

OHRNET

THE OHR SOMAYACH TORAH MAGAZINE ON THE INTERNET

PARSHA INSIGHTS

AN OPEN BOOK TEST

“Send forth men, if you please, and let them spy out the land of Canaan.”
(13:2)

A true story: Young Man to Rabbi: “Rabbi. I don’t need organized religion. I know I have a special relationship with G-d.

“A couple of years ago, I was riding my motorbike along a twisting mountain road in Colorado. It was a beautiful day. Suddenly I turned a steep bend and right in front of me was this huge Mack truck. He slammed on his brakes and so did I. I and the bike fell flat and slid all over the road, but I was going too fast. I slid and slid. There was a sheer drop from the edge of the road of about 500 feet. I saw the edge getting closer and closer. I couldn’t stop! I went over the edge with the bike. It fell away beneath me. Suddenly, in front of me was this branch. I grabbed it and it held my weight. I managed to swing my way back to the side of the cliff and get back to the road. It was a miracle. I don’t need to keep the Torah. I know G-d is with me. Who else put the branch there for me?”

Said the Rabbi to the young man: “Maybe you should ask yourself Who put the Mack truck there in the first place?”

At the beginning of this week’s Parsha, Rashi asks, “why does the incident of the spies directly follow Miriam speaking slander about Moshe?” But this seems to be a strange question. The reason that these events are juxtaposed is because they follow one another chronologically. That’s the way things

happened. Why shouldn’t they be written one after the other?

At some time in our lives, we have all taken an examination or a test of some kind. The essence of the test is that we don’t know what the questions will be. If we knew, it wouldn’t be a test. Not so is our relationship with the Creator. Hashem never gives us a test without first giving us the answers.

The Jewish People had wanted to send spies into the Land of Israel for a long time prior to Hashem giving per-

“Hashem never gives us a test without first giving us the answers.”

mission. However, Hashem knew that there would be a temptation to speak slander about the Land, and thus He waited until after Miriam had been punished for speaking slander so that the spies should clearly know that slander was prohibited. In other words, it wasn’t so much that the incident of the spies followed Miriam speaking slander, rather that Miriam

speaking slander provided the object lesson which facilitated the sending of the spies.

Hashem never gives us a test without first giving us the answers.

BADMOUTH

“Send forth men, if you please...” (13:2)

One of the less felicitous expressions to enter the English language in the last thirty or so years is the verb “to badmouth” — to speak ill of someone. Consciously or not, however, the pedigree of such an idea goes back a couple of thousand years.

In this week’s Parsha, the Torah describes the mission of the spies to scout out the Land of Israel. We learn that the spies erred terribly by slandering the Land.

But what’s wrong with slandering land — trees and stones? The prohibition against denigrating a human being is understandable, because we can damage a person with slander and gossip. But a land? Is a land sensitive to slurs? And yet the spies are faulted for their evil report on the Land of Israel.

The Torah prohibits us from doing evil not just for the effect that it has on others, but because of the effect it has on ourselves. Words cannot harm sticks and stones. It’s ourselves we damage when we speak slander.

The physical always mirrors the spiritual. The Torah calls slander *lashon hara* — evil tongue — meaning that the tongue itself has been made evil. It’s not just that evil has been created in the world; not just that we have let loose a poison arrow that can

PARSHA OVERVIEW

At the insistence of the *Bnei Yisrael*, and with Hashem's permission, Moshe sends twelve scouts, one from each tribe, to investigate Canaan. Anticipating trouble, Moshe changes Hoshea's name to Yehoshua, expressing a prayer that Hashem should not let him fail in his mission. They return 40 days later, carrying unusually large fruit. When ten of the twelve scouts state that the people in Canaan are as formidable as the fruit, the men are discouraged. Calev and Yehoshua, the only two scouts still in favor of the invasion, try to bolster the spirit of the people. The nation, however, decides that the Land is not worth the potentially fatal risks, and instead they demand a return to Egypt! Moshe's fervent prayers save the nation from Heavenly annihilation, however, Hashem declares that the nation must remain in the desert for 40 years until the men who wept at the scouts' false report

pass away. A remorseful group rashly begins an invasion of the Land based on Hashem's original command. Moshe warns them not to proceed, but they ignore his warning and are massacred by the Amalekites and Canaanites. Hashem instructs Moshe concerning the offerings to be made when the *Bnei Yisrael* will finally enter the Land of Israel. The people are commanded to remove *challah*, a donation for the *kohanim*, from their dough. The laws for an offering after an inadvertent sin, for an individual person or a group, are explained. However, should someone blaspheme against Hashem and be unrepentant, he will be cut off spiritually from his people. One man is found gathering wood on public property in violation of the laws of Shabbos, and is put to death. The laws of *tzitzis* are taught. We recite the section about the *tzitzis* twice a day because it reminds us of the Exodus.

