

O H R N E T

SHABBAT PARSHAT VA'ETCHANAN · 15 AV 5761 · AUG. 4, 2001 · VOL. 8 NO. 40

PARSHA INSIGHTS

OUTSIDE BROADCAST

"These words Hashem spoke to your entire congregation on the mountain, from the midst of the fire, the cloud, and the thick cloud — a great voice, never to be repeated." (5:19)

Nothing is as empty as the air. Or is it? If you had eyes to see and ears to hear you would see a myriad of messages traversing the sky. The air would be full of pictures, of sounds. Some of the sounds you would understand: "In a surprise move today the President announced..." Some would sound just like noise: White noise; pink noise; noise from the sun; noise from the galaxy. And noise from the creation itself....

In 1960, Bell Labs built a giant antenna in Holmdel, New Jersey, as part of a very early satellite transmission system called *Echo*.

However, two employees of Bell Labs, Arno Penzias and Robert Wilson, had their eye on the Holmdel antenna for quite a different purpose. They realized that it would make a superb radio telescope.

At first, they were disappointed. When they started their research, they couldn't get rid of a background "noise." It was like trying to tune in to

your favorite radio program and it being obscured with static. This annoyance was a uniform signal in the microwave range which seemed to come from all directions. Everyone assumed it came from the telescope itself.

They checked out everything, trying to find the source of this excess radiation. They even pointed the antenna right at New York City — there's hardly a bigger urban radio "noise" than the Big Apple. It wasn't urban interference. It wasn't radiation from our galaxy or extraterrestrial radio sources. It wasn't even the pigeons; Penzias and Wilson kicked them out of the big horn-shaped antenna and swept out all their droppings.

The source remained constant throughout the four seasons, so it couldn't have come from the solar system. Nor could it be the product of a 1962 above-ground nuclear test, because within a year that fallout would have shown a decrease. They had to conclude it was not the machine and it was not random noise causing the radiation.

What was it then that they were hearing?

Eventually they came to the stagger-

ing conclusion that what they were hearing was the very first moments of the creation of the universe.

The discovery in 1963 of the cosmic microwave background of the Big Bang was proof that the universe was born at a definite moment.

In the 1950s, there were two theories about the origin of the universe. The first was called the Steady State Theory. It had been put forward by Hermann Bondi, Thomas Gold and Fred Hoyle, and held that the universe was homogeneous in space and time and had remained like that forever — in "a steady state." This was essentially what Greek culture had posited — that the universe was *kadmon*; it had always existed.

The rival, and at the time more controversial, theory sought to incorporate into its framework the expansion of the universe. Edwin Hubble had shown in 1929 that galaxies are moving away from one another at remarkable speeds. A few physicists led by George Gamow had taken this notion and argued that the separation between galaxies must have been smaller in the past.

If one extrapolated this idea to its logical conclusion, it meant that, at one

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הוקדשה הוצאה זו
לכבוד הבר מצוה של
הבחור משה אליעזר נ"י

Although Moshe is content that Yehoshua will lead the nation, Moshe nevertheless prays to enter the Land of Israel in order to fulfill its special *mitzvot*. Hashem refuses. Moshe reminds *Bnei Yisrael* of the gathering at Sinai when they received the Torah — that they saw no visual representation of the Divine, but only the sound of words. Moshe impresses on *Bnei Yisrael* that the Sinai revelation took place before an entire nation, not to a select elite, and that only the Jews will ever claim that Hashem spoke to their entire nation. Moshe specifically enjoins *Bnei Yisrael* to “pass over” the Sinai event to their children throughout all generations.

Moshe predicts, accurately, that when *Bnei Yisrael* dwell in

Eretz Yisrael they will sin and be scattered among all the peoples. They will stay few in number but will eventually return to Hashem.

