

# O H R N E T

SHABBAT PARSHAT VAYIGASH · 11 TEVET 5761 · JAN. 6, 2001 · VOL. 8 NO. 11

## PARSHA INSIGHTS

### ON FINAL APPROACH

*"And Yehuda approached..." 44:18*

It should come as no surprise to anyone that there are deep divisions in the Jewish world. The State of Israel, too, is torn, and has always been torn, by division. As much as we are threatened by an enemy from without, so we are threatened by dissension and baseless hatred — the enemy from within.

Eventually, all those who have not categorically excluded themselves from their Jewish identity will find themselves united, and we will fulfill our destiny as "one nation in the world" — the earthly reflection of G-d's Oneness above.

Uncannily, both this week's Torah portion and the *haftara* predict our present situation:

In the *haftara*, the prophet's eye sees the Jewish People still divided into the two antagonistic kingdoms of Yehuda and Ephraim.

The historical stamp of the Ephraim Jews is religious nihilism — enmity towards every specifically Jewish point of view — and indiscriminate approbation of every non-Jewish religious point of view.

On the other hand, the Yehuda Jews cannot escape the reproach that they pick out those *mitzvot* they want to keep, and those that they do keep, they keep more or less mechanically.

When these two shattered halves of the Jewish People are again united, it will not be a sad compromise with each side making superficial concessions.

Rather, G-d promises, through the words of His prophet, that both of them will be refined and purified and eventually the Jewish People will be united when these "two wooden slabs" become "one in My hand." (*Yechezkel 37:19*)

The source for this eventual re-unification is in this week's Torah portion where there is another meeting of two worlds. Yehuda and Yosef. The world of revelation

and the world of concealment. Yehuda represents the revealed majesty of Israel — the royal line of King David — apparent and clear for all to see.

Yosef is the hidden majesty of Israel. Yosef recognizes his brothers, but they do not recognize him. He is the hidden spark of Israel — the *pintele yid* — which is hidden, burning away in exile, throughout all the "Egypt" of history. Yosef is the Jewish spark that never goes out. The eternal flame. From the outside, Yosef looks like a gentile ruler of a gentile nation, but inside he is every bit a Jew. So it is with every Jew: However far he may stray from his roots, inside burns the spark of his Jewishness, even if he never learned *alef beit*. He is bound to his inescapable holiness even when he is dragged through the spiritual sewers of a hostile world.

*"And Yehuda approached..."*

Yehuda approaching Yosef. Revealed majesty meeting concealed majesty.

Yosef. Like the deep waters of a well, hidden, sealed over by a great stone. Sealed by the constrictions of a physical world and all its cares.

Yehuda. Like a bucket reaching down into the depths to draw up from him the pure still waters. To reveal Yosef to himself.

*"And Yehuda approached..."* The connection of two worlds. A foreshadowing of the ultimate redemption. Yosef crying as he is re-united with his brothers.

When we cry for Israel, when we cry for all our brothers and sisters who are still in "Egypt," when we cry for all the hate and the violence, we should remember that just as Yosef was revealed to his brothers in tears, so too the ultimate redemption comes in tears. Then, the son of King David, the scion of Yehuda, will gather us from the four corners of the earth, and he will rule in revelation, in majesty with head held high.

Sources:

Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Zevin, *L'Torah Ul'Moadim*  
Rabbi Mendel Hirsch

With the discovery of the goblet in Binyamin's sack, the brothers are confused. Yehuda alone steps forward and eloquently but firmly petitions Yosef for Binyamin's release, offering himself instead. As a result of this act of total selflessness, Yosef finally has irrefutable proof that his brothers are different people from the ones who cast him into the pit, and so he now reveals to them that he is none other than their brother. The brothers shrink from him in shame, but Yosef consoles them, telling them that everything has been part of Hashem's plan. He sends them back to their father Yaakov with a message to come and reside in the land of Goshen. At first, Yaakov cannot accept the news, but when he recognizes hidden signs in the message which positively identify the sender as his son Yosef, his spirit is revived. Yaakov together with all his family and possessions sets out for Goshen. Hashem communicates with Yaakov in a vision at night. He tells him not to fear going down to Egypt and its negative spiritual

