

OHRNET

THE OHR SOMAYACH TORAH MAGAZINE ON THE INTERNET

PARSHA INSIGHTS

BEING A BLESSING

“And I will make of you a great nation; I will bless you, and make your name great, and you will be a blessing.” (12:2)

The above sentence is part of the first recorded communication between G-d and Avraham — the beginning of the relationship. As the beginning, these words must contain the essence of that relationship. For all beginning contains the essence. A seed is not just the beginning of an oak. It is also its essence.

When G-d spoke to Avraham, He promised him many things: That he would be a great nation; that he would be blessed; that his name would be made great. However, all of this was predicated on a single condition — that Avraham would be a *reason* for people to bless G-d. This was to be the essence of the relationship between G-d and Man: That through his every action, Man would sanctify G-d’s name; he would bring a blessing to the lips of the world.

Every Jew is an ambassador. Our actions are scrutinized by the world. If we are held to a higher — and sometimes double — standard, whether as individuals or as a nation, it is because the world recognizes subconsciously that our job in this world is “to be a blessing,” to sanctify G-d’s name.

I SEE NO SIGNAL

“So he built an altar there to Hashem Who appeared to him.” (12:7)

Pick up a telescope. Hold it to your eye. What was far away is now very close. Take the telescope and reverse it. Everything now seems very far away.

In the book of Job it says “And from my flesh, I will see G-d.” Before the soul enters the body, it recognizes that G-d created it. It sees the Existence, the Awe and the Radiance of G-d. The body obstructs this Radiance. The Torah is like a powerful telescope allowing the soul to pierce this obstruction and see its Maker as it once did before it became wrapped in the body.

But really the Torah can do more

“Through his every action, Man would sanctify G-d’s name; he would bring a blessing to the lips of the world.”

than just restore the vision of the soul. Even though the soul could see its Maker before it entered the body, it did not have the aid of a “telescope.” Its perception of G-d was unmagnified. The natural state of the body is to be like a reversed telescope, distancing the soul from G-d. However, the Torah can turn the body around so that it becomes a telescope which allows the soul to

see its Maker more closely than before its earthly incarnation.

EYES TO SEE

“I will set My covenant between Me and you.” (17:2)

When we look at the world, most of us see trees, sky, buildings.

The Avos, the Patriarchs of the Jewish People, looked into the world and they saw that one may not wear a garment in which linen and wool were sewn together. They looked into the world and they saw that you may not cook milk and meat together. They even saw that you should wait several hours after eating meat before eating milk.

Maybe I need to change my eye-glass prescription, but I never see such things. I also can’t remember seeing in Nature that you can’t eat animals which don’t have cloven hooves and chew the cud. All I see is trees, sky, buildings.

The Torah is the blueprint of Reality: If one had eyes to see, *shatnez*, *tefillin* and keeping kosher would be as visible as trees, the sky and houses.

Avraham had those eyes. He kept the entire Torah — even the Rabbinic decrees — before the Torah was given. The entire Torah...with one exception: The mitzvah of *bris mila*. What was the difference between *bris mila* and all the other *mitzvos*?

The word *bris* means “covenant.” The essence of a covenant is that it requires two parties to enter into it together. Until G-d actually made a

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Ten generations have passed since Noach. Man has descended spiritually. In the year 1948 from Creation, Avram is born. By observing the world, Avram comes to the inescapable Truth of Hashem's existence, and thus merits that Hashem appear to him. At the beginning of this week's Parsha, Hashem tells Avram to leave his land, his relatives and his father's house and travel to an unknown land where Hashem will make him into a great nation. Avram leaves, taking with him his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, their servants, and those whom they converted to faith in Hashem. When they reach the land of Canaan, Hashem appears to Avram and tells him that this is the land that He will give to his descendants. A famine ensues and Avram is forced to relocate to Egypt to find food. Realizing that his wife's beauty would cause his death at the hand of the Egyptians, Avram asks her to say that she is his sister. Sarai is taken to the Pharaoh, but Hashem afflicts the Pharaoh and his court with severe plagues and she is released unmolested. Avram returns to Eretz Yisrael (Canaan) with much wealth given to him by the Egyptians. During a quarrel over grazing rights between their shepherds, Avram decides to part ways with his nephew Lot. Lot chooses to live in the rich but corrupt city of Sodom in the fertile plain of

the Jordan. A war breaks out between the kings of the region, and Sodom is defeated. Lot is taken captive. Together with a handful of his converts, Avram rescues Lot, miraculously overpowering vastly superior forces, but demurs from accepting any of the spoils of the battle. In a prophetic covenant, Hashem reveals to Avram that his offspring will be exiled to a strange land where they will be oppressed for 400 years, after which they will emerge with great wealth and return to Eretz Yisrael, their irrevocable inheritance. Sarai is barren and gives Hagar, her Egyptian hand-maiden, to Avram in the hope that she will provide them with a child. Hagar becomes arrogant when she discovers that she is pregnant. Sarai deals harshly with her, and Hagar flees. On the instruction of an angel Hagar returns to Avram, and gives birth to Yishmael. The Parsha concludes with Hashem commanding Avram to circumcise himself and his offspring throughout the generations as a covenant between Hashem and his seed. Hashem changes Avram's name to Avraham, and Sarai's name to Sarah. Hashem promises Avraham a son, Yitzchak, despite Avraham being ninety-nine years old and Sarah ninety. On that day, Avraham circumcises himself, Yishmael and all his household.

HAFTORAH: ISAIAH 40:27-41:16

Avraham is known as "*Ha-Ivri*," the Hebrew, which means "the one who crossed over." He crossed over from being an idol worshipper to serving the living G-d.

The credo of the Jew is "There is nothing apart from Him." The credo of the world is "There is nothing apart from me."

Even if the rest of the world is on the other side, the Hebrew — the one who

crosses over — stands up and says "Stop worshipping your idols of stone, of money, of worldly power. Stop worshipping yourself, and acknowledge that Hashem is G-d. There is nothing apart from Him."

The task of the Jewish people has always been to deliver this message to the world. The prophet Isaiah encourages Israel to persevere in the face of both their own failures and exile, and the resistance and apathy of the nations.

Hashem has promised that ultimately they must prevail, for though the Jewish People may seem worm-like in their insignificance and powerlessness, they will vanquish those who now seem invincible.

slightest clue as to the nature of G-d's knowledge. It is as totally removed from our understanding, from our knowledge, as the essence of G-d Himself.

All we can understand of G-d's knowledge is that it allows for both concepts to coexist. Man has freedom to choose and G-d knows exactly what he will do. We may not understand how these two things coexist, but that is because we are bounded by earthly minds. For just as the Heavens tower above the Earth, so the "thoughts" of G-d tower over the thoughts of Man.

The opening lines of this week's Haftorah contain this philosophical debate:

THE ENDS OF THE EARTH

"Why do you say O Jacob, and declare O Israel: 'My way is hidden from Hashem, and my cause has been passed over by my G-d.' Could you have not known even if you had not heard, that the eternal G-d is Hashem, Creator of the ends of the Earth...Whose discernment is beyond inquiry?" (40:27-8)

A classic philosophical problem: If G-d is Omniscient, if He knows the present, past and future, how is it possible for us to have freedom of will? If, from the beginning, G-d knows what we will be, whether good or bad, how can we choose which direction to follow? Doesn't the prior knowledge of the Creator make it impossible for us to be other than that which G-d already knows we will be?

The Rambam, Maimonides, addresses this problem as follows: Our knowledge is entirely different from G-d's "knowledge." We cannot have the

"Why do you say O Jacob, and declare O Israel: 'My way is hidden from Hashem, and my cause has been passed over by my G-d.'" A person might think that there can only be one of two realities: Either the ways of Man are hidden from G-d and G-d has no foreknowledge, or that "my cause has been passed over by my G-d," i.e., if G-d knows what I'm going to do, I can't be held responsible for my actions, they were predestined. To this conundrum the next verse replies: "Could you have not known even if you had not heard, that the eternal G-d is Hashem, Creator of the ends of the Earth ... Whose discernment is beyond inquiry?" Man has not the remotest grasp of the nature of G-d's knowledge. His discernment is beyond inquiry. All we can know is that His knowledge still leaves room for Man to choose, and thus we are accountable for our actions.

• The Vilna Gaon in *Mayana shel Torah*

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PARSHA INSIGHTS

covenant with Avraham, no covenant existed. Therefore, no mitzvah to perform *bris mila* existed.

When Hashem made the covenant, the *bris*, with Avraham, He made that covenant on the part of the body which expresses the essence of a person; the place from which flows the life-force and progeny. Avraham took that essential part of himself which expressed his very continuation; he took the sym-

bol of everything he would ever be through his children's children, and he gave it to Hashem.

A *bris* has to have two sides. There is no pact in the world which consists of only one side. What was it, then, that Hashem gave to Avraham? What was the gift of His essence which was to bind Him and the Jewish People to an everlasting pact? Hashem gave Avraham His Will, His desire that it would be only the seed of Avraham that

would be the agency through which He would conduct and direct the events of the world. The entire future of the world would be orchestrated through the progeny of Avraham.

Sources:

Being A Blessing - Sforno, Da'as Z'keinim
miBalei HaTosefos, Rabbi Menachem Nissel
I See No Signal - Meshech Chochma,
 Rabbi C. J. Senter

LOVE OF THE LAND

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

THE PROMISED LAND

This week's Torah portion, *Lech Lecha*, will introduce a new dimension of this column — a focus on individual cities in the Promised Land. As an appropriate introduction we offer this perspective of the promise itself.

Four Divine promises to Avraham are mentioned in *Parshas Lech Lecha* regarding the "Promised Land," and they form a fascinating pattern. As Avraham reaches a higher level in his relationship with Hashem, there is a corresponding increase in the level of the promised prize.

"I shall give the land to your posterity" (*Bereishis 12:7*) is a limited promise which could mean only a small part of the land which Avraham had traveled until that point — the site of Shechem.

As Avraham's merits increase, he is told to lift his eyes and look in all directions. All those lands would be his, the gift would be an eternal

one and his posterity would be as numerous as the dust of the earth. (*Bereishis 13:14-16*)

In the historic covenant which pre-viewed the special relationship of Avraham and his posterity with Hashem through the sacrificial service in the Sanctuary, the promise is expanded to include the "Greater Land of Israel," and a guarantee that the sins of posterity will not forfeit this promise. (*Bereishis 15:18-21*)

In the covenant of circumcision, Avraham's bonding with his Creator is rewarded with a promise that his posterity will return to their promised land even after they are exiled from it, and they will have a special, intimate relationship with Hashem. (*Bereishis 17:8*)

• Based on the Commentary of Nachmanides



I DIDN'T KNOW THAT!

"And you will call his name Yitzchak...(17:19)"

Why was Avraham's name changed (from Avram - *Bereishis 17:5*) and Yaakov's name changed (to Yisrael - *Bereishis 32:29*), whereas Yitzchak's name remained unchanged?

Avraham and Yaakov received their names from their parents, while Yitzchak received his name from Hashem.

• Jerusalem Talmud - *Berachos 1:6*

WEEKLY DAF

PESACHIM 72 - 78

SHANKBONE VERSUS EGG

On Pesach eve our Seder Plate includes the *zeroa*, a broiled shankbone or other piece of meat, which serves as a remembrance of the Pesach sacrifice which was broiled and eaten on this night in the time of the *Beis Hamikdash*. We don't eat the *zeroa* until the next day (or the daytime meal of the second day outside *Eretz Yisrael* if it is to be used at the second Seder) because the *mishna* (*Pesachim 53a*) tells us that the custom in some places is to refrain from eating any broiled meat on Pesach eve. The reason for this custom is to avoid giving the impression that we have offered an animal as a sacrifice (which is forbidden when there is no *Beis Hamikdash*) and that we are eating its flesh in the prescribed manner of broiling.

A *beraisa* cited in our *gemara* defines the ban on eating a broiled lamb or kid on Pesach eve as applying only to an animal that has been broiled in its entirety, without any part of it separated before the broiling began. Rashi explains that this is the ban referred to in the aforementioned *mishna*, and that it is limited to those places where the custom is to refrain from eating broiled meat on Pesach eve. Rabbeinu Asher, however, has a different approach, and it is his view which is cited in the *Shulchan Aruch* (*Orach Chaim 476:1*). Even in places where the custom is to eat broiled meat on Pesach eve because there is no fear that it will give the appearance of eating sacrificial flesh, it is nevertheless forbidden to broil an *entire* lamb or kid because this *will* create such an impression.