Moshe designates three “refuge cities” to which an inadvertent killer may flee. Moshe repeats the 10 Commandments and then teaches the *Shema*, the central credo of Judaism, that there is only One G-d. Moshe warns the people not to succumb to materialism and thus forget their purpose as a spiritual nation. The *parsha* ends with Moshe exhorting *Bnei Yisrael* not to intermarry when they enter *Eretz Yisrael*, as they cannot be a treasured and holy nation if they intermarry, and they will become indistinguishable from the other nations.

HAFTARA

YESHAYA 40:1 - 26

The Shabbat immediately following Tisha B'Av is called Shabbat *Nachamu* — The Shabbat of Consolation. It takes its name from the first word of this week's *haftara*: “Comfort, comfort my people,” says your G-d. The Prophet reminds the people that the time of Jerusalem's exile

has come to an end. The Midrash tells us that Hashem asks Avraham to comfort Jerusalem, but he does not succeed. He is followed by Yitzchak and Yaakov and Moshe who are also unsuccessful. Finally Hashem Himself comes to comfort the Holy City.

I DIDN'T KNOW THAT!

“Let me see the good land which is across the Jordan; this good mountain and the levanon.” (3:25) “This good mountain” is Jerusalem (*Rashi*).

The Midrash writes that Jerusalem has 70 names; the Midrash lists the following names of Jerusalem:

Yerushalayim, Shalom, Yireh, Yabus, Gilad, Levanon, Zion, Marom Yam, Kiseh Hashem, Ir David, Yefeh Nof, Har Zion, Yarcetai Zaphon, Kiryat Melech Rav, Mesos Kol Ha'aretz, Beulah, Cheftzi Bah, Even Meamsah, Ephratah, Sadeh, Ya'ar, Menuchah, Ariel, Har Moed, Yaphneh, Betulah, Kallah, Eshet Neurim, Rabati Am, Rabati Bagoyim, Sarati Bamdinot, Ir Shechubrah Lah, Bet Tefilla, Migdal Eder, Metzudah, Yedidut, Derushah, Ir Lo

Ne'ezavah, Giloh, Eden Gan Hashem, Har Marom Hashem, Kedoshim, Akarah, Moriah, Har Gevoah, Ir Hayonah, Kiryah Ne'emana, Ir Hatzedek, Gai Chizayon, Daltot Ha'amim, Bamot Nachalah, Har Hakodesh, Har Chemed, Givat Halevona, Ir David, Ir Hanegev, Har Marom, Yisrael Shem Chadash, Ir Yisrael, Gan Eden Hashem, Yerushah, Ir David Hanegev, Har Marom Yisrael, Shalem, Asher Pi Hasham Yekabenu.

(This list appears to omit 5 of the 70 names.)

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PUBLIC DOMAIN

Comments, quibbles and reactions concerning previous “Ohrnet” features

Re: Your “Thou Shalt Laugh” Page:
www.ohr.edu/web/expjud.htm

I loved this page, and am going to save it. It is such a profound truth.

• Cherie Koch, Tempe, AZ

Re: Star Struck (Ohrnet Pinchas):

I heard that Rabbi Avigdor Miller, *zatzal*, explained the vast heavens in the following manner: So that we could con-

ceptualize G-d's infinitude, *i.e.*, if the universe were limited to, say, just the size of the earth, or even the solar system — realms within our scope of scrutiny — we might imagine that G-d, too, was limited. But being that we understand the universe to extend beyond the reaches of our imagination, so, too, can we understand G-d's sovereignty to surpass the confines of our imagination.

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point in time, the universe had been infinitely dense. Using the laws of physics, Gamow and his colleagues were able to show that the point — which was also infinitely hot — corresponded to the moment of creation. Everything in the universe had emerged from this incredibly dense and hot state in a cataclysmic event astronomers call “the Big Bang.”

The conflict between the theories was resolved by Penzias and Wilson in 1965 when they discovered that the mysterious radio signal was cosmic radiation that had survived from the first moments of the universe. It was proof of the “Big Bang.”