consequences, because it is there that Hashem will establish the Children of Israel as a great nation even though they will be dwelling in a land steeped in immorality and corruption. The Torah lists Yaakov's offspring and hints to the birth of Yocheved, who will be the mother of Moshe Rabbeinu. Seventy souls in total descend into Egypt, where Yosef is reunited with his father after 22 years of separation. He embraces his father and weeps, overflowing with joy. Yosef secures the settlement of his family in Goshen. Yosef takes his father Yaakov and five of the least threatening of his brothers to be presented to Pharaoh, and Yaakov blesses Pharaoh. Yosef instructs that in return for grain, all the people of Egypt must give everything to Pharaoh, including themselves as his slaves. Yosef then redistributes the population, except for the Egyptian priests who are directly supported by a stipend from Pharaoh. The Children of Israel become settled, and their numbers multiply greatly.

## TWO CHIPS OFF THE OLD BLOCK

One of the ways that a prophecy becomes irreversible is if it is reinforced by a symbolic

action. In this week's haftara, the Prophet Yechezkel foretells that in the time of the final redemption the two halves of the Jewish people, symbolized by Yehuda and Yosef, will be brought together like two blocks of wood. Hashem tells Yechezkel "Join them together [so that they] look like one. They shall be one in your hands." (37:17)

Even though nothing could be more separate than two blocks of wood,

eventually these two blocks will become one. And even though only Hashem can perform the miracle of making one block out of two, for us to deserve that Hashem will accelerate the redemption, we must "look like one;" i.e., the Jewish People must be united and free from malice and baseless hatred. For although the redemption is irreversible and inevitable, it is in our hands to delay it or to make it happen today.

### I DIDN'T KNOW THAT!

**Yosef said to his brothers: "I am Yosef..." (Bereishet 45:3) Yosef said to his brothers: "Draw near to me...I am Yosef your brother whom you sold to Egypt." (Bereishet 45:3)**

At first, Yosef said merely "I am Yosef." He didn't mention his sale into slavery because Binyamin was listening. Binyamin didn't know about the sale, and Yosef didn't want to embarrass the brothers in front of Binyamin. Then, Yosef told his brothers to "draw near," and he separated them from Binyamin. Only then, out of Binyamin's earshot, did Yosef say "I am Yosef your brother, whom you sold to Egypt."

• *Da'at Zekenim m'Ba'alei Hatosefot*

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## POETIC JUSTICE

“They were cooked in the pot they prepared for others.” This is how Rabbi Elazar explains what Yitro said about the Egyptians drowning in the Yam Suf, the “Red Sea” (*Shemot 18:10*). They planned to destroy the Jewish people by drowning their male children, and they were punished measure for measure by being drowned.

This theme of poetic justice is taken further by Rabbi Chiya bar Abba. He cites Rabbi Simoi’s statement that Pharaoh plotted to commit genocide through water in the hope that Hashem would not punish him through water, because Hashem had made an oath to Noah not to bring another world-destroying flood:

“Three people were consulted in that plot — Bilaam, Iyov and Yitro. Bilaam, who advised implementing it, was eventually slain by the Jews; Iyov, who remained silent, was inflicted with severe bodily pains; and Yitro, who fled, was rewarded with his descendants sitting in the Sanhedrin in the *Beit Hamikdash*.”

These three wise men were certainly capable of pointing out the fallacies in Pharaoh’s reasoning which our Sages mention — that Hashem’s oath not to bring a flood was only in regard to the entire world, but not to a single nation, and that there is a difference between flood waters coming upon a land and a nation of pursuers rushing into the water. But to disagree with a despotic autocrat like Pharaoh, even if he accepted their argument, would mean certain death, as in the case of Ketiya bar Shalom and the Roman emperor (*Mesechta Avoda Zara 10b*).

Rabbi Yitzchak Zev Soloveitchik, the Rav of Brisk, offered a beautiful explanation of the measure for measure aspect of the retribution meted out for the various reactions to this challenge. For actively advocating the slaying of Jewish children, Bilaam was slain. Iyov maintained silence rather than protest and flee like Yitro because he felt that Pharaoh’s mind was made up and that his outcry would be an exercise in futility. Hashem taught him a lesson by inflicting him with severe boils all over his body. When a person suffers such severe physical pain he cries out, even though his outcry does not in any way heal him. So too, when a person sees mass murder being planned he must cry out, both because it hurts and because there is still the possibility that it may help. Yitro showed great courage in protesting and fleeing for his life because it meant foregoing the great privilege of sitting in the king’s palace as a senior adviser. His reward, measure for measure, was that his descendants had the privilege of sitting as judges in the most important royal palace, the *Beit Hamikdash*.

