

## O H R N E T

SHABBAT PARSHAT PINCHAS · 19 TAMMUZ 5760 · JULY 22, 2000 · VOL. 7 NO. 42

## PARSHA INSIGHTS

## SENSE AND SENTIMENT

*"I give him My covenant of peace." (25:12)*

**W**e live in a world where sentimentality has replaced feeling.

On the one hand, we see righteous indignation on all subjects PC: "Save the Whales!" "Save the environment!" "Save religious women from the tyranny of 'over-large' families!" (You can almost smell the brimstone emanating from the holy noses of the media pundits who labor day and night to raise our moral standards.) On the other hand, events took place here in Israel a few weeks ago that make the hair stand on the back of your neck:

About a month ago, Michael Bar-Am and Efraim Dawishe were in their cars, jockeying for position back and forth from one traffic lane to another. At one point, Bar-Am sideswiped Dawishe in anger. Dawishe then followed Bar-Am to his workplace south of Tel Aviv, where they argued and exchanged blows in the parking lot before a crowd of spectators. Dawishe, 28, then knocked Bar-Am to the ground and beat him to death. Neither Dawishe nor the victim had a criminal record, police said.

Within days of this murder, 19-year-old Alon Michaeli was stabbed to death with a broken beer bottle in a dispute over a beach chair. Most chilling of all, in a separate incident, a 2-year-old was beaten to death, allegedly for disturbing an adult watching a soccer match.

In two of these incidents, nobody lifted a finger to help the victim. People watched and did nothing.

What kind of society is it that can

engender such apathy at unspeakable acts of violence while preaching its concern for the poor, the needy, the environment and the whales? Poor whales.

Prime Minister Ehud Barak called for a realignment of national priorities. "No soccer game or argument over a parking space or over a beach chair should stand between us and preserving life," Barak told Israelis.

I never fail to marvel at the ability of politicians to intone the blindingly obvious as though it was a matter of great revelation.

"Every citizen in the country must act to stop these incidents, with all our means," said Barak, adding that he planned to convene his Cabinet to examine the surge in violence.

A World Health Organization sponsored study last year ranked Israel in the top 10 Western countries for schoolyard violence. Israeli minister Ben-Ami reported that the national statistics for such violent incidents had quadrupled from 1991 to 1999.

These acts of mindless violence reveal a frightening emptiness in the soul of the nation. What is being done about it? One pundit recommended that the Israeli government set up a committee on violence modeled on "successful" U.S. violence reduction programs that targeted schools and communities: "The problem in Israel is very, very simple — we have not yet implemented such a strategy," he opined.

American culture is the most violent in the world. A quick trip down the aisles of your local "Wars-are-us" will reveal how Western society inculcates violence into the brains of toddlers.

In this week's Torah portion, we read of an incident that, on the surface, looks like it could have been culled from a contemporary newspaper: A lone assailant picks up a spear and, in front of a vast crowd, murders a prince and a princess in cold blood. Their only crime — they are "romantically involved."

You would think that G-d would have punished Pinchas severely, and yet, He confers priesthood on Pinchas and all his descendants — "My covenant of peace."

Why?

A society that runs on sentimentality will ultimately turn around and perform acts of unspeakable cruelty. In Nazi Germany, the first law that was passed against Judaism was the outlawing of *shechita*, kosher slaughter of animals. And during the war, the German society for the prevention of cruelty to animals sent a memo to the SS to ask them to please slow down the deportation of Jews to concentration camps because they couldn't keep up with the volume of pets for which new homes had to be found.

The word for peace in Hebrew also means wholeness and perfection. There is only one true peace. There is only one true Perfection. By definition, if we do what G-d wants, we are performing an act of peace, we are bringing the world to its perfection — even if that act looks like violent murder. If we act against the Creator, though modern culture may praise our liberality and our cultured open-mindedness, we have waged war on reality. We have laid waste the world as surely as an atomic plant melt-down.

Sources:

• Binyomin Yerushalmi in Yated Neeman, AP wire service

**H**ashem tells Moshe to inform Pinchas that Pinchas will receive Hashem's "covenant of peace" as reward for his bold action — executing Zimri and the Midianite princess Kozbi. Hashem commands Moshe that the people must maintain a state of enmity with the Midianites because they lured the Jewish People into sin. Moshe and Elazar are told to count the Jewish People. The Torah lists the names of the families in each tribe. The total number of males eligible to serve in the army is 601,730. Hashem instructs Moshe how to allot the Land of Israel to *Bnei Yisrael*. The number of the Levites' families is recorded. Tzlofchad's daughters file a claim with Moshe: In the

absence of a brother, they request their late father's portion in the Land. Moshe asks Hashem for the ruling, and Hashem tells Moshe that their claim is just. The Torah teaches the laws and priorities which determine the order of inheritance. Hashem tells Moshe that he will ascend a mountain and view the Land that the Jewish People will soon enter, although Moshe himself will not enter. Moshe asks Hashem to designate the subsequent leader, and Hashem selects Yehoshua bin Nun. Moshe ordains Yehoshua as his successor in the presence of the entire nation. The Parsha concludes with special teachings of the service in the *Beit Hamikdash*.