William Shakespeare once said that “All the world’s a stage.” He was right, but in a way that I doubt he understood. When does a play begin? From the moment the actors walk on the stage? Or does it start with the con-

struction of the set?

The world has two beginnings — a “Big Bang” — a physical beginning where the stage is set, where all the props and the scenery are set in place. And a beginning where the play itself starts, where the purpose of the Author is revealed. The first beginning is when G-d created the world *ex nihilo*. The second is when the Torah was given at Mount Sinai.

With the giving of the Torah, the true nature of the world, its purpose and end was revealed.

It stands to reason, then, that just as that physical Big Bang is still with us, that spiritual “Big Bang” at Sinai is still with us.

“These words Hashem spoke to your entire congregation on the mountain, from the midst of the fire, the cloud, and the thick cloud — a great voice, never to be repeated.”

Onkelos, the Aramaic translation of the Torah, translates the phrase “never to be repeated” as “that never stopped.”

That ultimate “outside broadcast” at Sinai never stopped. It’s still being broadcast as you read these words.

We live in a world where there are many broadcasts vying for our ears. In order to hear the messages of their sponsors, you’ll need a television. But in order to hear the broadcast of Our “Sponsor,” you have to plug into His non-stop, twenty-four-hour-a-day broadcast. How do you do that? Pick up a volume with words of Torah, be they Chumash, halacha, gemara, mishna, or Tehillim (Psalms.) Start to read the words and make them part of you, and you’re now receiving that same outside broadcast that started over 3,000 years ago.

Good Shabbos.

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE STORY

Giving People the Benefit of the Doubt

Dear Editor,

I have been intending to write a story for OHRNET for months. Finally, the baby is asleep, and only two of the children are at home, so here’s my chance. My story is called...

THERE’S A RAISIN FOR EVERYTHING

I received a call from a single man that we know. He knows to feel free to call us when he wants to come for a Shabbat or *Yom Tov* meal. I asked him how he is doing. He told me that he would be leaving to the US for a two-week trip.

Our children love little snack-size raisin boxes, and I have never seen them here in Israel. Moreover, I wanted to add them to our Purim gifts (*mishloach manot*). I asked him if he could pick up a few bags-full of small raisin boxes. I could

hear the hesitation on the other end.

[Editor: This is where it might be easy to have bad thoughts, such as: “What! All the times he’s been our guest, and now he can’t do us this favor!]

During the few seconds of hesitation my mind went through some thoughts, such as “He probably has a long list of items to buy for people.” I remember those trips to the US (especially when I was single) when I would shop for others. Then he told me that he would not have a home base in the US, and he would be carrying his bags everywhere he would go. It was just as I had thought; I knew he had to have a good reason, I mean reason, for saying no. PS. Two other friends who went to the US bought us raisins — enough for the family and enough for *mishloach manot*.

• An Ohrnet reader

YIDDLE RIDDLE

(New Twist on an Old) Yiddle Riddle

In an archived Yiddle Riddle (#48), we asked for two sets of grandfather-grandson whose names are mentioned in the weekday *amida* (*shemona esrei*) prayer.

But if you include the special seasonal additions to the *amidah*, you can find the names of a third set of grandfather-grandson. Who are the three grandfathers and grandsons?

• Thanks to James Franks, Ramat Bet Shemesh

Answer Next Week...

A NEW OHRNET FEATURE

With the completion of *Mesechta Kiddushin* in the *Daf Yomi* cycle, the **OHRNET** feature “Weekly Daf” completes its own 7½ year cycle of offering two weekly insights on the seven pages of the Talmud studied that week by *Daf Yomi* participants throughout the world. We therefore launch a new feature, **WEEKLY DAFootnotes**, which will offer weekly insights of another nature — historical and textual background for passages from Tanach quoted in the seven weekly *dapim*.