• *Sotah 11a*

## THREE DECREES AND THREE CHALLENGES

In his wicked desire to limit the Israelite population in his land the Egyptian ruler, Pharaoh, issued three successive decrees. First he ordered the midwives to kill every male child born to an Israelite mother. When this proved ineffective because of their lack of cooperation, he appointed officers to cast into the Nile waters every Israelite son. The day Moshe was born, Pharaoh’s astrologers told him that the redeemer of the Israelites had come to the world, but they were not certain whether he was Jew or Egyptian. The king thereupon decreed that every child born that day, even those of his own people, be drowned.

When Moshe’s father, Amram, divorced his wife as an expression of the futility of bringing children to the world only to have them drowned by the Egyptians, his example was followed by the other Jews because he was the spiritual giant of his generation. His daughter, Miriam, challenged his decision with the arguments which, Maharsha explains, correspond to the aforementioned three decrees.

Your decree, she told him, is more severe than Pharaoh’s, because he only decreed against the males and your decree affects females as well. This corresponds to the initial decree of infanticide limited to sons.

His decree, she added, only affected the lives of those children in this world while yours denies these unborn children both this world and the World to Come. (Since they will never be born they cannot enter the World to Come — Rashi.) This corresponds to the second decree about drowning the children and came to stress the belief that even those who drown will enter the World to Come as is stated in the passage “I shall return (the dispersed of Israel) from the depths of the sea. (*Tehillim 68:23* - See *Mesechta Gittin 57b* where this passage was cited by the oldest of the Jewish children being shipped to Rome for immoral exploitation as an assurance that their martyrdom in leaping into the sea would not deny them entry into the World to Come.)

Pharaoh’s decree, concluded Miriam, may or may not be fulfilled while your’s is the decree of a *tzaddik* and will certainly be fulfilled by Hashem as we learned in the Book of Iyov (22:28) “You shall decree and it will be fulfilled.” This was directed at the third decree which affected the Egyptians as well. There is no certainty, Miriam pointed out, as to whether the Egyptians will be so patriotic as to go along with a royal decree condemning their own sons to death and they may well bring about the abolition of that decree. Your decree, however, is certain to be fulfilled.

Amram accepted her arguments and remarried Yocheved; following his example, all the other Jews reestablished family life in Egypt.

• *Sotah 12a*

## PARSHA Q&A?

1. What threatening words did Yehuda say to Yosef?
2. Why did Yehuda say his missing brother died?
3. Why was Yehuda the one to plead for Binyamin?
4. What do we learn from Yosef telling his brothers "Go up to my father"?
5. What two things did the brothers see that helped prove that he was really Yosef?
6. Why did Binyamin weep on Yosef's neck?
7. Why did Yosef send old wine to Yaakov?
8. What did Yosef mean when he said "Don't dispute on the way?"
9. What happened to Yaakov when he realized Yosef was alive?
10. Why did G-d tell Yaakov, "Don't fear going down to Egypt?"
11. "I will bring you up" from Egypt. To what did this allude?
12. What happened to the property that Yaakov acquired in Padan Aram?
13. Who was the mother of Shaul ben HaCanaanit?
14. When listing Yaakov's children, the verse refers to Rachel as "Rachel, wife of Yaakov." Leah, Bilhah and Zilpah are not referred to as Yaakov's wives. Why?
15. Yosef harnessed his own chariot instead of letting a servant do it. Why?
16. Why were shepherds abhorrent to the Egyptians?
17. Why did Yosef pick the weakest brothers to stand before Pharaoh?
18. What blessing did Yaakov give Pharaoh when he left his presence?
19. Yosef resettled the land of Egypt, moving the people from city to city. What were his two motives for this?
20. Whose fields were not bought by Yosef?