## HAFTARA

### YIRMIYAHU 1:1 - 23

“**D**ivrei Yirmiyahu” is the first *haftara* of the “Three-of-Affliction” trilogy read between 17 Tammuz and 9 Av. It contains Yirmiyahu's ominous vision of Israel's ruin and first exile at the hand of Babylon's King Nebuchadnezzar.

Yirmiyahu's vision of a menacing, almond-wood rod indicates that the time of Israel's punishment is ripening, like the hasty ripening of an almond; a

cauldron boiling at its north lip warns that Israel's northern neighbor, Babylon, will wield that rod. But if they repent, G-d will remember their “youthful kindness” when, as a fledgling nation, they forsook a familiar Egypt and like a starry-eyed bride followed G-d into a frightening wasteland.

### SUPER VISION

**I**n his introduction to the Book of Yirmiyahu, Malbim notes that this book contains more “irregularities” in spelling and grammar than any other book of *Tanach*. This, explains Malbim, is due to the exalted nature of Yirmiyahu's vision, which can almost be compared to that of Moshe's. Just as the Five Books of Moses contain untold layers of meaning, many of them hinted

through oddities of spelling and grammar, so too, the book of Yirmiyahu reaches beyond the normal bounds of expression due to Yirmiyahu's lofty grasp, above that of most other prophets.

The Sages sum up the Book of Yirmiyahu as “entirely destruction.” Even in English, “a jeremiah” is any predictor of gloom and doom. Why, indeed, did G-d specifically invest such a great Prophet, one of the very greatest, with the vision of Israel's destruction and exile?

“All G-d does is for the good,” say our Sages. Perhaps Yirmiyahu's exalted perception was the very reason he was chosen to bring word of the exile; from his lofty vantage point, he — like no other in his generation — could perceive the joy hidden in the tears.

## OHRNET

THE OHR SOMAYACH TORAH MAGAZINE ON THE INTERNET

Published by

**OHR SOMAYACH**  
TANENBAUM COLLEGE

POB 18103, Jerusalem 91180, Israel • 02-581-0315

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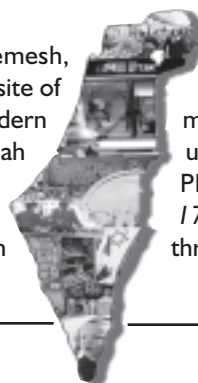
## LOVE OF THE LAND

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

## VALLEY OF ELAH

**N**ot far from Beit Shemesh, spreading between the site of ancient Azekah and modern Kfar Zecharia, is the Valley of Elah where David slew the mighty Goliath. Named for the *elah* (terebinth) trees which grow on

the surrounding mountains, this is where King Saul and the men of Israel gathered and set up their battle lines against the Philistine invaders (*Shmuel I, 17:2*) and achieved victory through David's slingshot.



## ECOLOGY AND ECONOMY

Where is it preferable to live — in a town or in a big city? Small-town dwellers and suburbanites will give you one answer, while the denizens of a metropolis will give you another. The truth, of course, is that a good case can be made for both. The halachic ramifications of this sociological reflection are whether a man can force his wife to move from town to city or vice versa.

The *mishna* clearly states that a husband cannot compel his wife to leave a town and come live with him in the city, nor to leave the city and live with him in a town. Objection to moving from city to town is readily understood, observes the *gemara*, because everything is available in a metropolis. But why should a woman object to moving from a town to a city?

The answer given is based on an observation made by Rabbi Yossi bar Chanina that it is difficult to be a city-dweller. The historical proof of this observation is the account we find of the settling of *Eretz Yisrael* by the exiles returning from Babylon. Although most of the people were more interested in establishing their homes in towns throughout the land, their leader, Nechemia, was determined to see that Jerusalem would be sufficiently populated. He therefore ordered that lots be drawn to designate which tenth of the total population would be assigned to live in Jerusalem, and he appealed for volunteers beyond that number. His appeal won a positive response, “And the people blessed all those who had volunteered to live in Jerusalem.” (*Nechemia 11:2*)

What is so difficult about living in a big city that deserved such a special blessing and which serves as grounds for a wife refusing to move there?

Rashi explains that because of the large population in the city, the houses are crowded together with little air available to their residents, in contrast to the town where fields and orchards adjoining the homes provide a pleasant atmosphere. Metzudot David on Nechemia and Tiferet Yisrael on the *mishna* suggest that the difficulty of city life lies also in the high cost of living there. It is the wife’s prerogative to favor the positive aspects of either town or city in her choice of where to live.

• *Ketubot 110b*

## THE SAGES’ LOVE OF THE LAND

The final pages of Mesechta Ketubot describe the great love which the Talmudic Sages had for *Eretz Yisrael*. Let us cite two examples:

Rabbi Chanina picked up stones that were on the road. Tosefot explains his action based on a Midrash (*Tanchuma Parashat Shlach*) describing this sage’s journey from Babylon to *Eretz Yisrael*. There were no border signs in those days

indicating where the Holy Land began, so Rabbi Chanina developed his own test. He picked up a stone and felt its weight. Finding it too light, he realized that he had not yet reached his destination. When he finally picked up some stones that had substance, he realized that he was in *Eretz Yisrael*. He kissed those stones and recited the passage, “For Your servants desired her stones, and its dust found favor in their eyes.” (*Tehillim 102:5*)

Rashi, however, has another interpretation which ties in with the following piece of *gemara*. Rabbi Chanina, he explains, was already in *Eretz Yisrael* and his lifting stones had a different purpose. His love of the land was so great that he was anxious to see that no one could fault it for having poor roads. He therefore went about removing stones and other obstacles from the roads.

That same sort of consideration seems to be the motive of Rabbi Ami and Rabbi Asi who, in order to find comfort in the shade, would leave the place where they were studying Torah when the sun’s rays became too hot. On cold days they would move from their unheated place to where they could enjoy the warmth of the sun. They did so, explains Rashi, so that they would never have cause to complain even about the climate in *Eretz Yisrael*.

But wouldn’t any one of us move from an uncomfortable place to a comfortable one? What is so remarkable about the behavior of these sages? The answer is that they could certainly have continued studying despite a little discomfort, while moving necessitated a loss of precious time spent in intense Torah study. They nevertheless made that sacrifice so that it should never occur to them that there was something imperfect about living in the *Eretz Yisrael* they so loved.

• *Ketubot 112b*

## I DIDN’T KNOW THAT!

Moshe’s prayer for G-d to appoint a leader in his stead (*Numbers 27:16-17*) contains exactly 28 words, corresponding to the 28 years which that leader, Yehoshua, led the people. Thus, in connection with Yehoshua’s conquering the Land, the verse states (*Deuteronomy 8:18*) that G-d grants *koach*-power (*koach* = 28) to prosper in the Land.

• *Ba’al Haturim*

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## PARSHA Q&A?

1. Why was Pinchas not originally a *kohen*?
2. Why was Moav spared the fate of Midian?
3. What does the *yud* and *hey* added to the family names testify?
4. Korach and his congregation became a “sign.” What do they signify?
5. Why did Korach’s children survive?
6. Name six families in this Parsha whose names are changed.
7. Who was Yaakov’s only living granddaughter at the time of the census?
8. How many years did it take to conquer the Land? How long to divide the Land?
9. Two brothers leave Egypt and die in the *midbar*. One brother has three sons. The other brother has only one child, a daughter. When these four cousins enter the Land, how many portions will the daughter get?
10. What do Yocheved, Ard and Na’aman all have in common?
11. Why did the decree to die in the desert not apply to the women?
12. What trait did Tzlofchad’s daughters exhibit that their ancestor Yosef also exhibited?
13. Why does the Torah change the order of Tzlofchad’s daughters’ names?
14. Tzlofchad died for what transgression?
15. Why did Moshe use the phrase “Hashem of the spirits of all flesh”?
16. Moshe “put some of his glory” upon Yehoshua. What does this mean?
17. Where were the daily offerings slaughtered?
18. Goats are brought as *musaf* sin-offerings. For what sin do they atone?
19. Why is Shavuot called *Yom Habikkurim*?
20. What do the 70 bulls offered on Succot symbolize?