The insights which appeared in the past on these *dapim* can be seen on the Ohr Somayach Website, www.ohr.edu.

We begin this new feature with a prayer to the Giver of the Torah to grant us the understanding and ability to see this project through to its successful climax.

• Rabbi Mendel Weinbach and the Ohrnet Staff

THE HORNS OF PROPHECY

The horn of the goring ox is a major subject of *Mesechta Bava Kama*. “Should an ox gore a man or woman” is how the Torah introduces the chapter (*Shmot* 21:28-32) regarding the financial responsibilities of one who is negligent in guarding his ox.

Goring is defined by the *beraita* as an attack by the ox using its horn. The source for this definition is a passage (*Melachim I* 22:11) which describes how Tzidkiyahu ben Canaanah fashioned some horns of metal and prophesied for his royal audience that with these *horns* the kings of *Israel* and *Yehuda* would *gore* their Aramite enemies until total destruction.

This may explain why goring is identified with horns, but it leaves us with a mystery as to who Tzidkiyahu was and why he was making horns. A closer examination of the source in the Tanach will clear up the mystery.

Achav, the sinful idol-worshipping ruler of the Kingdom of *Israel*, joined forces with the righteous Yehoshafat, ruler of the Kingdom of *Yehuda*, to prepare for war against neighboring *Aram* over the right to the territory of *Ramot Gilad*. But the latter, Yehoshafat, was reluctant to embark on such a war before consulting Hashem. Achav then assembled some 400 prophets of the idol Ba'al, and these false prophets unanimously advised them to go to war and guaranteed their victory. Yehoshafat suspected them of false prophesying and insisted on hearing from another voice, a true prophet named Michayahu.

While Michayahu, who would eventually offer a dissenting forecast, was being summoned, one of the idolatrous prophets, Tzidkiyahu, sought to reinforce the prophecy of his company by providing virtual fulfillment of this prophecy

in the manner of true prophets, who acted in such fashion in order to invest their prophecy with irrevocability. (See Ramban on *Bereishet* 12:6 and *Metzudat David* on the passage under discussion.) He therefore demonstrated such fulfillment with artificial horns.

But a false prophecy will not come true even with such reinforcement, and Achav ended up being slain in that war as Heavenly punishment for his sins.

• *Bava Kama 2b*

THE UNFRIENDLY OX

While a man must pay for the damages his ox inflicts upon another animal as a result of his negligence, no such payment is required if the victim was an animal belonging to the *Beit Hamikdash* (Sanctuary). This exception is derived from the wording of the passage (*Shmot* 21:35) which speaks of “*shor ish*” (the ox of a man) goring “*shor rayahu*” (his fellow’s ox), which we understand as meaning the ox of his fellow man, thus excluding an ox belonging to the Sanctuary.

An offbeat interpretation of this passage was offered by a medieval scholar named Ben Zuta, who is quoted by the great biblical commentator Rabbi Avraham Ibn Ezra. He understood the term “*rayahu*” in this passage as referring to the victimized ox which is the “friend” of the goring ox (rendering “*shor rayahu*” as “his fellow ox”). Ibn Ezra sarcastically dismisses this misinterpretation by noting that an ox has no friend except for Ben Zuta!

The proof offered by Ibn Ezra that “*rayahu*” refers to a fellow man and not a fellow ox is that just as the gorer is described as “the ox of a man,” the similar term describing the victim must be understood as “the ox of his friend.”

This proof receives reinforcement from Rashi’s comment on the words “*shor ish*” at the beginning of this passage. He explains that this means “the ox of a man” in order to eliminate any misunderstanding that it may mean “the ox goring a man.” Just as the Torah combines the words “ox” and “man” to describe the relationship between the gorer and its owner, so does the ensuing combination of “ox” and “friend” describe the relationship between the victim and its owner — and not between one ox and another.

• *Bava Kama 6b*

Coming Soon!!
A New Ohrnet Feature
PEOPLE OF THE LAND

PARSHA Q&A ?

1. "And I prayed to Hashem at that time." Why "at that time"?
2. What characteristic trait is represented by Hashem's "strong hand"?
3. What is *ha'levanon*?
4. What did Hashem tell Yehoshua after the battle of Ai?
5. What will happen if the Jewish People fail to keep the *mitzvot* properly?
6. How did the decree that Moshe not enter the Land affect him even in death?
7. What is hinted by the word *v'noshantem*?
8. Why were the Jewish People exiled two years earlier than indicated by Moshe's prophecy?
9. "You'll serve man-made gods." Is this literal?
10. Why is east called *mizrach*?
11. "Keep the Shabbat day as I have commanded you." When had Hashem previously commanded us to keep Shabbat?
12. Where did the Jewish People first receive the command to honor parents?
13. What is meant by "Hashem, our G-d, Hashem is One"?
14. What are two meanings of loving Hashem "with all your might"?
15. How well-versed must one be in Torah?
16. Where does the word *totafot* come from?
17. Who is fit to swear in Hashem's name?
18. What does it mean that the Jews are the "smallest nation"?
19. When someone serves Hashem with love, how many generations receive reward?
20. Why are evil-doers rewarded in this world?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

1. 3:23 - Defeating Sichon and Og, whose lands were part of Eretz Canaan, Moshe thought perhaps Hashem had annulled the vow against his entering the Land.
2. 3:24 - His willingness to forgive.
3. 3:25 - *Ha'levanon* means the *Beit Hamikdash*, which makes "white" (*lavan*), i.e., atones for, the Jewish People.
4. 3:28 - Yehoshua must lead the army into battle.
5. 4:9 - The non-Jewish world will regard them as foolish.
6. 4:22 - Even his remains weren't buried in the Land.
7. 4:25 - The *gematria* of *v'noshantem*, 852, hints at the number of years until the first exile.
8. 4:25 - So that the rest of the prophecy "that you shall utterly perish" would not be fulfilled.
9. 4:28 - No. It means you'll serve others who serve idols.
10. 4:41 - It's the direction from which the sun shines (*mizrach* means shining).
11. 5:13 - Before *Matan Torah*, at Marah. (*Shmot 15:25*)
12. 5:16 - At Marah. (*Shmot 15:25*).
13. 6:4 - Hashem, who is now our G-d, but not [accepted as] G-d of the other nations, will eventually be [accepted as] the one and only G-d.
14. 6:5 - 1) With everything you own. 2) Whether Hashem treats you with kindness or harshness.
15. 6:7 - If asked a Torah question, one should be able to reply quickly and clearly.
16. 6:8 - *Tot* means two in Caspi. *Fot* means two in Afriki. Together they allude to the four sections of tefillin.
17. 6:13 - One who serves Hashem and reveres His name.
18. 7:7 - *B'nei Yisrael* are the humblest nation.
19. 7:9 - 2,000.
20. 7:10 - So that they get no reward in the next world.

KASHA! (KASHA MEANS "QUESTION")

"And I prayed to Hashem at that time....(3:23)" Rashi: "After I conquered the land of Sichon and Og, I thought perhaps the vow had been annulled."

Moshe thought, being that he had merited to see the beginning of the conquest of the land with the defeat of Sichon and Og, that perhaps Hashem's vow against his entering the Land had been annulled (see question and answer #1 above). If so — if the vow against his entering the Land had been annulled — why, then, did Moshe need to *pray* this special prayer to enter the Land?

Answer:

There are two types of decrees: A decree with a vow, and a decree without a vow. The former, a decree with a vow, can not be rescinded through prayer; so, as long as Moshe thought the vow was in place, praying to rescind the decree would have been futile. Only after Moshe thought that perhaps the vow had been annulled was he able to pray for the rescinding of the decree.