## PARSHA Q&A!

### Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

1. 44:18 - He threatened that Yosef would be stricken with leprosy, like Pharaoh when he took Sarah from Avraham; alternatively, Yehuda threatened to kill Yosef and Pharaoh.
2. 44:20 - Yehuda feared that if he said his missing brother was alive, Yosef would demand to see him.
3. 44:32 - He was the one who took "soul" responsibility for him.
4. 45:9 - We learn that *Eretz Yisrael* is higher than all other lands.
5. 45:12 - He was circumcised like they were, and he spoke *Lashon Hakodesh*.
6. 45:14 - Binyamin wept for the destruction of *Mishkan Shilo* built in Yosef's territory.
7. 45:23 - Elderly people appreciate old wine.
8. 45:24 - He warned that if they engage in halachic disputes, they might not be alert to possible travel dangers.
9. 45:27 - His *ruach hakodesh* (prophetic spirit) returned.
10. 46:3 - Because Yaakov was grieved to leave Eretz Canaan.
11. 46:4 - That Yaakov would be buried in Eretz Canaan.
12. 46:6 - He traded it for Esav's portion in the Cave of Machpelah.
13. 46:10 - Dina bat Yaakov.
14. 46:19 - Rachel was regarded as the mainstay of the family.
15. 46:29 - Yosef wanted to hasten to honor his father.
16. 46:34 - Because the Egyptians worshipped sheep.
17. 47:2 - So Pharaoh wouldn't see their strength and draft them.
18. 47:10 - That the waters of the Nile should rise to greet Pharaoh.
19. 47:21 - In order to remind them that they no longer owned the land, and to help his family by removing the stigma of being strangers.
20. 47:22 - The Egyptian priests'.

## KASHA! (KASHA MEANS "QUESTION") How would you answer this question on the Parsha? \_\_\_\_\_

From: Yechiel <jew4truth@aol.com>

These weekly Torah portions recount the tragic story of Yosef and his brothers. Here is my question: If Yaakov was indeed a *tzaddik* (righteous person) and *navi* (prophet), why then did he not understand his sons' evil designs on Yosef, nor did he know that his sons lied about Yosef's death. Wouldn't a *tzaddik* and *navi* discern the truth in these critical matters?

### Answer:

The Midrash says that the prophecy, or *ruach hakodeh*, that Yaakov had, was temporarily (22 years) suspended from him, when Yosef was sold.

• *Midrash Tanchuma, Miketz 6*

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

**From:** <Name@Withheld>

Dear Rabbi,  
 Something has been eating me up inside since the summer. My family and I and some friends of my Dad from work were camping out over the Fourth of July weekend in the mountains. We were swimming in this river and my friend looked like he was going to drown in the river! But I could not bring myself to jump in and save him even though I am a good swimmer and took a lifeguard class once when I was 13 (I'm 20 now). But I just froze, and another camper jumped in and helped him, so I didn't have to. Anyway, I know I'm Jewish because both my parents are Jewish and I had a brit milah and mitzvot and everything when I was a kid. But I haven't been very observant in a while, but I've been reading your site and I think maybe I should become more religious after this experience. But I have to know: Did I do a big sin by not jumping in right away? I feel so bad. Please help.  
 Also, I want to know if I should come to Israel because of the Arabs killing Jews? Thanks so much.

Dear Name@Withheld,

Thanks for writing. It's clear that you feel guilty for not doing what you feel was right, to save the life of your friend. That is a very understandable feeling.

When a person is in a clinch situation like you were in, sometimes a part of their personality comes out that they weren't aware of. This is called in Hebrew a "nisayon" or "test."

It's a situation G-d puts a person in, to bring out parts of their personality that they might not be fully aware of. If the person passes the "test," then that good aspect of his personality gets strengthened. If he "fails," this can also lead to good, because it can be a sign for the person that he needs to work and improve this part of his personality. (The word "nisayon" also means "sign.")

Perhaps G-d was trying to give you a very clear message that you need to work on your aspect of courage. Courage doesn't only mean jumping in the river: Any time you make a difficult moral choice, and anytime you choose what is right over what is convenient, that is courage.

Like it says in Pirke Avot, "Who is courageous, he who conquers his desires."

You mentioned you've been toying with the idea of becoming more observant. Perhaps some fears or desires are holding you back. Maybe this is the time to conquer those feelings.

As for your second question, "should I come to Israel," I can't decide that for you. But realize that there are millions of Jews living here in relative safety, and we're not running away. I feel that it is quite safe and advisable to come here. In fact, I encouraged my mother to come visit, and she did!

Under the current circumstances, Jews are advised to avoid Arab neighborhoods. But in any major city — in America and elsewhere — it is equally true that one should avoid dangerous neighborhoods.