HAFTORAH: YEHOSHUA 2:1-24

STREETS OF GOLD

Can you imagine what it must be like to look for a new job almost every single week of the year? It's bad enough trying to find and hold down one job, but to have to start again every Monday morning, pounding the tarmac to find yet another way to put bread on the table?

But that is exactly what Jews did in America at the turn of the century. To escape the pogroms of Czarist Russia, Jews fled to America — *the goldeneh medina* — a land where the streets were paved with gold.

But that gold came at a terrible price: To mine the gold meant working on Shabbos. Many found the lure of gold too much and threw aside their three thousand year heritage, bequeathing to their children a religion which consisted of bagels and lox and little else.

But there were others. They were small in number, but their steadfastness was inversely proportionate to their size. To them, to work on Shabbos was literally unthinkable. And so these Jews would get hired on Monday, work until Friday afternoon, not turn up on Shabbos and get fired again on Monday. This happened week after week. It was through this tremendous self-sacrifice that Torah was established in America.

What kept those spiritual heroes, and thus their descendants, connected to *Yiddishkeit* (Judaism) was that they never for one moment thought of breaking Shabbos. It never entered their minds for a second. You *had* to keep Shabbos! That

was as self-evident as saying you had to breathe!

There is an interesting puzzle in this week's Parsha: Why is it that the spies Moshe sent came back with a negative report, while those sent by Yehoshua in this week's Haftorah came back positive and enthusiastic?

The difference was their attitude to the mission in the first place: The spies Moshe sent went with the attitude of *whether* to enter the Land, whereas those of Yehoshua had no question as to whether to enter the Land. That was Hashem's will. Not to enter the land was unthinkable. *It never entered their minds for a second.* The only question was *how* enter the Land.

When a person starts off with the mindset that is exclusively positive, his focus will be locked on achieving his objective, because the thought of not doing so never enters his mind.

• Source: Rabbi Abraham Twerski

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LOVE OF THE LAND

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

THE GREAT LOVER OF THE LAND

In his plea to the Chief Butler to intercede on his behalf, Yosef asked him to remember him to Pharaoh to release him from this prison "for I was stolen from the land of the Hebrews." (*Bereishis* 40:14-15)

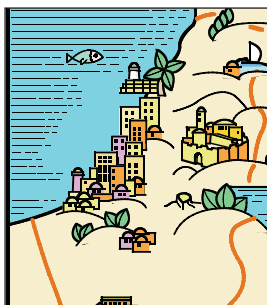
What was the point of Yosef mentioning to the Chief Butler his land of origin?

Yosef was not motivated to seek a release from prison for the sake of achieving personal freedom. From a spiritual point of view he was more secure in this isolation

from human temptations, just as saintly men throughout history sought the refuge of caves for spiritual security. What concerned this great *tzaddik* was that the spiritual perfection he strove for could be achieved only by a return to the holy land from which he was stolen.

It was this unique passion for *Eretz Yisrael* which gained for Yosef a privilege not accorded even to Moshe Rabbeinu: To have his bones interred in the Land he loved.

• Rabbi Yonason Eybshutz in "*Ya'aros Devash*," *Drush* 14



never be retrieved. Our very body has been corrupted. We have made our tongue “evil;” our mouth “bad.”

TARGET FOR TONIGHT

“Moshe called Hoshea, the son of Nun, ‘Yehoshua.’” (13:16)

A full moon lit up the cloudless sky. The dull drone of four piston engines nagged at the night air. When the plane reached two thousand feet, two dark figures leaped into nothingness. There was a dull *whumpf* as large parachutes billowed up in the silver sky. Two men wafted silently over the fields; fields whose outlines had been embossed on their memories by weeks of training. Silently, they floated to the ground.

Two men behind enemy lines. Their jobs — the same but different. One to openly oppose. The other to infiltrate into the trust of the leadership; to pretend to agree and by gaining trust, to grab the right opportunity and voice the truth in the mass arena of the media.

There are two ways you can stand up to evil. You can meet it head on. You can shout about it from the rooftops. Or you can pretend to join in, to become a “fifth column,” an undercover agent, smiling the same patriotic smile, mouthing the same nationalistic platitudes, but inside, waiting.

Of the twelve spies whom Moshe sent to the Land of Israel, only two returned with a favorable report: Yehoshua and Calev. Before Moshe sent out the spies, he changed Hoshea’s name. Moshe added a letter — a *yud* — to Hoshea’s name, making it “Yehoshua.”

Why didn’t he do the same for Calev?

Yehoshua and Calev are two kinds of personalities. One is the extrovert

who will fight for his opinions openly and vociferously, while the other is introverted, quietly fighting behind the scenes. The advantage of covert opposition is that you are not at physical risk of attack, however there is an insidious danger: When a person voices opinions which are inimical to him and assumes a disguise, there is a danger that he will eventually become what he is pretending to be.

Yehoshua represents the extroverted personality. His overt resistance put him in real physical danger. It was for this reason that Moshe changed his name, giving him the blessing that Hashem should save him from the spies. Calev, on the other hand, was more inward. His method of opposition was to play along until the time was right to oppose. Thus, he was in no immediate physical danger. However, this subtle conditioning was also a threat to him. It was for this reason that Calev went to pray at the tombs of the Fathers that his undercover dissembling should not warp his judgment and lead him to side with the spies.

THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER

“The Land of Israel is very good.” (14:7)

How many times have you heard something like this? “I don’t know how you live in this country. You’re living in the Third World. It’s dirty and dangerous. It’s beyond my comprehension why someone with a decent standard of living would uproot himself and live in a Levantine slum.”

Why is it that to some people the Land of Israel seems so beautiful while others struggle to see its beauty and leave disappointed?

Once, there was a beautiful princess who had many suitors for her hand in marriage. Obviously she could not marry all of her suitors and

so she devised a plan to select the more promising candidates: When a young man would come to woo her, her servants would usher him into an ante-chamber. On the table in front of him were some fruit and some books of Torah scholarship. The servants told him that the princess would be with him shortly. They bade him make himself comfortable and to help himself to some fruit. What the suitor did not know was that there was a spy-hole in the wall of the room. Through this, the princess would observe the aspiring husband.

If he took a piece of fruit and made a *bracha* with the proper concentration, or if he took up a book and began to learn intently, then she would emerge in her finest apparel and appeared as a rare beauty.

If, however, the suitor took some fruit and failed to make a *bracha* or idled his time away and didn’t use the opportunity to study Torah, then she would put on torn rags, blacken her face and teeth and emerge looking like a hag.

Eretz Yisrael is that princess. If a person comes to the Land looking for spirituality, he will be enchanted even by the physical beauty of *Eretz Yisrael*. On the other hand, if a person is not worthy, everything will seem dirty and dingy.

However, *Eretz Yisrael* will never embarrass a person. Rather than suffering the embarrassment of being rejected by the Land, *Eretz Yisrael* allows the person to think that he has rejected her.

Sources:

- *An Open Book Test* - Gur Aryeh heard from Rabbi Moshe Zauderer, and a story heard from Rabbi Moshe Averick
- *Sticks And Stones* - Rabbi A. Haver
- *Target For Tonight* - Chafetz Chaim heard from Rabbi C.Z. Senter
- *The Eye Of The Beholder* - Ramban writing to his talmidim from *Eretz Yisrael*; heard from Rabbi Nota Schiller in the name of Rabbi Yosef Tzeinvort

I DIDN'T KNOW THAT!

The minimal volume of dough requiring that *challah* be separated from it is 43 egg-volumes plus a fraction. The word *challah* hints at this number by the combined numerical value of its letters: 43! (*Challah* is spelled *ches lamed hey*. *Ches*=8, *lamed*=30, *hey*=5)

- Heard from Rabbi Yisroel Simcha Schorr

WEEKLY DAF

ERUVIN 42 - 48

LET HIM COME TODAY!

“Behold, I send you the prophet Eliyahu before the arrival of the great and awesome day of Hashem...” (*Malachi 3:23*)

This Divine promise that the prophet will appear as the herald of Mashiach a day before the Mashiach’s arrival has an interesting condition built into it.

Israel has been guaranteed, say our Sages, that Eliyahu will not appear on the day preceding Shabbos or Yom Tov because of the problem this would cause (all Jews would abandon their Shabbas preparations to go and welcome the prophet — *Rashi*).

What about Mashiach himself? Won’t his arrival on *erev Shabbos* create the same kind of problem? No, answer our Sages. With Mashiach’s arrival, all the nations of the world will become subservient to the People of Israel (and there will be plenty of people to make the necessary preparations — *Rashi*).

There are many Talmudic and Midrashic references to the significance of Eliyahu’s arrival. One of them has to do with the term *teyku* used by the *gemara* in declaring a halachic question unresolved. Tradition has it that *teyku* is an acronym for the words “*tishbi yetaretz kushios u’boyos*” — “Eliyahu the Tishbite will resolve all contradictions and unresolved questions.” That great day when Eliyahu appears, all our questions will be answered.

Once, on *erev Shabbos*, a great Torah leader was overheard by his students praying for the immediate arrival of Eliyahu to announce the end of the long exile. “But Eliyahu is not scheduled to arrive on *erev Shabbos*?” they challenged him.

“We desperately need Eliyahu to arrive today,” he explained. “But you have asked a good question. So when Eliyahu arrives, he’ll answer your question along with all the others.”

• *Eruvin 43b*

SECURE BORDERS THEN AND NOW

Our Sages gave a special dispensation for walking beyond the regular “*techum*” limit on Shabbos to a person who went beyond that limit in order to rescue a Jewish community from a military siege. This concept introduces a discussion of a fascinating chapter in Jewish history.

While David and his band of followers were fleeing the pursuing army of King Saul, David was informed that the city of Keilah was besieged by the Philistines who were looting the granaries of the Jewish residents (*Shmuel I, 23:1*). Although the combined danger of Saul’s pursuit and the prospect of battling the Philistine forces meant a serious risk to life, this future king of Israel led his little army into the fray and rescued Keilah.

But if the Philistines were only interested in the grain, asks the *gemara*, what justified risking his own life and the lives of his soldiers? The halacha only sanctions military action against an enemy even on Shabbos when the enemy’s intention is to kill, not when his objective is merely a monetary one.

Rabbi Dostai of Biri explains that Keilah was a city on the border between the territories of the Israelites and the Philistines. In regard to a border city, the halacha tells us that defensive military action may be taken even on Shabbos even if the invaders are only trying to plunder straw and hay (because the capture of such a strategic city exposes the entire nation to the danger of conquest — *Rashi*). Keilah’s security, even if presently threatened for a monetary motive, was thus an issue which could affect the lives of the entire nation and therefore justified military action even on Shabbos.

• *Eruvin 45a*

BONUS QUESTION?

SHERLOX HOLMES AND THE ESPIONAGE MYSTERY

Two cloaked figures emerged from Scotland Yard into the gray London morning. “I’ve advised the Chief Inspector to continue investigating Mr. Walter Bradley regarding the Tinkham burglary. I’m sure that a bit of probing will show him to be the guilty party,” said world famous detextive Sherlock Holmes.

“Mr. Bradley?” said Watstein. “Of all the suspects, I found him the least suspicious. He seemed so calm during questioning.”

“Too calm, don’t you think?”

“How so?”

“It’s not every day a person like him is called to Scotland Yard for questioning. Should he not be even a bit nervous? Yet he showed not the slightest apprehension whatsoever. His strong exterior is a telltale sign of inner apprehension,” said Sherlock. “Often in these matters the strong one is the weak one, and the weak one, he is strong.”

“Fascinating insight,” said Watstein. “It reminds me of Rashi’s

comment on the following verse: Moshe told the spies: ‘**See the land, what is its nature? And the nation who dwells upon it: Is it strong? Is it weak? Few in number, or many? And what kind of land is it in which they dwell; is it good or bad ... unfortified or fortified?**’ (Numbers 13:18-19) On the phrase ‘**Is it strong? Is it weak?**’ Rashi comments: ‘**Moshe gave them a formula: If the people live in unfortified cities then they are physically strong, for they rely on their might; but if they live in fortified cities, then they are physically weak.**’”

“Exactly,” said Sherlock. “The strong one is weak, the weak one is strong.”

“But tell me,” asked Watstein. “As true as it is, how does Rashi see it in the text itself? Certainly, there are other ways to discern whether or not a soldier is strong or weak? Perhaps the spies were simply asked to see how the people looked. Are they big, tall and healthy, or small and weak?”

“The strong one is weak, Dr. Watstein, the strong one is weak.”

What did Sherlock mean?

answer on page eight

PARSHA Q&A ?

1. Why is the portion about the spies written immediately after the portion about Miriam's *tzara'as*?
2. To what was Moshe really referring when he asked the spies "Are there trees in the land?"
3. Who built Hebron?
4. Which fruits did the *meraglim* bring back from *Eretz Yisrael*?
5. How many people were needed to carry the grape cluster?
6. Why did Hashem shorten the journey of the *meraglim*?
7. Why did the *meraglim* begin their report by saying that the land is "flowing with milk and honey?"
8. Why did the *meraglim* list Amalek first among the hostile nations they encountered?
9. How did Calev quiet the people?
10. Why did the Land appear like a "land that eats its inhabitants?"
11. Besides the incident of the *meraglim*, what other sin led to the decree of 40 years of wandering in the desert?
12. On which date did the *Bnei Yisrael* cry because of the report of the *meraglim*? How did this affect the future of the Jewish Nation?
13. "Don't fear the people of the land ... their defense is departed" (14:9). Who was their chief "defender?"
14. Calev and Yehoshua praised *Eretz Canaan* and tried to reassure the people that they could be victorious. How did the Jewish People respond?
15. "How long shall I bear this evil congregation (14:27)?" Hashem is referring to the ten *meraglim* who slandered the Land. What halacha do we learn from this verse?
16. How is the *mitzvah* of *challah* different from other *mitzvos* that are associated with *Eretz Yisrael*?
17. What is the minimum measurement of *challah* that must be given to a *kohen* according to Torah Law? Rabbinic Law?
18. Verse 15:22 refers to what sin? How does the text indicate this?
19. Moshe's doubt regarding the punishment of the *mekoshesh etzim* (wood-gatherer) was different than his doubt regarding the punishment of the blasphemer. How did it differ?
20. How do the *tzitzis* remind us of the 613 commandments?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

1. 13:2 - To show the evil of the *meraglim* (spies), that they saw Miriam punished for *lashon hara* (negative speech) yet failed to take a lesson from it.
2. 13:20 - Moshe wanted to know if there were any righteous people in the land whose merit would "shade" the Canaanites from attack.
3. 13:22 - Cham.
4. 13:23 - A cluster of grapes, a pomegranate and a fig.
5. 13:23 - Eight.
6. 13:25 - Hashem knew the Jewish People would sin and be punished by spending a year in the desert for every day of the *meraglim's* mission. Therefore, Hashem shortened the journey to soften the decree.
7. 13:27 - Any lie which doesn't start with an element of truth won't be believed; therefore, they began their false report with a true statement.
8. 13:29 - To instill fear in the Jewish People. The Jewish People were most afraid of Amalek, because they had attacked the Jewish People once before.
9. 13:30 - He fooled them by shouting, "Is this all that the son of Amram did to us?" The people quieted themselves to hear what disparaging thing Calev wished to say about the "son of Amram" (Moshe).
10. 13:32 - Hashem caused many deaths among the Canaanites so they would be preoccupied with burying their dead and not notice the *meraglim*.
11. 13:33 - The golden calf.
12. 14:1 - The 9th of Av. This date therefore became a day of crying for all future generations: Both Temples were destroyed on this date.
13. 14:9 - Iyov.
14. 14:10 - They wanted to stone them.
15. 14:27 - That ten men are considered a congregation.
16. 15:18 - The obligation to observe other mitzvos associated with *Eretz Yisrael* began only after the possession and division of the Land. The obligation to observe the mitzvah of *challah* started immediately upon entering the Land.
17. 15:20 - No fixed amount is stated in the Torah. Rabbinic Law requires a household to give 1/24, and a baker to give 1/48.
18. 15:22 - Idolatry. "All these commandments" means one transgression which is equal to transgressing all the commandments — i.e., idolatry.
19. 15:34 - Moshe knew that the *mekoshesh etzim* was liable for the death penalty, but not which specific means of death. Regarding the *megadef* Moshe didn't know if he was liable for the death penalty.
20. 15:39 - The numerical value of the word *tzitzis* is 600. *Tzitzis* have eight threads and five knots. Add these numbers and you get 613.

KOSHERER THAN THOU

Avi <Email.Address@Withheld> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

Our youngest son was born with a disease known as “celiac” which imposes upon him a life-long diet restriction. He cannot ingest any form of wheat or other grains which contain gluten. If he does so, it will cause him to become very ill. We, as a family, have learned to adjust to this “inconvenience” and even when we eat out, we manage to find kosher gluten-free foods that our son can eat.

But the other day, we ran into a problem, when we decided to go out for pizza at a kosher pizza restaurant which we had not tried before. Since we had done this many times before at other pizza places, we knew the drill. My wife prepared a special pizza dough made from gluten-free flour. She laid it in a round aluminum “chalavi” (dairy) pan (we keep kosher).

In the past, we would simply request from workers at the pizza place which we were visiting to add the sauce and cheese and toppings to our pre-prepared pan with the dough, and cook it in their ovens, as normal. The pizza always turned out great, and our son could enjoy his own pizza, along with us (we always order a “normal” mishpachti-size (family) pizza for the rest of us).

But at this particular pizza restaurant, the night-shift manager refused to make the pizza for our son, because he cited “perhaps your pan is not kosher. I cannot take this chance.” Now, I must tell you Rabbi, I wear a kippa (yarmulke) and was doing so at the restaurant. Yet no amount of arguments would have convinced this manager that our pan was kosher enough for his ovens. Was his “ruling” correct? I dread to think that this is how far we are taking our kosher laws, to the point that a person cannot eat in a com-

mercial place, because of his illness, because that is the upshot of this whole story. Granted, it is not every day that we take our own cooking pans to a restaurant, but then again, what’s wrong with finding creative solutions? Was our creative solution unkosher?

Dear Avi,

Firstly, I wish your son a complete recovery. Your solution was very creative and I applaud your “let’s-find-a-solution” attitude.

In this particular instance, however, I think the pizza shop manager did the correct thing by refusing. The night manager is not necessarily a *kashrut* expert. And even if he were, the people who eat at the restaurant are relying not upon him but rather upon the *kashrut* supervisor who is sent by the *kashrut* agency. Therefore, the night manager should not introduce any changes in the food-making process without the express permission of the *kashrut* supervising agency. It’s not so much a matter of *kashrut* as it is a matter of policy.

Perhaps if you contact the *kashrut* supervision agency and make an arrangement with them they will allow you to “bring your own.”

PYRAMIDS

**Yosef Dovid Rosenberg
<Geegooo@aol.com> wrote:**

Dear Rabbi,

Did the Jews build the Great Pyramids of Egypt?

Dear Yosef Dovid Rosenberg,

According to the verse in the Torah the Jews built storage cities, Pithom and Rameses. Pithom is probably ancient Tanis, and Rameses has been identified as either Pelusium or Quantir. None of these places had pyramids, and pyramids were certainly not used for storage. They were tombs of the Pharaohs.

Sources:

- Exodus 1:11

CARRYING OUT IN A HOLIDAY INN

**Tev Djmal from Sao Paulo, Brazil
<djmal@ibm.net> wrote:**

Dear Rabbi,

If I’m staying at a hotel during Shabbat, can I carry anything outside the room, or would this be a desecration of Shabbat? For example, can I leave my room and carry the key with me?

Name@Withheld from Hebrew University, Jerusalem wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

In a hotel on Shabbat, what is considered “public” and “private” domain? Is the entire hotel considered “private” domain? Is it permissible to carry objects to and from one’s hotel room?

Dear Tev Djmal and Name@Withheld,

I asked this question to Rabbi Zalman Nechemia Goldberg, *shlita*, who ruled that it is permissible to carry items inside a hotel. Since you do not own the room and the management reserves the right to enter your room to clean, plus the fact that the furnishings belong to the hotel, the hotel is considered one private domain.

Sources:

- See Shulchan Aruch 382:18

CHAPTERS OF THE FATHERS

**Michael Poppers from Elizabeth, NJ
<MPoppers@KayeScholer.com> wrote:**

Dear Rabbi,

Pirkei Avot is commonly translated “Chapters of the Fathers.” When the tractate known as *Avot* (indeed, when all the tractates) was redacted, was it then divided into such chapters, or were the chapters — like those of the Pentateuch — divisions made sometime afterwards?

Dear Michael Poppers,
The chapters of the Mishna are

original divisions by Rabbi Yehuda Hanasi, who compiled the Mishna (170 CE). The tractate called *Avot* meaning *Fathers* became known as “Chapters of the Fathers” because of the custom to read *one chapter* each week between Passover and Shavuot.

The chapter divisions in printed texts of the Pentateuch are of relatively recent origin, created by Christian monks in the 13th century. In the Torah scroll there are different divisions (called *parshiot petuchot* and

setumot) signified by spaces between blocks of text. These divisions are the original divisions revealed to Moshe through prophecy. There is another ancient Jewish tradition called *sedarim* by which the Pentateuch is divided into 154 portions. This was customary when the public Torah reading took three years to complete reading the entire Torah. Today the public Torah reading is divided into 53 weekly portions and the Torah is completed once a year.

PUBLIC DOMAIN
Comments, quibbles and reactions concerning previous “Ohrnet” features

Re: Intermarriage (Ohrnet Emor):

This is a response to those who wrote in about intermarriage. I am intermarried. When I initially got married I didn't think anything about my religion. I felt that as long as you were happy it was O.K. I didn't even know that intermarriage was prohibited. As the years went on and we had children some things changed. It is hard to explain, but there were different events that changed my life. Well, anyway, so it goes I became very religious. To reiterate, I didn't come from a religious background, I didn't have a Jewish education, but there were events that changed my life.

Anyway, I became kosher, I observe Sabbath (by myself all the time), I worry about Israel (by myself all the time). My daughter became very religious and is now going to a religious girls' high school. My son is not as religious but wants to go to a Hebrew High. I feel fortunate in this respect, but I am very alone in my thoughts, in my dreams; it is a lonely lifestyle. I also realize that it is harder for Jewish men because the children are not considered Jews. Some of the intermarried couples that I know have non-Jewish partners that have an anti-Semitism that comes out from time to time. It comes out in the form of remarks or innuendoes that are hurtful. Many Jews don't realize the generations that are lost through intermarriage. We need to promote Jewish education, real Jewish education. Too many souls have been lost in the Diaspora. Too many Jews don't appreciate one another. Too many of us look after the wrong values. We don't know what Torah has to offer, we don't know the jewel we have lost until it is too late. I am still married, and struggling with conflicts every day. It is hard to break up a marriage with children involved. I hope any readers considering intermarriage will use more head than heart, show some restraint and hold a moratorium for a while.

• Name&email@Withheld

Re: Intermarriage (Ohrnet Emor):

In a recent column you wrote: “By marrying a non-Jew one thereby ends over 3,000 years of Jewish continuity, effectively cutting oneself and one's offspring off from what it means to be Jewish.” Isn't this statement at best misleading? Without in any way condoning intermarriage, about half the offspring of intermarriages are halachically Jewish. When a Jewish woman intermarries, the chances of the children assimilating are clearly far greater than that in the average Jewish family (which are already very high). Yet why should we write off any Jew? I know from personal experience of years working with students at *NameWithheld* University of numerous cases of children of Jewish mothers and non-Jewish fathers who have discovered their roots and returned to a life of observance. Why was no mention made in your column of the fact that a child born to a Jewish mother is halachically Jewish?

• Name&email@Withheld

Ohrnet responds: True, a child born to a Jewish mother is Jewish. Our point was that intermarriage, for a man or woman, generally means the end of the Jewish tradition in that family. The child of such a marriage, even when halachically Jewish, usually ends up assimilated. We too at *Ohr Somayach* have first-hand knowledge that there are exceptions.

Re: Naming After Living Relatives (Ohrnet Bamidbar):

In a recent “Ask the Rabbi” *Ohr Somayach* wrote: “It is the custom of Jews of European descent not to name children after living relatives.” Are we now excluding Spain, Portugal, and the Balkans from Europe? The Jewish communities of these areas are Sefardim, and they, like the Sefardim of North Africa and the Middle East, do name for living relatives, as do the Jews of Italy (who do not consider themselves Sefardim because the Italian Jewish community, the oldest in Europe, long predates the Jewish communities of Spain and Portugal.) Rather, should one not say that it is the custom of Jews of Northern and Eastern European descent not to name children after living relatives? *B'shalom uv'hessed*,

• Rabbi Zev-Hayyim Feyer <Rebbezev@aol.com>

The best way to fulfill the mitzvah of judging favorably is to be as specific as possible. While it's commendable to think, "There must have been a reason for such behavior," it is even better to consider what that reason might be. We should first consider the likely, but if that doesn't help we should be willing to move on to excuses that seem unlikely. Far-fetched is also credible. Far-fetched need only mean the unconsidered. For example, take the case of ...

TANYA

Sima and Tanya shared a room in the hospital maternity ward. Sima had a boy, Tanya had a girl. That's how their friendship began. As the years passed, their friendship continued although they lived quite a distance apart. They called every few months and they exchanged holiday cards year after year.

One day, Sima received an invitation to the bar mitzva of Tanya's oldest son. This

was one bar mitzva Sima didn't want to miss! But she was invited to a wedding and another bar mitzva on the same evening which she had to attend! Sima decided to attend all three affairs. The night of the bar mitzva, Sima raced like a maniac from affair to affair. Finally, she arrived at the bar mitzva. She walked over to the head table where her friend Tanya sat. "Tanya! Is that really you?" Sima exclaimed. She threw her arms around her friend in a warm embrace. "You look marvelous!" Tanya responded with a weak smile. "Where's the Bar Mitzvah boy?" Sima asked. "And where's your little Sarah?" Tanya pointed to her son, and then over to where the girls sat. "What was wrong?" Sima wondered. "What kind of greeting is this?" Sima tried to make a little more conversation with Tanya, but to no avail. With a sinking feeling, Sima went home.

Two days later Sima's phone rang. "Sima, it's Tanya. What happened? Why didn't you come to the bar mitzva?" "Are you kidding? Don't you remember? I wore a blue dress, I came a little late, I

hugged you, I asked you where Sarah was..." "Sima! That was you? I didn't recognize you! I've never seen you dressed up. I guess I'd only recognize you in a hospital gown!"

Sima knows, as we all do, that a host — when harried and facing many guests — might not immediately recognize or "place" everyone who walks in. But at the time, that reasonable possibility didn't occur to her.

• Original Story

Inspired by "The Other Side of the Story" by Yehudis Samet, ArtScroll Series

DO YOU HAVE
A STORY TO SHARE?

Were you ever in a situation with potential to judge negatively, but there really was a valid explanation? Has a friend or a relative ever told you how they were in such a situation? Share your stories with us for inclusion in future columns of The Other Side of the Story. To submit your story, send it to <info@ohr.org.il> Or write to Ohrnet POB 18103 Jerusalem or Fax 02-581-2890.

YIDDLE RIDDLE

This morning in shul, I noticed that during chazarat hashatz (cantor's repetition of the silent prayer) I responded "amen" 26 times. However, my one friend responded "amen" only 22 times, and my other friend only three times! Can you explain why? (By the way, we all had finished our silent prayer completely, we all paid attention during the entire repetition, and we all responded properly.)

• Riddle submitted by Rabbi Avraham Connack, Jerusalem

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BONUS ANSWER!

Sherlock said, "Notice all the phrases describing opposites: 'Few or many? Good or bad? Unfortified or fortified?' In every single case, the Hebrew text uses the normal formula, which is to separate the two opposites with the Hebrew word 'im.' For example: 'ha-me'at hoo, im rav — are they few, or many?' In this context, the word 'im' has the connotation of the English word 'or.' Yet there is one exception: 'Hachazak hoo, harafeh — Is it strong? Is it weak?'"

"Why, I had never noticed that before. The word 'im' is missing! Indeed, it is an exception," said Watstein.

"Indeed," said Sherlock. "Now, Watstein, say the phrase again, and listen to what you're saying."

"'Hachazak hoo harafeh,' Watstein repeated to himself. "It sounds like: 'The strong one is the weak one!'"

"And the weak one is strong," replied Sherlock.

RECOMMENDED READING LIST

RAMBAN

13:4 Order of the Meraglim
13:27,32 & 14:1,3 Tactics of the Meraglim
14:17 Moshe Rabbeinu's Prayer
15:2 Order of the Chapters

SEFER HACHINUCH

385 Challah
386 Tzitzis
387 Avoiding Intellectual and Physical Temptations