• Rabbi Yitzchak Ze'ev Solevetchik (*The Brisker Rav*)

Do you have a KASHA? Write to kasha@ohr.edu with your questions on any Parsha!

GIGA-ZILLIONS TO THE GOOGLEPLEX

From: Name Withheld:

Dear Rabbi,

Regarding your recent answer stating that the reason the universe is so vast is in order to inspire awe and humility: There is no question that the universe is immense. Considering that the known universe has a radius of 15 billion light-years (1 light-year = the distance light travels in a vacuum in 1 year, and the speed of light in a vacuum is about 300,000 kilometers per second) and is filled with billions of galaxies, each composed of billions of star systems, it is easy to be overwhelmed. However, it is very difficult to imagine that God created the entire universe solely for the benefit of humanity. The entire Solar system is only a few light-hours across, making it trivial in size compared with the rest of the universe. Most of the universe is superfluous as far as we are concerned. Our ancestors were awe-stricken long before we had any inkling of the size of the universe (less than a century ago with the rise of modern astronomy); we do not need 1.41372×10^{31} cubic light-years of space (probably more, actually) just to feel humility. More likely, G-d had something else in mind than our benefit...[The "Ask the Rabbi" editor has deleted the following four paragraphs of this message for the sake of brevity.]

Signed,

(Name Withheld), Graduate student, Department of Biometry and Epidemiology Medical University of (University Name Withheld)

Dear Graduate Student, Department of Biometry and Epidemiology,

Okay, so how big would the universe need to be for you to feel humility?

You know, your question reminds me of a true story: An impudent fellow once remarked to the dean of a prestigious yeshiva (rabbinical seminary): "Your beard is so long that it covers your tie; you can't even see it. So why do you even bother wearing a tie?"

The rabbi replied, "How do you know I'm wearing a tie?"

You say that the ancients perceived a mere fraction of the universe's true vastness, yet they were inspired by it; so what did they need the rest for?

And the answer is, the rest is there to inspire us today.

You see, our ancestors had open hearts full of wisdom and understanding, while we have numb skulls full of data and information. So, we need extra help. To help us out a little, G-d opened our eyes to some mighty impressive numbers — numbers that previous generations may not have known, nor needed to know. With these fancy figures, inspiration and fear of G-d are once again available to a generation that has forgotten how to look at the sky.

So, like a tie peeking through a beard, impressing those who need ties to impress them, the big statistics peek out at our generations, giving us a picture of the universe that inspires awe and humility. In some people, at least.

(By the way, we didn't say that inspiration was the only reason; we gave other reasons as well, and of course there may be reasons that we don't know about.)

DESTRUCTION AND REBUILDING

From: Chaim Schreiner

Dear Rabbi,

Tisha B'av (the 9th of Av) is the fast day for the destruction of the first and the second Temples, both of which were destroyed on this date. My question is, did they fast on Tisha B'av during the 2nd Temple period, even though the Temple was rebuilt?

Dear Chaim Schreiner,

In the book of Zechariah, the people in Babylon ask the Prophet Zechariah whether they should stop fasting on the mournful fast days. This question was asked during the period when the *Beit Hamikdash* was in the process of being rebuilt. The meaning of Zechariah's answer to them is not immediately obvious.

The Talmud explains that it depends: If the Land of Israel is under oppressive foreign powers, then one still fasts. If it is under foreign rule, but they are not oppressive to the Jews, then the people may choose whether to fast or not. If the Land of Israel is under Jewish rule and peaceful, then the fast becomes a *yom tov*, a holiday, upon which it is prohibited to fast.

This passage from the Talmud, however, does not explain what exactly was done during the Second Temple, and there are differing views among the commentaries. Rabbeinu Chananel says that Tisha B'Av was a *yom tov* during the Second Temple, and it was forbidden to fast. Maharsha there seems to concur.

Rambam differs, saying that the period was considered a time of non-oppressive foreign rule. