

O H R N E T

SHABBAT PARSHIOT MATOT/MASEI - DEVARIM · ROSH CHODESH AV - 8 AV 5761 · VOL. 8 NO. 39

# And Rabbi Akiva Laughed...

By Rabbi Reuven Subar

*Adapted from a lecture by Rabbi Mordechai Becher*

What response is appropriate when hearing the battle cries of the invincible Roman army? What should be the reaction when seeing ruined Jerusalem and the Holy Temple's rubble? What is the proper response of a disciple seeing his beloved teacher dying in torment...?

Laughter? Certainly not. But according to the Talmud, such was Rabbi Akiva's response in these very situations.

Roman battle cries heard miles away caused the sages to weep. Rabbi Akiva laughed.

Frolicking foxes on the Temple Mount — where once only the high priest dare tread — brought tears to the eyes of the sages. Rabbi Akiva laughed.

The death throes of their teacher, the saintly Rabbi

Eliezer, wrenched sobs from the throats of the sages. Rabbi Akiva laughed.

The destruction of Jerusalem can be called the Jewish tragedy extraordinaire. It claimed millions of lives and unleashed a 2,000 year torrent of crusades, pogroms, jihads and holocaust. Arguably, it is the worst thing that ever happened to the Jewish people.

The death of a Torah scholar, not merely a Jewish tragedy, is a global one. Because "Torah scholars increase peace in the world."

In each case, the destruction of Jerusalem and the death of a Torah scholar, laughter would seem the most inappropriate of reactions. How, then, is Rabbi Akiva to be understood?

## *Simcha - Happiness*

Happiness has many expressions, and in Hebrew there is a word for each. The happiness expressed in laughter is called *Simcha*.

Sometimes people laugh. Every once in a while something strikes their funny bone, and they giggle, chuckle or burst out howling. Why? What causes the *simcha* of laughter?

Rabbi Saadia Gaon offers a novel insight into this phenomenon: When a person suddenly gains a straight perception of reality, the result is laughter. A flash of reality obliterates time-honored falsehoods, and the soul laughs.

This novel idea, the link between truth and laughter, is expressed in Psalms:

*"Ohr zarua l'tzadik, ulyishrai lev simcha..."*

"Light is sown for the righteous, and for the straight of heart, *simcha*..." (Psalms 97)

Bare to the truth, the "straight of heart" are ever open to deeper and deeper perceptions of reality. Thus, their heart is sown with "*simcha*," the joy expressed in laughter.

*"Pekudei Hashem y'sharim m'samchai lev."*

"Hashem's commandments are straight, they bring

*continued on page ten*

**Matot/Masei**

“**S**himu Dvar Hashem” is the second in the “Three-of-Affliction” haftara trilogy read between 17 Tammuz and 9 Av. In it, Yirmiyahu laments the double wrong committed by the Jewish People: They have forsaken the Living G-d, and they have sought after many useless gods.

This week’s haftara continues last week’s in which Yirmiyahu protests his Divine appointment as rebuker of the Jews. Yet, say our Sages, Yirmiyahu, as a descendant of Rachav, was ironically fit for this purpose. Rachav was a less-than-reputable “inn-keeper.” Yet, she repented: She harbored Israel’s spies,

aided them in their conquest of Canaan, and eventually converted to Judaism. “Yirmiyahu is the son of a disreputable woman, yet his deeds are righteous: Let him come and rebuke the Jewish people, who are the children of the righteous Yaakov, and yet their deeds are evil.”

• Rashi

**Devarim**

**T**his, the final haftara of “Three of Affliction” trilogy, is always read on the Shabbat before Tisha B’av.

The ninth of Av wasn’t always a day of tragedy. During the days of the Second Temple, it was turned into a

day of great joy at the celebration of rebuilding the *Beit Hamikdash*. When the Second Temple was destroyed, Tisha B’Av reverted to its former sadness.

Every generation in which the Holy Temple is not rebuilt, it is as though we ourselves destroyed it. The Prophet Yeshaya laments not for the Temple’s destruction, but rather for those evils that caused its destruction. For it is not enough for us to bemoan what was. We must realize that it is within our power to bring the Redemption. We must use this time of national mourning to analyze our mistakes and correct them.

It’s up to us.

I DIDN'T KNOW THAT!

**Matot/Masei**

The phrases “*Bnei Gad*” and “*Bnei Reuven*” appear eight times in connection with taking their inheritance before the other tribes. Thus, the tribe of Gad and Reuven were exiled

from that inheritance eight years before the other tribes.