## PARSHA Q&A!

### Answers to this Week’s Questions!

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

1. 25:13 - *Kehuna* (priesthood) was given to Aharon and his sons (not grandsons), and to any of their descendants born *after* they were anointed. Pinchas, Aharon’s grandson, was born *prior* to the anointing.
2. 25:18 - For the sake of Ruth, a future descendant of Moav.
3. 26:5 - That the families were truly children of their tribe. These two letters spell G-d’s Name.
4. 26:10 - That *kehuna* was given forever to Aharon and his sons, and that no one should ever dispute this.
5. 26:11 - Because they repented.
6. 26:13,16,24,38,39,42 - Zerach, Ozni, Yashuv, Achiram, Shfufam, Shucham.
7. 26:46 - Serach bat Asher
8. 26:53 - Seven years. Seven years.
9. 26:55, 27:8 - Two portions.
10. 26:24,56 - They came down to Mitzrayim in their mothers’ wombs.
11. 26:64 - In the incident of the *meraglim* only the men wished to return to Egypt. The women wanted to enter *Eretz Yisrael*.
12. 27:1 - Love for *Eretz Yisrael*.
13. 27:1 - To teach that they were equal in greatness.
14. 27:3 - Rabbi Akiva says that Tzlofchad gathered sticks on Shabbat. Rabbi Shimon says that Tzlofchad was one who tried to enter *Eretz Yisrael* after the sin of the *meraglim*.
15. 27:16 - He was asking Hashem, who knows the multitude of dispositions among the Jewish People, to appoint a leader who can deal with each person on that person’s level.
16. 27:20 - That Yehoshua’s face beamed like the moon.
17. 28:3 - At a spot opposite the sun. The morning offering was slaughtered on the west side of the slaughtering area and the afternoon offering on the east side.
18. 28:15 - For unnoticed ritual impurity of the Sanctuary or its vessels.
19. 28:26 - The Shavuot double-bread offering was the first wheat-offering made from the new crop.
20. 29:18 - The seventy nations.

## KASHA! (KASHA MEANS “QUESTION”)

### Sheldon from New York asked:

Why does the Torah wait till this week’s Parsha to tell us the names of the Israelite prince and the Midianite princess who sinned together? Why doesn’t it say their names in last week’s Parsha when it happened?

### Answer:

G-d is concerned even for the dignity of evildoers; He does not want to publicize their names for no reason. Therefore, when the Torah describes their sin, it omits their names. However, in this Parsha, which describes Pinchas’ reward, it is to Pinchas’ credit that he courageously stood up against a well-known Prince and a Princess. Therefore, for the sake of Pinchas, the Torah here tells their names.

• *Ohr Hachaim*

Do you have a KASHA? Write to [kasha@ohr.org.il](mailto:kasha@ohr.org.il) with your questions on any Parsha!

## HARRY POTTER

From Zev Schwartz in Baltimore, MD  
<teamzev@juno.com>

Dear Rabbi,

In America and the U.K., the Harry Potter series of novels has swept millions of fans into their “spell.” The popular books are about a young wizard and his friends who attend the distinguished Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Many states in America have officially banned the books from public school curriculum because of biblical injunctions against these two activities. May we read the books with a clear conscience?

Dear Zev Schwartz,

Isn't all mindless activity performed with a clear conscience?

What I mean is, life is like a business. A good businessman carefully takes inventory, buying more of the hot movers and chucking the duds. In life, too, we should weigh each activity as to its benefits and drawbacks.

Does reading this book benefit you? If it relaxes you, that's a benefit. If it strengthens your bond with your kids because you read it to them, that's a benefit.

But if it wastes your time, that's a drawback. If it weakens your bond with your kids, because you hide in your room and read it instead of spending time with them, that's a drawback. Every activity has the “opportunity cost” of what you *could have* done instead.

So, while there's no specific prohibition against “wizard” stories, the question is how much time, if any, to spend on them?

as yet to say “yes.” A weekend passed. I then said I was declining to pursue the job. I was accused of unethical conduct. I reasoned that my doubts and discomfort about the project's outcome would seriously impair my creative performance, and that it was in the client's best interests that I withdraw, even though such a withdrawal would constitute a serious embarrassment for me, the production company and the client's ad agency. Was I wrong?

Dear Name@Withheld,

This is a tough one. And since it is a financial issue that involves others, it requires a real live Rabbi to hear both sides. I can just give you basic guidelines based on your side of the story: (In my answer, I will assume that you were not yet committed by legal contract or industry standard.)

The Talmud says: “Your YES should be righteous,” meaning that a person should stand by his word.

The Shulchan Aruch (*Choshen Mishpat 204:7*) rules that one who breaks a verbal agreement in a business transaction — even if the deal has not been *legally* concluded — is considered unfaithful, and that he is “out of favor” with the Sages.

So, for example, let's say I'm selling you my car, and we agree on a certain price. As you begin writing out the check, someone comes along and offers me more money. It would be unscrupulous for me to cancel my deal with you and to sell it to the newcomer, even if *legally* I am able to do so.

Now, your case appears to differ from a standard “business transaction.” You aren't selling a car. Rather, you're “selling” your talent and creativity. According to your description, you agreed to take on the project thinking you would be able to put your creative talents to it, but later you realized that you don't have it in you. This is more like agreeing to sell someone a car which you later realize you don't own. In such a case, backing out isn't a lack of faith, but rather a mistake made in the beginning.

So, if you think you can do a good job without harming the client's interest, you should reconsider in order to uphold your word. But if you can't do it, you can't do it. I'm sure you will make apologies to the appropriate parties, as well as a commitment to exercise more care in future agreements.

Sources:

- Tractate Bava Metzia 49a
- Shulchan Aruch, *Choshen Mishpat 204:7*

## DIRECTION NEEDED

From: Name@Withheld

Dear Rabbi,

I am a film director. I work in advertising. After much pressure and considerable preparatory work on my part, I reluctantly agreed to direct a TV advert. I felt very uncomfortable about my decision.

Meanwhile, although I had said “yes,” no-one was in a position to reciprocally confirm the job as mine, i.e. the actual client had

## RECOMMENDED READING LIST

### RAMBAN

26:57 Counting the *Levi'im*  
27:9 Inheritance  
28:2 The Daily Offerings

### SEFER HACHINUCH

400 Inheritance  
401 The Daily Sacrifices  
405 Shofar

**Re: Jews at the Speed of Light (Ohrnet Beha'alotcha):**

You recently wrote: "Light from the sun takes eight minutes to reach us. When you look at the sun, you're not really seeing it; rather, you see light that left the sun eight minutes ago. So when you look at the setting sun, the actual sun has already sunk below the horizon." A few years ago I mentioned something similar to a friend. It took an hour of back and forth discussion before I understood that I was wrong. Even though the light from the sun does come to us with an eight minute delay, the sun is in the position we see it in. The sun does not move, we do.

• An Ohrnet reader

**Ohrnet responds:** In other words, the *sun* is where we see it, but we are not!

**Re: Addiction to Mitzvot:**

ROTFLOL (Rolling On The Floor Laughing Out Loud)!!! I am sorry but I had to write and tell you how you made me laugh on a stressful day, thank u....I see you are addicted to mitzvot...so be it with us all! *Shalom U'brachot!*

• Madeline Ortiz <maddielovesyah@juno.com>

I know people who are so given to Torah study that they can't stop during *davening* (prayer time). The halachic works say you're not supposed to do that. That could be an addiction. We used to call it the "*frumer yetzer hara*."

• Name@Withheld

In "Getting Up When You're Down," Rabbi Abraham J. Twerski M.D. notes that among religiously observant people, OCD (obsessive compulsive disorder) can often involve "religious" rituals. He cites the case of a woman who went to absurd lengths to keep her house clean of "*chometz*" (leaven) for Passover by refusing to allow any bread in the house all year round. Rabbi Twerski writes that OCD requires treatment; people who give counsel to others must be aware that there may be emotional disorders of a medical nature which require treatment!

• David <david1@talk21.com>

**Re: You Are There:**

Ohr Somayach, thank you for being there!! I very much look forward to your email.

• Chuck Wintner <Cfwintner@aol.com>

## THE OTHER SIDE OF THE STORY

## Giving People the Benefit of the Doubt

*In international travel, faster is usually better. But in evaluating others, we should be wary of making...*

### JET SPEED JUDGEMENTS

A student who had spent the day learning in our yeshiva in Israel returned to his old yeshiva in a nearby city, saying that he'd think over the possibility of transferring to ours. His decision was in the affirmative, and after about a week he arrived to begin his studies with us. The first morning did not look very promising, however, when he appeared about two hours late for the morn-

ing session. From this it seemed that he was sorely lacking in the motivation and discipline necessary to succeed in the formidable challenge of learning Talmud. I was already mentally assigning him to the ranks of the well-meaning but under-motivated, when I heard someone say that our new friend was still suffering from jet lag after returning from the States. It seems that the week's delay in transferring to us was due to a quick trip home. So it was not laziness, but travel fatigue that caused his lateness. Fortunately, I now had the opportunity to revise my overly hasty assessment of this new student, and to give him the fair chance he deserved.

## YIDDLE RIDDLE

**WHO KNOWS 22?**

18 is the amount of time it takes to turn *matza* dough into *chametz* (leaven).

• Mazal Zirkind <mazalz@thekosher.net>

19 is the number of years in a Jewish calendar cycle.

• Stuart Wise <swise@amlaw.com>