The custom everywhere today is to refrain from eating broiled meat on Pesach eve, and this extends even to those things which were not valid for the Pesach sacrifice. Anything which requires slaughtering (beef or fowl) is included in this ban, but fish and eggs are not included. It

is therefore customary to eat on Pesach eve the egg on the Seder Plate, which is a remembrance of the Chagigah sacrifice offered together with the Pesach one in certain circumstances, even if it has been broiled.

• *Pesachim 74a*

THE GIFT AND THE SERVICE

One evening Rabbi Tarfon did not come to the *Beis Hamidrash* together with the other sages. In the morning Rabban Gamliel, the head of the Sanhedrin, asked him the reason for his absence.

Rabbi Tarfon, a *kohen*, responded that he was busy performing his priestly service.

This struck Rabban Gamliel as very strange because they lived after the destruction of the *Beis Hamikdash*, so what sort of priestly service could Rabbi Tarfon possibly have been performing?

In response Rabbi Tarfon quoted the passage (*Bamidbar 18:7*): "I shall give you your priesthood as a *gift* of service and the stranger who approaches it shall die."

The Torah, he explained, equated the gifts which Hashem delegated to the *kohanim* such as the tithe of *terumah* with the service performed in the *Beis Hamikdash*. Rabbi Tarfon had been busy eating *terumah* the night before and he referred to it as a performance of priestly services.

It is interesting to note that the concluding words of the passage he quoted serve as a perfect illustration of this equation. A stranger, i.e., a non-*kohen*, who performs the sacrificial service in the *Beis Hamikdash* is punished by an early death at the hands of Heaven. The same punishment is due for a non-*kohen* who eats *terumah*. The Torah's warning against a non-*kohen* intruding upon the areas reserved for the *kohen* is thus directed at such usurpation both of his *gift* and of his *service*.

• *Pesachim 78b*

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PARSHA Q&A ?

1. What benefits did Hashem promise Avraham if he would leave his home?
2. "And all the families of the earth will be blessed through you." What does this mean?
3. Who were the souls that Avraham and Sarah "made"?
4. What were the Canaanites doing in the Land of Canaan when Avraham arrived?
5. Why did Avraham build an altar at Ai?
6. What two results did Avraham hope to achieve by saying that Sarah was his sister?
7. Why did Avraham's shepherds rebuke Lot's shepherds?
8. Who was Amrafel and why was he called that?
9. Verse 14:7 states that the four kings "smote all the country of the Amalekites." How is this possible since Amalek had not yet been born?
10. Why did the "palit" tell Avraham that Lot had been captured?
11. Who accompanied Avraham into battle against the four kings?
12. Why was Avraham unable to pursue the four kings past Dan?
13. Why did Avraham give "ma'aser" to Malki-Tzedek specifically?
14. Why didn't Avraham accept any money from the king of Sodom?
15. When did the decree of four hundred years of exile begin?
16. What did Hashem indicate with His promise to Avraham that he would "come to his ancestors in peace?"
17. How did Hashem fulfill His promise to Avraham that he would be buried in "a good old age?"
18. Why did the Jewish People need to wait until the fourth generation until they returned to *Eretz Canaan*?
19. Who was Hagar's father?
20. Why did Avraham fall on his face when Hashem appeared to him?

SHERLOX

SHERLOX HOLMES AND THE PRECISION MYSTERY

Two figures sat in a coach on the rumbling train. "Good thing you and I arrived early at the train station," said world famous detextive Sherlox Holmes. "This train was scheduled to leave at 3:18, but in fact it left at 3:17. Had we been precisely on time, we would have missed it. It's not always good to be too precise."

"Speaking of the number 318, I'm puzzled by the following verse: *Avraham armed his disciples — three hundred and eighteen.... (Bereshis 14:14).*"

"What's puzzling?" asked Sherlox.

"It's Rashi's comment that confuses me. Rashi says that the plural word 'disciples' (*chanichav*) is written as though it were singular (*chanicho*), indicating that there was in fact only one dis-

ciple, Eliezer. To complicate matters, the verse states explicitly that there were 318 people. Rashi explains this by saying that the numerical value of Eliezer is exactly equal to 318."

"Brilliant observation!" said Sherlox.

"Perhaps, but why must Rashi depart from the straightforward explanation? Why must he resort to numerical values to explain a simple verse?"

"You answered that yourself, Dr. Watstein: The word *disciples* is written as though it were singular, indicating that it was indeed only one person."

"As you well know, Mr. Holmes, the Torah often writes plural words as though they were singular (for example, *Shmos 27: 11* and *Devarim 33:9*) and Rashi makes no comment. So why here does Rashi comment?"

"It's not always good to be too precise, Dr. Watstein."

answer on page eight

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

1. 12:1 - He would become a great nation, and his excellence would become known to the world, and he would be blessed with wealth.
2. 12:3 - A person will say to his child, "You should be like Avraham."
3. 12:5 - People they converted to the worship of Hashem.
4. 12:6 - They were in the process of conquering the land from the descendants of Shem.
5. 12:8 - He foresaw the Jewish People's defeat there in the days of Yehoshua due to the sin of Achan. He built an altar there to pray for them.
6. 12:13 - That the Egyptians would let him live and give him presents.
7. 13:7 - Lot's shepherds grazed their flocks in privately owned fields.
8. 14:1 - Amrafel was Nimrod. He said (*amar*) to Avraham to fall (*fel*) into the fiery furnace.
9. 14:7 - The Torah is using the name that the place would bear in the future.
10. 14:13 - He hoped Avraham would die trying to save Lot, so that he himself might be able to marry Sarah.
11. 14:14 - His servant, Eliezer.
12. 14:14 - He saw prophetically that his descendants would erect a golden calf there. As a result his strength failed.
13. 14:20 - Because Malki-Tzedek was a *kohen*.
14. 14:23 - Hashem had promised Avraham wealth, and Avraham didn't want the King of Sodom to be the one to take credit for it.
15. 15:13 - With the birth of Yitzchak.
16. 15:15 - That his father, Terach, repented and became righteous.
17. 15:15 - Avraham lived to see his son, Yishmael, repent and become righteous, and he died before his grandson, Esav, became wicked.
18. 15:16 - They needed to wait until the Amorites had sinned sufficiently to deserve expulsion.
19. 16:1 - Pharaoh.
20. 17:3 - Because he was as yet uncircumcised.

WHERE HAVE ALL THE YEARS GONE?

Baruch Roi Garcia from San Antonio, Texas <roigar@aol.com> wrote:

*Dear Rabbi,
Now that it is the new year a friend of mine from Israel says that we are not really at 5759, but that we lost some 240 years during captivity, according to his Rabbi in Netanya. True or not so true?*

Dear Baruch Roi Garcia:

There is a discrepancy of about 165 years between Greek historians and Jewish historians.

The Greeks maintain that Jewish historians omitted a number of Persian kings from the historical accounting, and that the combined reigns of these kings add up to about 165 years. We, on the other hand, maintain that the people the Greeks mistakenly count as kings were actually only dukes or princes who ruled concurrently. The fact they were known as kings and not as “king of kings” is evidence of this.

We, the Jews, lived in Babylon and Persia for over 1000 years; whereas the Greeks sent scribes to gather their historical information. I believe, therefore, that our history is accurate and that the Greek account is mistaken. We had first-hand knowledge of Persia and are therefore more reliable.

Speaking of what year it is, we thank **David Olesker <olesker@IsraelMail.com>** for forwarding the following:

Last year, in my computer class, a student asked me before Rosh Hashanah what year we were entering. I said 5758. He paused for a moment and said, “Well, I guess you guys solved the Year 2000 problem!”

WHAT'S NEW!

Gaon <Gaon@earthlink.net> wrote:

*Dear Rabbi,
What on earth was the wisest of the wise thinking when he said, “There’s nothing new under the sun?” I wonder if King Solomon would have said the same thing if he had Internet access.*

Dear Gaon,

In the *Book of Koheles* King Solomon wrote: “There is absolutely nothing new under the sun.” He meant that in the physical world nothing is created new. There is no creation *ex nihilo*, only the transfer of energy and reassembling of different parts into different structures. All of “modern technology” has existed since ancient times, in potential. When G-d created the physical universe, telephones, fax machines and “Internet access” came into existence, in their component parts. It was only up to us to figure out how to put them together.

Only in the spiritual world — “above the sun” — is there renewal. Through the power of free will a person can create a spiritual reality that was not preordained and is not just a continuation of a process already started. Repentance, choosing against one’s conditioning, acts of altruism — these are all acts of creation. This is what King Solomon meant when he said “nothing new under the sun.”

REENACTMENT OF SINAI

Hillary Zana <ai181@lafn.org> wrote:

*Dear Rabbi,
I have read and heard that the Torah Service is actually a reenactment of the giving of the Torah at Har Sinai, with the bima representing Har Sinai etc. I can’t find any sources for this. I would like to use*

this idea when I teach six graders the Torah Service. Any help would be appreciated.

Dear Hillary Zana,

The idea you mentioned is found in *Ta’amei Haminhagim*. There it says that the public Torah reading is a symbolic reenactment of the giving of the Torah at Sinai: The *gabbai*, the one who decides whom to call to the Torah, symbolizes Hashem, who chose the Jewish people to receive the Torah. The person called to the Torah represents the Jewish People. And the one who reads the Torah represents Moshe, the “broker” between the Jewish people and Hashem!

Sources:

- *Ta’amei Haminhagim, Shabbat 328, quoting Levush 141:4*
- *Thanks to Rabbi Sholem Fishbane*

MISPLACED MERIT

Marion Zeiger <mardi@suntan.niehs.nih.gov>

*Dear Rabbi,
I’m preparing a lesson for my synagogue on the concept of davening (praying) and studying Torah for a sick person’s well-being (refuah sheleima). I know the custom, and that davening and learning gains one merit. I would like to know more about the following:*

- *History/origins of the custom.*
- *Mechanics — Exactly how does the davening and learning gain one merit in Heaven?*
- *How does the merit gained transfer to the sick person in whose name one davens and learns?*

Dear Marion Zeiger,

The earliest source where praying for the sick is mentioned is when Abraham prays for Avimelech (Genesis 20:17). Later in the Torah, Moses prays for the recovery of Miriam, his sister (Numbers 12:13). There are numerous places in the

Prophets as well.

The Talmud discusses the obligation to visit the sick and to pray for them. In fact the implication is that if one visits but does not pray for them, one has not fulfilled the mitzvah. The obligation to pray for the sick is found in The Code of Jewish Law, which states that when praying, one should ask that this sick person be healed along with the other sick people of Israel. The central prayer in Judaism, the *shemoneh esreh*, includes a blessing in which we pray for the sick.

How does it work? Some say that since the patient has inspired me (consciously or not) to perform a mitzvah, a commandment, and has caused the one who prays or studies Torah to draw closer to G-d, then the patient has direct merit as a result of the prayer. Another way of understanding this is the one who prays is binding himself to the patient, showing concern and sharing the patient's pain. The Divine calculation now must take into account not just the patient and his pain, but also all those who are praying for him.

Sources:

- *Tractate Nedarim 40a*
- *Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deah 355*

DISC O' DAVENING

Skidog@pol.net wrote:

Dear Rabbi,
Do you know where I can buy audio tapes or CD's that teach one how to daven?

Dear Skidog,

You can order them via our web site. Check out Ohr Somayach's Audio Library - Category: Tefillah at:

<http://www.ohr.org.il/tape/desc07.htm>

For more information, please e-mail to Somayach@msn.com or fax to 905-886-6065.

PUBLIC DOMAIN
Comments, quibbles and reactions concerning previous "Ohrnet" features

Re: Ben Ish Chai Riddle (Ohrnet Nitzavim):

You asked a riddle regarding "a town on the Euphrates in the time of the Beit Hamikdash which always celebrated the first day of Pesach for one day, while the first day of Succos, however, was sometimes observed one day and sometimes two." This is unfortunately untrue. There was a *gezerah Pesach atu Succos* (decree on Pesach because of Succos) that existed, so that there was always total uniformity in the observance of Yom Tov. If the messengers did not reach a place for Succos, that place had to keep two days of Pesach even if the messengers made it there in *Nissan* in time for Pesach. This is also why Shavuot was observed for two days, even though there was never any doubt as to its date of observance, since it is 50 days after Pesach.

- Rabbi Yitzchok D. Frankel Cedarhurst, NY <Ydfrankel@aol.com>

Ohrnet responds:

Excellent point, which we were aware of when we

posted the riddle. Two possible avenues of explanations come to mind:

- The Ben Ish Chai (who is the source for our riddle) asked the riddle merely *lechaded et hatalmidim* — to sharpen his students' minds. (See *Berachot 33b*)
- The scenario was true *before* the decree was promulgated.

Re: Building a Succah on a Truck (Ohrnet Vayelech):

I would add the following, regarding using a parked truck on Yom Tov — one would of course have to make sure that no internal lights come on when one opens the door.

David <das1002@cam.ac.uk>

Re: Tashlich (Ohrnet Rosh Hashana):

Rabbi Orlofsky's idea behind the custom of throwing away sins and emptying out one's pockets at *tashlich* was a very well-expressed idea. However, the idea of throwing away sins is not brought down as the source of the custom. The main reason given for *tashlich* is Avraham's defeat of the Satan, who tried to prevent Avraham from going to the *akeidah* (binding of Isaac) by making himself into a body of water. A further idea is symbolizing the "anointing" of G-d as king, and the anointing ceremony usually took place at a body of water. Only tangentially does the *Mishna Berura* bring down the idea of shaking out one's pockets at *tashlich* (and none of the other major sources bring this down at all).

- Benjie Gerstman <gerstbpg@netvision.net.il>

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE STORY

GIVING PEOPLE THE BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT

If you saw a Jew eating at MacDonald's, and he told you it was kosher, would you accuse him of...

FEEDING YOU A WHOPPER

My oldest brother, Todros (yes, a rare name indeed!) runs a boys' summer camp in the UK. This past year he went on his annual search to find a school or college that would rent him their premises, and his search took him from Manchester as far as Ireland.

At one point my brother and his assistant realized they hadn't eaten for 13 hours. They had had the foresight to bring with them two pre-packed, double-wrapped, kosher airline meals. Just then they drove past

a small countryside MacDonald's restaurant. They pulled over, went in and asked the employee if he would heat up their meals, and that they would willingly pay for this service. The employee obliged kindly and refused any payment. He recommended they take a breath of fresh air while they waited.

Five minutes later they were invited to enjoy their meal. MacDonald's had graciously laid a table for them on their verandah with MacDonald's personalized tablecloth, place mats, cups, cutlery and napkins (all paper), with their ready-warmed meals sitting unopened on their plates. Needless to say, they thoroughly enjoyed their meals.

Now, had a fellow Orthodox Jew

just happened to pass through this tucked-away location and seen them dining, I wonder what would have gone through his mind?

• Submitted by Mellow
Concept based on "The Other Side of the Story" by Yehudis Samet, ArtScroll Series

OHRNET'S NOTE: While we are commanded to judge favorably, we must also try to act in a way that is above suspicion, as the verse states: *Be innocent in the eyes of G-d and Man* — It's not always enough to do what's right; it should also look right to human observers. Our Sages therefore forbade certain acts which cast suspicion on the doer. Some Halachic authorities forbid entering a non-kosher restaurant for this reason.

YIDDLE RIDDLE

During a certain period of the year, there is something we do three times a day, almost every day. We do it twice with one part of the body and once with another part of the body (according to Askenazic custom). What is it?

• Riddle submitted by Rabbi Yonasan Taub

Answer next week...

continued from page five

SHERLOX ANSWER!

"My intuition," said Sherlock, "tells me that the answer is as follows: Whenever the Torah counts soldiers, the Torah speaks in terms of round numbers. For example: In *Bamidbar* 1:20-43, each number is a multiple of fifty."

"Go on," said Watstein.

"It is quite out of character for the Torah to say that Avraham had *precisely* 318 men. The normal way would be to give a round number, such as 300."

"Come to think of it," said Watstein, "the same is true elsewhere in *Tanach*; for example: *Gidon, and the three*

hundred men who were with him (Shoftim 8:4)."

"Yes, *Tanach* is replete with such examples. So, to say that Avraham took *precisely* 318 men is jarring to the ear sensitive to the Torah's subtle nuance."

"I see!" said Watstein. "If 318 refers to the actual number of people, it is *too* precise! Therefore, Rashi offers the midrashic explanation, one which seeks precision by being *less* precise!"

"Precisely, dear Watstein."

• Sherlock is by Reuven Subar

RECOMMENDED READING LIST

RAMBAN

12:6 A Sign for the Children
12:8 Proclaiming the Name of Hashem
12:10 The Sin of Avram
13:7 The Quarrel of the Shepherds
14:1 The Four Kings
15:12 The Dreadful Vision

16:12 Yishmael

SFORNO

12:17 Pharaoh's Plague
16:12 Yishmael
17:1 Attaining Perfection