## PUBLIC DOMAIN

Comments, quibbles and reactions concerning previous "Ohrnet" features

### RE: Do Ants Steal? (Ohrnet Toldot):

Your comment in a recent Ohrnet that ants don't steal is patently wrong; they steal from other ants whenever they can. Some even spend their entire existence doing just that.

"The Laz" <biltong@safrica.com>

### OHR.EDU Responds:

Not the ants in Israel. They're more moral! But seriously, the insect spoken of by the Sages apparently refers to a specific species of ant, or ant-like creature, one which does not steal from its fellows of the same species.

### Kosher & Non-Kosher animals (Ohrnet Toldot):

Regarding your recent article about why G-d created non-kosher animals: It is inspiring to watch a small child in a supermarket shift from asking for candy to realizing that it is not kosher. Or, a person passing a fast food place and sniffing the french fry fragrance and knowing that some smells are good but off-limits. A main idea of keeping kosher is for us to have will-power, control, not give in to every desire and, most importantly, to obey Hashem. Surely Hashem could have made all foods kosher, but there is a higher meaning and purpose to everything. Kashrut is one of the beautiful disciplines given to the blessed Jewish people to maintain our connection, the spark that unites us with *Shamaim* (Heaven).

• Rivka Carasso <Rbcarasso@aol.com>

## TRAFFIC JAM

Recently I was stuck in a traffic jam, a passenger in a car inching along up to my destination. I was startled by a loud honking to my right, and when I instinctively turned to the noise, I was aghast to see the angry honker's car bumping into the car in front of him!

"How could that driver be so impatient that he would try

to nudge the other car with his bumper!" I thought. "Can't he see that we're in a traffic jam that stretches as far as the eye can see?!"

I rolled down my window to give the offending driver a piece of my mind. But he told me something that reminded me that things aren't always as they seem:

"The guy in front of me wasn't paying attention, and his car started rolling backwards into mine!"

• G.A. <Name@Withheld>

## YIDDLE RIDDLE

### Last week we asked....

A Rabbi had the custom to learn privately with his top student each year. One year he couldn't decide between three students. So he tested them. He showed them five yarmulkes, three black and two white. He told them that he would put one on each of their heads, and the one who could tell him first what color yarmulke he was wearing would be the student he would learn with. He did this, putting the three black ones on their heads, and hiding the white ones away. Within fifteen seconds, one of them said to him, "I know for sure that I am wearing a black yarmulke." How did he know? (There was no way that he could have seen it).

### Answer:

He (let's call him Reuben) thinks as follows. I can see two black yarmulkes on the other two students' heads. Let's say I have a white yarmulke on. If so, Simon will see my white yarmulke and will know for certain that he is wearing a black one, for if he was also wearing a white one, Levi would see two white ones, and since there are only two white ones, Levi should know for sure that he is wearing a black one. So why does Levi not call out? It must be that I am wearing a black one. (This is Simon thinking until here.) So why doesn't Simon call out that he has a black one? It must be that I (Reuben) am not wearing a white one, so Simon can not rationalize as above. So Reuben knows for sure that he is wearing a black one.

• Riddle and Answer submitted by Moshe Steinhaus

## LOVE OF THE LAND

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

### THE LAND THAT HAS EVERYTHING

"When you enter the Land and plant a fruit tree..." (Vayikra 19:23) It is obvious, notes the Talmud (Masechta Succah 35a), that the tree under discussion in this law concerning the ban on eating fruits during the first three years is a fruit tree. Why then spell out that it is a "fruit tree"?



The answer is that the Torah hints here to the "pal-palin" tree (something related to the pepper family) whose wood has the same taste as the fruit. This is to teach you that Eretz Israel is not lacking even such a rare species and is therefore characterized as "a Land which is missing nothing." (Devarim 8:9)

## RECOMMENDED READING LIST

	<b>Ramban</b>	46:15	Hidden Miracles	46:3	The Advantage of Exile
44:19	Yehuda's Diplomacy	46:29	Who Cried?		
45:16	Egyptian Reaction to Yosef's Brothers	47:9	Yaakov's Age		<b>Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh</b>
45:26	Yaakov's Disbelief	47:18	The Seven Lean Years	45:26	Why Yosef Didn't Tell Yaakov
45:27	The Lifetime Secret	45:16	<b>Sforno</b> Pharaoh's Invitation	46:4	The Shechina in Mitzrayim