylonian community of Pumpedisa, and the affected woman followed the advice of the Sages. Those who learned of her plight indeed prayed for her and she was healed.

• *Niddah 66a*

continued from page one

cal/ethical level. Man can lower his hands: i.e., he can stoop to the lowest of the low. He can commit the greatest sins possible. He can murder. He can steal. Everything can be done with the hands. Idiomatically we talk of “blood on his hands,” “dirty hands.”

However, the hands can also be raised up. They can perform the holiest acts. When the *Kohen* blesses the people he raises his hands. Hands gives *tzedaka* (charity). They put on tefillin. We extend “the hand” of friendship and assistance.

The *handiwork* of a person is symbolized by the acquisitions that his hands have brought him. For this reason, the first of his fruits must be made holy as

*Bikkurim*.

Since the beginning always influences what follows, every beginning needs to be holy. For when the beginning is holy, everything that follows will also be holy.

When the hands are raised above the head, when their direction is heavenwards, then the head and the body will inevitably follow after them.

#### VOICE PROJECTION

**“And we cried out to Hashem the G-d of our fathers, and Hashem heard our voices...” (26:7)**

In time of trouble it’s not enough merely to pray, but one must cry out to

Hashem, then one is answered immediately. Notice here that the verse doesn’t say that Hashem heard our prayers, but He heard our *voices*!

And even though every prayer is answered, there are prayers which are answered in days and prayers which are answered in years.

The essence of one’s prayers should always be for the whole community, and the ideal time — after doing a mitzvah.

Sources:

**Rock Of Ages** - Don Isaac Abarbanel  
**Going Through The Motions** - Rabbi Yochanan Zweig  
as heard from Rabbi Moshe Zauderer  
**Hands Up!** - Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Zevin  
**Voice Projection** - The Chafetz Chaim

# ASK the RABBI

## THE BRAIDED BUNCH

Alison <mershjam@usaor.net> wrote:

Dear Rabbi:

Every Friday I make Challah for Shabbat. When asked why I braid them, I had no answer! What is the historical/traditional significance to braiding Challah?

Roi Levine Garcia <roigar@aol.com> wrote:

In the Torah portion we read about the Challah, the bread of Shabbat. What is the significance of the intertwining of the bread to make it Challah?

Dear Alison & Roi Levine Garcia,

I have heard several reasons for braiding Challot for Shabbat. The three braids are symbolic of the commands to observe Shabbat that appear in the Ten Commandments. One braid represents the word "Zachor" — "Remember." A second braid represents the word "Shamor" — "Guard." The third braid is for "b'Dibbur Echad" — that these commands of "Remember" and "Guard" were said by G-d simultaneously and as one unit.

Another reason is that Shabbat signifies and reminds us of three different concepts: The Creation of the World, the Exodus from Egypt and the Messianic Era. This is also the reason for three distinct separate Amidot — Silent Prayers — on Shabbat, as opposed to the weekday Amidah which is of identical wording three times a day (the theme of the fourth prayer of Shabbat — *Mussaf* ("additional") is said for the additional Temple sacrifice for Shabbat, and also applies on Festivals.) This idea provides an understanding for the three meals eaten on Shabbat.

By the way, the "Challah" mentioned in the Torah is not referring to the Challah that we eat on Shabbat and Yom Tov. It refers to the command to separate a small amount of the dough that one kneads when baking bread. In Temple times this portion of dough (called "Challah" by the Torah) was

given to the Kohanim, the priestly tribe, who were responsible for the Temple service. Today there is a rabbinical command to separate "Challah" from the dough and burn it, since for eating it there is a requirement for the Kohanim and the Challah to be ritually pure — a state that does not presently exist.

## PARDES

Brian Levitan

<blevitan@cisco.com> wrote:

Could you please give a simple explanation with examples, of the levels of textual interpretation, referred to as PARDES. (Pshat, Remez, Drush, Sod.)

Dear Brian,

Let's take the first verse of the Torah as our example:

1. *Pshat* — simplest meaning, based on the text and context. Rashi explains the *pshat* of the verse as follows: "In the beginning of God's creation of the heaven and the earth, the earth was desolate and void." This is based on a linguistic analysis of the word "Bereshit," which does not mean "In the beginning," but "In the beginning of..."

2. *Remez* — "hint." The Gaon of Vilna taught that all commands of the Torah are hinted at in the first word of the Torah. For instance, *Pidyon Haben* — redemption of the first-born — is alluded to by an acronym of the letters of *Bereshit*, which spell "ben rishon acharei shloshim yom tifdeh" — the first son you shall redeem after thirty days.

3. *Drush* — contextual and non-contextual, moral and philosophical explanations. Rashi states that there is a philosophical idea alluded to in the word "Bereshit." The world was created for the sake of Torah which is called "reshit," and for the Jewish people who are also referred to as "reshit." Both are "firsts" in terms of their centrality in the purpose of Creation.

4. *Sod* — hidden or secret meaning. Mishna: "The world was created with ten statements." Gemara: "But when you count them there are only nine statements! *Bereshit* (In the beginning) is also a statement." The statement of "Bereshit" was the creation of time, which is a dimension of the

physical world. One of the names of G-d is "Hamakom" — "The Place" — as the Midrash explains that "He is the place of the world, the world is not His place." This concept is based on the idea that the physical world would not exist if not for G-d willing it to exist at every moment. Therefore G-d is the "Place" of the world, meaning the framework of reality in which everything exists, and He provides the possibility of existence to all of Creation. The dimension of Time and the laws of nature were created during the six days of Creation. The Sforno, The Gaon of Vilna, the Maharal and Maimonides, all basing themselves on the Talmud, state that the hidden meaning of the word "In the Beginning" — *Bereshit* — is the creation of what we today call "the space-time continuum."

Sources:

- *Ethics of the Fathers 5:1; Babylonian Talmud Tractate Megillah 21b*
- *Gaon of Vilna in Aderet Eliyahu, Bereshit 1:1; Maharal of Prague*
- *Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin, Nefesh Hachaim*
- *Maimonides, Guide for the Perplexed 2:30 (13th Century)*

## YIDDLE RIDDLE

We all know that you must nullify the chametz prior to Pesach at a time when it is still permissible to derive benefit from it, because when the chametz becomes totally prohibited, the Torah withdraws a person's ownership of it and the person can no longer nullify it. Under what circumstances would a person be able to make an effective statement of nullification during Pesach, which will enable him to avoid transgressing the strict prohibition on owning chametz?

Thanks to Ralph Zwier  
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# PARSHA Q&A!

## Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

1. 26:1 - After the Land was conquered and divided.
2. 26:2 - The seven species for which *Eretz Yisrael* is praised.
3. 26:5 - Speak loudly.
4. 26:2 - When he sees the first fruit ripen on a tree, he binds a piece of straw around it to mark it as *bikkurim*.
5. 26:4 - The *kohen* places his hands under the hands of the one bringing it, and they wave the basket together.
6. 26:5 - Lavan.
7. 26:11 - *Bikkurim* are brought starting from Shavuot (until Channuka). The verses are recited only until Succos.
8. 26:13 - To bless Hashem.
9. 27:24 - Each curse corresponds with one of the tribes, except for the tribe of Shimon. Since Moshe didn't intend to bless the tribe of Shimon before his death, he did not want to curse them either.
10. 27:2 - Build an altar.
11. 27:12 - Kohanim, Levi'im and the Ark.
12. 27:18 - Any person who intentionally gives bad advice.
13. 27:24 - By slandering him.
14. 28:4 - Because they 'enrich' (*m'ashiros*) their owners.
15. 28:23 - In *Bechukosai*, the Torah speaks in the plural, whereas in this *Parsha* the curses are mentioned in the singular.
16. 28:37 - Whenever someone wants to express the idea of extraordinary suffering they will use the Jewish People as an example.
17. 28:64 - You will pay taxes to the idol worshipping priests.
18. 28:67 - Because the curse of each hour will be greater than that of the previous hour.
19. 29:3 - To the tribe of Levi.
20. 29:8 - 40 years.

## BONUS ANSWER!

We stand up in the presence of a *brit milah* and a funeral procession. When the owners of the *bikkurim* brought the produce up to Jerusalem all the inhabitants stopped what they were doing and stood up in their honor.

• *Bartinura on Mishna Bikkurim 3:2*

## RECOMMENDED READING LIST

606-7	<b>SEFER HACHINUCH</b> Power of Speech	27:15	The Curses	27:26	Upholding the Torah
611	Emulating Hashem	28:2	The Blessings	28:42	The Fourth Exile
	<b>SFORNO</b>	28:14	Punishment		
26:17	Exalting Hashem	26:3	<b>RAMBAN</b> The <i>Kohen</i> of Your Day	226:11	<b>OHR HACHAIM HAKADOSH</b> Rejoicing with Hashem and the Torah
26:18	The Exalted Jewish People	27:3	The Stones		

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