• *Ba’al Haturim*

**Devarim**

“*These are the words that Moshe spoke to all of Bnei Yisrael...*” (1:1) **Rashi:** *These words were harsh words of rebuke.*

Moshe only spoke harshly when speaking to *Bnei Yisrael*. When speaking to Hashem, however, he only spoke good about *Bnei Yisrael*. Because he was the leader, he always came to his people’s defense even under the most trying circumstances.

• *Kedushat Levi*

OHRNET

THE OHR SOMAYACH TORAH MAGAZINE ON THE INTERNET

---

Published by  
**OHR SOMAYACH**  
TANENBAUM COLLEGE  
POB 18103, Jerusalem 91180, Israel • 02-581-0315

---

General Editor:  
**Rabbi Moshe Newman**  
Editorial & Web Advisor:  
**Rabbi Reuven Laufer**  
Associate Editor:  
**Rabbi Reuven Subar**  
Contributing Writers:  
*Weekly Daf, Love of the Land:*  
**Rav Mendel Weinbach**  
*Insights, Overview:*  
**Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair**

---

Web Production: **Michael Treblow, Shimon Young**

---

Produced and Designed by the Office of Communications  
**Rabbi Eliezer Shapiro, Director**

---

© 2001 OHR SOMAYACH INSTITUTIONS - ALL RIGHTS RESERVED  
• THIS PUBLICATION CONTAINS WORDS OF TORAH. PLEASE TREAT IT WITH DUE RESPECT.

---

OHRNET is available from the following sources:  
• **E-MAIL:** Write to [info@ohr.edu](mailto:info@ohr.edu) for information.  
• **WORLD WIDE WEB:** Our address is: [www.ohr.edu](http://www.ohr.edu)

your source  
for jewish  
information,  
literature  
and education

[www.ohr.edu](http://www.ohr.edu)

the ohr somayach website

MATOT/MASEI

A GOLF LESSON

*“Moshe wrote their goings forth according to their journeys at the bidding of Hashem, and these were the journeys according to their goings forth.” (33:2)*

Life is like a game of golf. You have to keep your eye on the ball. This world is full of distractions — and distractions to distract you from the distractions. Take that wonder of technology, the computer, for example. If the computer had a motto it would be “You can waste your life saving time.”

By the time you get the thing to do what it’s supposed to do, you could have done it by hand five times over. But it’s so neat to watch it disgorge all those im-personalized letters to all your closest friends!

Imagine you have just bought a new car. You climb behind the wheel. You insert the key into the ignition and with the sweetness of expectation gently turn the key preparing for the thrill of the engine purring into expensive life. Nothing happens. You try again. Again nothing. You pick up the phone. A heated conversation with the car dealer ensues. “Oh yes, sir, you need to come back to the store and buy a connecting pipe between the radiator and the crankcase!”

No one would stand for such behavior. And yet us folk who have to deal with the computer take it as par-for-the-course when we find ourselves back in the store half an hour after buying a computer, needing some piece of software/hardware just to get the machine to flicker into life.

This world is full of distractions. However, apart from those distractions that we are forced to face, we actively seek others. Why do we allow distractions to dominate our lives?

Because we don’t keep our eye on the ball.

We don’t keep the end and purpose of our lives in focus at all times. Most of the time, we don’t think about where we are going. We just want a

change of scenery. New for the sake of new.

The essence of being Jewish is to know that there is Somewhere to go — and never to lose sight of how to get there. Never to mistake the ride for the road. The bow-and-arrow for the target. The means for the end.

*“Moshe wrote their goings forth according to their journeys at the bidding of Hashem, and these were the journeys according to their goings forth.”*

The beginning of the sentence says “goings forth according to their journeys.” At the end of the sentence, however, the order is reversed: “...journeys according to their going forth.” Why the change?

The first phrase expresses G-d’s purpose for the Jewish People in their journey through the desert to their ultimate destination — *Eretz Yisrael*. The essence is the *going forth*, the target, the end-in-sight. Every step represents a step nearer to the intended goal. It is the destination that matters, not the journey.

The second part of the sentence describes the Jewish People’s view of their journeying. The nature of the Human is impatience. Whenever they had been encamped for a while, the Jewish People would grow dissatisfied and restless to move on. From their perspective, the essence was to journey, to go, to get out. To seek new scenery. The end goal was less in their thoughts. Their purpose was not the destination — but the journey.

Anyone for golf?

Sources:

• Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch

DEVARIM

IN FRONT OF THE CHILDREN

*“These are the words” (1:1)*

One Shabbat not long ago, as I was standing in synagogue, my five-year old son came over to me. We had reached the part of the

service where the *Kohanim* ascend the steps in front of the Holy Ark, cover their heads and arms with their prayer shawls and bless the congregation. The *Kohanim* have been blessing the people like this for over three thousand years. I covered my own head with my prayer shawl and I felt a light tug from outside. “Daddy, can I come under your *tallit*?” whispered a young voice.

I brought my son under my *tallit*, and as the priests were blessing us, our eyes met. I thought, G-d willing, one day my son will be standing in my place, and he too will be looking down into his son’s face.

Sometimes you feel like a link in a chain that stretches back across the millennia. Sometimes you understand what tradition really means.

Tradition doesn’t mean bagels and lox. Tradition doesn’t mean chicken soup and *kneidlach*. Tradition means passing down the heritage of our fathers intact to our children. Tradition means “My father told me that his father told him that his father told him...that G-d gave us the Torah at Sinai.”

The Jewish People believe in G-d not because the odds that the universe just “happened” out of some primordial “soup” are gastronomically impossible. The Jewish People believe in G-d not because some missionary landed on our shores and told us some fable that happened away in a manger. The Jewish People believe in G-d not because some whirling Dervish told us to convert or die (a very persuasive theological argument). The Jewish People believe in G-d because we are the great, great, great...grandchildren of those same Jews who stood at Sinai and saw and heard G-d speak to them.

We believe in G-d because we hold it axiomatic that parents don’t lie to their children about things which it is important for the children to know — and G-d speaking to an entire nation

continued on page four

continued from page three

and making them the chosen instrument of His world-plan certainly qualifies as something important for one's children to know.

This week we begin the synagogue reading of the fifth book of the Torah — *Devarim* or Deuteronomy. The

Greek title is apt. It means repetition. In the last five weeks of his life, Moshe repeated the entire Torah — and the entire history of the Jewish People.

Nothing in the Torah is superfluous. Maybe Moshe's intent was to symbolize that the lifeblood of Judaism is the

repetition of the parents to the children. For it is this repetition which has carried Judaism across the millennia in an unbroken chain down to a little boy looking up into his father's face under a *tallit* one Shabbat morning more than 3,300 years later.

## PARSHA OVERVIEW

### Matot

Moshe teaches the rules and restrictions governing oaths and vows — especially the role of a husband or father in either upholding or annulling a vow. *Bnei Yisrael* wage war against Midian. They kill the five Midianite kings, all the males and Bilaam. Moshe is upset that women were taken captive, because they were catalysts for the immoral behavior of the Jewish People. He rebukes the officers. The spoils of war are counted and apportioned. The commanding officers report to Moshe that there was not one casualty among *Bnei Yisrael*. They bring an offering which is taken by Moshe and Elazar and placed in the *Ohel Mo'ed* (Tent of Meeting). The Tribes of Gad and Reuven, who own large quantities of livestock, petition Moshe to allow them to remain east of the Jordan and not enter the Land of Israel. They explain that the land east of the Jordan is quite suitable grazing land for their livestock. Moshe's initial response is that this request will discourage the rest of *Bnei Yisrael*, and that it is akin to the sin of the spies. They assure Moshe that they will first help conquer Israel, and only then will they go back to their homes on the eastern side of the Jordan River. Moshe grants their request on condition that they uphold their part of the deal.

### Masei

The Torah names all 42 encampments of *Bnei Yisrael* on their 40-year journey from the Exodus until the crossing of the Jordan river into *Eretz Yisrael*. Hashem commands *Bnei Yisrael* to drive out the Canaanites from *Eretz Yisrael* and to demolish every vestige of their idolatry. *Bnei Yisrael* are warned that if they fail to rid the land completely of the Canaanites, those who remain will be “pins in their eyes and thorns in their sides.” The boundaries of the Land of Israel are defined, and the tribes are commanded to set aside 48 cities for the *levi'im*, who do not receive a regular portion in the division of the Land. Cities of refuge are to be established: Someone who murders unintentionally may flee there. The daugh-

ters of Tzlofchad marry members of their tribe so that their inheritance will stay in their own tribe. Thus ends the Book of *Bamidbar/Numbers*, the fourth of the Books of The Torah.

### Devarim

This Parsha begins the last of the Five Books of The Torah, *Sefer Devarim*. This Book is also called *Mishneh Torah*, “Repetition of the Torah” (hence the Greek/English title Deuteronomy). *Sefer Devarim* relates what Moshe told *Bnei Yisrael* during the last five weeks of his life, as they prepared to cross the Jordan into *Eretz Yisrael*. Moshe reviews the *mitzvot*, stressing the change of lifestyle they are about to undergo: From the supernatural existence of the desert under Moshe's guidance to the apparently natural life they will experience under Yehoshua's leadership in the Land.

The central theme this week is the sin of the spies, the *meraglim*. The Parsha opens with Moshe alluding to the sins of the previous generation who died in the desert. He describes what would have happened if they hadn't sinned by sending spies into *Eretz Yisrael*. Hashem would have given them without a fight all the land from the Mediterranean to the Euphrates, including the lands of Ammon, Moav and Edom. He details the subtle sins that culminate in the sin of the spies, and reviews at length this incident and its results: The entire generation would die in the desert; Moshe would not enter *Eretz Yisrael*. He reminds them that their immediate reaction to Hashem's decree was to want to “go up and fight” to redress the sin; he recounts how they wouldn't listen when he told them not to go, that they no longer merited vanquishing their enemies miraculously. They ignored him and suffered a massive defeat. They were not allowed to fight with the kingdoms of Esav, Moav or Ammon — these lands were not to be part of the map of *Eretz Yisrael* in the meantime. When the conquest of Canaan will begin with Sichon and Og, it will be via natural warfare.

## CENTRALITY OF JERUSALEM AND JUSTICE

“You will arise and ascend to the place which Hashem, your G-d, has chosen” (*Deuteronomy 17:8*). This passage, instructing Jewish judges faced by a problem in Torah Law to bring it up to the Sanhedrin (High Court) in the *Beit Hamikdash* (Holy Temple) in Jerusalem, teaches us that the *Beit Hamikdash* is the highest place in the Land of Israel and that the Land of Israel is higher than all other lands.

The Maharsha explains this as follows: The universe is a globe and the site of the *Beit Hamikdash* is the center of this universe (centrality, rather than altitude, is the meaning of height), as, too, is the Land of Israel. Our Sages therefore said of the Land of Israel that, because of its central position, its atmosphere is balanced and generates wisdom. This is even more so in regard to the site of the *Beit Hamikdash*, and for this reason it was the seat of the Sanhedrin.

• *Kiddushin 69a*

## THE VIRTUE OF VULNERABILITY

The requirement for a *kohen* to check into the ancestry of the woman he wishes to marry — to ascertain that there is nothing in her family history to disqualify her as a marriage partner — is suspended in the case where there were charity wardens in her family. The background for this is the power of these wardens, appointed by the

community to collect charity assessments imposed on members of the community, to enforce their collection by confiscating property from reluctant individuals even at such a tense time as *erev Shabbat*. This would inevitably bring them into conflict with these individuals and would have led to their being humiliated with the mention of any family blemish. If such vulnerability never led to exposure, it is a guarantee that there were no skeletons in the family closet.

• *Kiddushin 76b*

## MERITS AND LIVELIHOOD

Rabbi Meir declared:

*One should always teach his son a clean and simple trade and pray to He who is the source of all wealth and property, for there is no trade which cannot lead to poverty and wealth; for poverty and wealth are not determined by trade alone but rather by merit.*

• *Kiddushin 82a*

Rabbi Shimon ben Elazar declared:

*I have never seen a deer drying fruit, a lion porter, or a fox shop-keeper, and they are all provided with their food without pain. They were created only to serve me, and I was created to serve my Master. If those who were created to serve me are provided with their livelihood without pain, then certainly I, who was created to serve my Master, should be provided with my livelihood without pain — but I have corrupted my actions and complicated my livelihood.*

• *Kiddushin 82b*

## KASHA! (KASHA MEANS “QUESTION”)

### MATOT/MASEI

**F. V. from Holland asked:**

*Here’s a question that has baffled me for years: Why in Parshat Matot is the casualty report given after the counting of the spoils? The verse says Moshe counted and apportioned all the spoils captured in the war against Midian (Bamidbar 31:25-46); afterward the captains reported, “We have taken a head-count of the warriors under our charge, and not one man is missing.” (31:48-9) Shouldn’t they have counted the soldiers first to see if any died? Aren’t people more important than things?*

**Answer:**

The captains’ report was not a casualty report. Rather, they were saying that they monitored every soldier during the entire battle, and not one was ever missing from surveillance; and hence, no one sinned with any of the Midianite women.

• *Ramban*

### DEVARIM

**Alan Balzam asked:**

*“And they (the spies) said, ‘The Land which Hashem our G-d is giving us is good.’ Yet, you did not want to ascend (to the Land); rather, you rebelled against Hashem’s command...” (1:25,26)*

Moshe makes it sound as if the spies gave a good report but the people ignored it. Doesn’t this contradict the verse that says that the spies “gave a bad report...” (*Bamidbar 13:32*)?

**Answer:**

Ten of the spies gave a bad report, but the other two spies, Yehoshua Ben Nun and Calev Ben Yefuna, gave a good report. The people should have listened to the good report, because it was in line with G-d’s promise to the Jewish People to bring them to a good land.

• *Ramban*

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

## PARSHA Q&A ?

### MATOT

1. Who may annul a vow?
2. When may a father annul his widowed daughter's vows?
3. Why were the Jewish People not commanded to attack Moav, as they were to attack Midian?
4. Those selected to fight Midian went unwillingly. Why?
5. What holy vessels accompanied the Jewish People into battle?
6. Those who killed in the war against Midian were required to remain outside the "machaneh" (camp). Which machaneh?
7. Besides removing traces of forbidden food, what else is needed to make metal vessels obtained from a non-Jew fit for a Jewish owner?
8. "We will build sheep-pens here for our livestock and cities for our little ones." What was improper about this statement?
9. During the conquest of the Land, where did *Bnei Gad* and *Bnei Reuven* position themselves?
10. What promise did *Bnei Gad* and *Bnei Reuven* make beyond that which Moshe required?

### MASEI

1. Why does the Torah list the places where the Jewish People camped?
2. Why did the King of Arad feel at liberty to attack the Jewish People?
3. What length was the camp in the *midbar*?
4. Why does the Torah need to specify the boundaries that are to be inherited by the Jewish People?
5. What was the *nesi'im*'s role in dividing the Land?
6. When did the three cities east of the Jordan begin to function as refuge cities?
7. There were six refuge cities, three on each side of the Jordan. Yet, on the east side of the Jordan there were only two and a half tribes. Why did they need three cities?
8. To be judged as an intentional murderer, what type of weapon must the murderer use?
9. Why is the *kohen gadol* blamed for accidental deaths?
10. When an ancestral field moves by inheritance from one tribe to another, what happens to it in *yovel*?

## PARSHA Q&A!

### Answers to Matot/Masei's Questions!

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

### MATOT

1. 30:2 - Preferably, an expert in the laws of *nedarim*. Otherwise, three ordinary people.
2. 30:10 - If she is under 12 and 1/2 years old and widowed before she was fully married.
3. 31:2 - Because Moav only acted out of fear against the Jewish People. Also, Ruth was destined to come from Moav.
4. 31:5 - They knew that Moshe's death would follow.
5. 31:6 - The *aron* and the *tzitz*.
6. 31:19 - The *Machaneh Shechina*.
7. 31:23 - Immersion in a *mikveh*.
8. 32:16 - They showed more regard for their property than for their children.
9. 32:17 - At the head of the troops.
10. 32:24 - Moshe required them to remain west of the Jordan during the conquest of the Land. They promised to remain after the conquest until the Land was divided among the tribes.

### MASEI

1. 33:1 - To show Hashem's love of the Jewish People. Although it was decreed that they wander in the desert, they did not travel continuously. During 38 years, they moved only 20 times.
2. 33:40 - When Aharon died, the clouds of glory protecting the Jewish People departed.
3. 33:49 - Twelve *mil*.
4. 34:2 - Because certain *mitzvot* apply only in the Land.
5. 34:17 - Each *nasi* represented his tribe. He also allocated the inheritance to each family in his tribe.
6. 35:13 - After Yehoshua separated three cities west of the Jordan.
7. 35:14 - Because murders were more common there.
8. 35:16 - One capable of inflicting lethal injury.
9. 35:25 - He should have prayed that such things not occur.
10. 36:4 - It remains with the new tribe.

## PARSHA Q&A ?

### DEVARIM

1. How do we see from the beginning of *Parshat Devarim* that Moshe was concerned for the Jewish People's honor?
2. How much time elapsed between leaving Mt. Sinai and sending the spies?
3. Moshe rebuked the Jewish People shortly before his death. From whom did he learn this?
4. Why did Moshe wait until he had smitten the Amorite kings before rebuking the Jewish People?
5. What were some of the achievements that resulted from the Jewish People "dwelling" at Mt. Sinai?
6. Why does the Torah single out the names of the *avot* in connection with the giving of the Land?
7. What did Moshe convey to the Jewish People by saying: "You today are like the stars of the Heavens"?
8. "*Apikorsim*" (those who denigrate Talmud scholars) observed Moshe's every move in order to accuse him. What did they observe, and what did they accuse him of?
9. Moshe was looking for several qualities in the judges he chose. Which quality couldn't he find?
10. Moshe told the judges, "the case that is too hard for you, bring it to me." How was he punished for this statement?
11. Why did Moshe describe the desert as great and frightful?
12. Which tribe was not represented among the spies?
13. Which city did Calev inherit?
14. How many kingdoms was Avraham promised? How many were conquered by Yehoshua?
15. Why were the Jewish People forbidden to provoke Ammon?
16. Why were the Jewish People not permitted to conquer the Philistines?
17. How did Hashem instill the dread of the Jewish People into the nations of the world?
18. Why did Moshe fear Og?
19. Who was instrumental in destroying the Refa'im?
20. What was the advantage of Reuven and Gad leading the way into battle?

## PARSHA Q&A!

### Answers to Devarim's Questions!

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

1. 1:1 – Moshe mentions only the names of the places where the Jewish People sinned, but does not mention the sins themselves.
2. 1:2 - 40 days.
3. 1:3 - From Yaakov, who rebuked his sons shortly before his death.
4. 1:4 – So that no one could say, "What right has he to rebuke us; has he brought us into any part of the land as he promised?"
5. 1:6 - They received the Torah, built the *mishkan* and all its vessels, appointed a Sanhedrin, and appointed officers.
6. 1:8 - Each of the *avot* possessed sufficient merit for the Jewish People to inherit the Land.
7. 1:10 - They are an eternal people, just as the sun, moon and stars are eternal.
8. 1:13 – They observed the time he left home in the morning. If Moshe left early, they accused him of having family problems (which drove him from his home). If he left late, they accused him of staying home in order to plot evil against them.
9. 1:15 - Men of understanding.
10. 1:17 - When the daughters of Tzlofchad asked him a halachic question, the law was concealed from him.
11. 1:19 - Because the Jewish People saw huge, frightening snakes and scorpions in the desert.
12. 1:23 - Levi.
13. 1:36 - Hebron.
14. 2:5 - Avraham was promised the land of ten kingdoms. Yehoshua conquered seven. The lands of Moav, Ammon and Esav, will be received in the time of the *mashiach*.
15. 2:9 - This was a reward for Lot's younger daughter, the mother of Ammon, for concealing her father's improper conduct.
16. 2:23 - Because Avraham had made a peace treaty with Avimelech, King of the Philistines.
17. 2:25 - During the battle against Og, the sun stood still for the sake of the Jewish People, and the whole world saw this.
18. 3:2 - Og possessed merit for having once helped Avraham.
19. 3:11 - Amrafel.
20. 3:18 - They were mighty men, and the enemy would succumb to them.

## VIOLENCE IN THE TORAH

**From: Tim Lieder**

*Dear Rabbi,*

*Was the point of your "Torah Weekly" insight (Parshat Pinchas) — in which you wrote about the immorality shown on TV — that we should not read the Torah, since it has so many shocking and immoral acts in it, including violence?*

Dear Tim Lieder,

No, we should study the Torah, one reason being that the Torah is educational.

Television, too, is educational. Unfortunately, it is teaching the wrong lesson.

The average five-year old sees hundreds of acts of violence, murder, and other acts of immorality each year on television, films, videos and video games. So do his parents. He and his parents do this for entertainment. Rarely is there an obvious moral or lesson conveyed.

The Torah, on the other hand, educates us to be good. For example, the Torah says "Cain rose against his brother Able and killed him (Genesis 4:8)." Immediately Cain is punished by G-d with exile and the eventual dying out of his line after seven generations.

The immoral advances of Potifar's wife toward Joseph are related in the Torah (*Ibid.* 39). Joseph's resistance to her advances eventually leads him to become viceroy of Egypt and gains him the praise and blessing of his father (49:24 and *Rashi*).

Immoral acts are described by the Torah matter-of-factly and as briefly as possible; no gory details are offered for our "entertainment."

The word "Torah" means "instruction." The Torah is our instruction manual for life. A manual shows what to do and what not to do; what works and what doesn't work; what is good and what is evil.

## PRAYING FOR ISRAEL

**From: Margaret Klompas**

*Dear Rabbi,*

*Please would you let me know which Tehillim (chapters of Psalms) one should recite for peace in Israel? Thank you very much.*

Dear Margaret Klompas,

There are specific chapters of *Tehillim* which King David wrote for times of trouble, and he wrote them with all Israel in mind. Psalm 83 asks G-d to protect Israel from an international coalition, headed by "Edom and the Ishmaelites," whose stated goal is to "eradicate them as a nation, and let the name 'Israel' never again be mentioned." (83:5) Psalms 130 and 142 ask G-d to save us from our misdeeds and from those who seek our harm.

Here at Yeshivat Ohr Somayach in Jerusalem we say these three chapters (83, 130 and 142) at the end of every weekday

morning service. It takes about two minutes.

If you wish to memorize a Psalm to have on your lips, there is Psalm 130.

The truth is that all *Tehillim* are good. The Talmud tells us that G-d told King David He prefers one of his psalms to 1000 sacrifices that his son, Solomon, would offer in the Temple. Any and all *Tehillim* are a merit towards whatever purpose they are being said for. So, if you have about 10 minutes a day, the entire book of *Tehillim* is divided into thirty sections, with one section to be said each day. That way, you can finish the entire book of *Tehillim* every month. (In a 29-day month, the last two sections are read together.)

May your and all Israel's prayers be answered.

## SLOWLY FASTING

**From: Brenda L.**

*Dear Rabbi:*

*I recently flew from Israel to America on the day of a minor fast. What is one supposed to do when flying east and experiences over 20 hours of consecutive daylight on a fasting day?*

Dear Brenda L.,

Fast. Slow. In other words, other than fasting the entire time, there is not an awful lot you can do — other than plan a trip in the opposite direction the next time a fast rolls around!

On the fast of Tisha B'av, one should try to avoid travel.

I have found the best thing for a fast is to drink a great deal of water just beforehand, *not* on a full stomach. On a more spiritual note, accepting the fast with the satisfaction that you are doing a *mitzvah* can make it a much more "enjoyable" experience.

People with special medical considerations should consult with both their rabbi and their doctor before a fast.

## TRAVEL DURING THE "NINE DAYS"

**From: Ahuva**

*Dear Rabbi,*

*My mother's niece is getting married in France on 1 August. My aunts have planned to travel on 26 July which is during the "nine days" leading up to Tisha B'av. My mother could theoretically travel the day after Tisha B'av, but that would mean traveling alone, which I feel is less safe, and if there is a flight cancellation she could miss the wedding. Since she is doing two mitzvot, visiting an ailing sister and bringing joy to her niece on her wedding day, would she therefore be allowed to travel during the "nine days"?*

Dear Ahuva,

Some people are wary of travel during the nine days, yet many still do. While one should avoid doing anything dangerous during the nine days, flying is probably safer than driving on the highway, which people do.

So if it would make it easier for your mother to fly at that time, she may certainly do so.



Before you accuse someone of “taking the cake,” perhaps you need to smile and ...

## “SAY CHEESE”

One day on the way home from work, I stopped by the neighborhood market. As I entered the store I saw a rare site in the freezer section: Kosher Cheesecake!! It was Rosh Chodesh Shevat: I remembered a custom to buy your wife a gift on Rosh Chodesh. (Well, actually, I love cheesecake, and I needed an excuse.) Anyway, before I knew it I was at the cashier buying a pizza-size Cappuccino Flavor Cheesecake. When I got home and presented my discovery, she was less enthusiastic about it than I was; I don't know why. Perhaps she thought it was too big for the freezer, or maybe she had made a meat dinner that night.... Whatever the case, we didn't eat cheesecake that night and without any argument we put it in the freezer.

A few days later, I opened the freezer. IT WAS GONE! Not a trace remained. I thought she had returned it to the store. In spite of my strong urge to start an argument, I convinced myself that maybe there was another reason and I didn't mention it.

Over a month later, my wife and I were going to visit some friends. As we were getting into the car, I saw the cheesecake box in her hand! I can't describe how happy I was. When I told her what I had thought, she smiled and said that since she bought a lot of frozen items, she had taken the cake to her mom to save it for us in her freezer. That night I had the best cheesecake ever.

We discussed the story with our friends and we talked about how easy it can be to make wrong assumptions, and how joyous it is when you are victorious against your inclination to start an argument.

• FF, Encino, California

## YIDDLE RIDDLE

Nehemiah Klein sent us the following riddle and answer:

Which *haftara*, often read twice a year, will not be read at all this year (5761)?

Answer:

The special *haftara* for Rosh Chodesh that occurs on Shabbat, which starts “*Hashamayim kisi*.” Why? The first Rosh Chodesh on Shabbat this year was Rosh Hashana, which has its own special *haftara*. The next such occurrence was the week of *parshat shekalim*, which has its own special *haftara* as well. The third occurrence is Rosh Chodesh Av, which falls during the three weeks prior to Tisha B'av, each week of which we read a special *haftara*.

## RECOMMENDED READING LIST

### MATOT

#### Ramban

30:16 Responsibility  
31:2,6 Vengeance  
31:23 Cleansing Vessels  
31:36 Miracle of the Spoils  
31:49 Jewish Victory  
32:33 Menashe's Inheritance  
32:41 Yair's Ancestry

#### Sforno

31:15 The Meaning of Silence

### MASEI

#### Ramban

33:53 The Land  
35:14 Cities of Refuge  
35:29 The Sanhedrin

#### Kli Yakar

33:49 The Greater Loss

35:6 Temporary Dweller

#### Sefer Hachinuch

408 Cities of the *Levi'im*  
409 Capital Punishment  
410 Exile

#### Sforno

33:1 The Merit of the Journeys  
36:4 The Inheritance of Daughters  
36:12 The Husbands of the Daughters of Tzlofchad

### DEVARIM

#### Ramban

1:1 Overview of *Devarim*  
1:12 Judging the Jewish People  
1:25 The *Meraglim*  
1:37 Moshe's Punishment  
2:4 Brother Esav  
2:7 Blessings

2:25 Fear of the Jewish People

#### Sefer Hachinuch

414 Appointing Judges  
415 Responsibility of Judges

#### Ba'al Haturim

3:25 The 51st *Amah*  
3:25 The Missing Letter “*Vav*”  
3:25 Order of Prayer

#### Sforno

Introduction To *Devarim*  
1:5 The Reason for Moshe's Rebuke  
1:22 The Choice of the *Meraglim*  
1:23 Moshe's Reason for Sending *Meraglim*  
1:27 The Sin of the *Meraglim*  
1:37 The Limits of Repentance  
3:11 The *Refa'im*

simcha to the heart..." (Psalms 19)

Hashem's commandments bring simcha because they are "straight." Torah study and observance confront a person with hitherto unrealized insight, hence simcha and laughter.

When Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak, Rabbi of the Lubavitch Chassidim, was arrested for organizing a network of Torah education in Russia, a KGB officer put a gun to his head and demanded he name his collaborators. The Rabbi laughed.

No believing Jew is afraid to declare, "I believe in the World to Come." But a loaded gun brings the existence of the World to Come into such crisp focus, the alternative is instantly reduced to absurdity.

And so Rabbi Akiva laughed. He laughed because he excelled in the quality of straightness of heart. His keen perception of reality allowed him immediately to glean the kernel of truth from the very event his comrades mourned.

### Renewal - Consolation

“Akiva, why do you laugh?” the Sages asked him when they heard the clamor of Roman legions.

“Why do you cry?” Rabbi Akiva replied.

“Idol worshipers dwell in peace and security, while the Holy Temple is burnt to the ground...shall we not cry?”

“That’s why I’m laughing,” said Rabbi Akiva. “If this is how G-d rewards the Romans — who are so wicked and cruel — for the good deeds they sometimes do, how much more will be the reward of the righteous people in the World to Come.”

“Akiva, how can you laugh?” they asked standing at the Temple ruins.

“Why do you cry?” he replied.

“The Holy of Holies, about which it’s written, ‘Any unauthorized person who enters shall die,’ now foxes play there? Shall we not cry?”

“That’s why I’m laughing,” said Rabbi Akiva. “Seeing the fulfillment of the prophecy that “Zion will be plowed like a field,” I more deeply internalize the knowledge that all the prophecies will be fulfilled, including those that foretell the rebuilding of Jerusalem!”

At their teacher’s deathbed, Rabbi Akiva explains: “Our teacher, Rabbi Eliezer, enjoyed an ideal life.... His wine never soured, his oil never went bad. He was completely successful in everything. I had a suspicion that he was somehow receiving his reward in this life, and that he had no part in the World to Come. Now that I see his suffering, I realize he’s being purged of whatever minute sin he may have committed, and that his reward in the next world remains intact.”

And faced with death by torture for his “crime” of teaching Torah, Rabbi Akiva laughed. “All my life I’ve been waiting to fulfill the concept ‘You shall love Hashem, your G-d, with all your heart and with all your soul...’ and now I finally have the chance.”

May we all merit to become “straight of heart,” to approach Rabbi Akiva’s depth of truth. And then, may we say, as the Sages did, “Akiva, you have comforted us. Akiva, you have comforted us.”

Sources:

- Tractate Makkot 24a
- Tractate Sanhedrin 101a
- Tractate Menachot 61b
- Talmud Yerushalmi, Berachot 9:5

The Zohar reveals Rabbi Akiva’s name hinted in the very verse so aptly depicting his outstanding straightness of heart:

“Light	ohR
is sown	zaruA
for the righteous	latzadiK
& for the straight	u’lyishreI
of heart	leV
happiness.”	simchA

The last letter of each word spells R’ AKIVA.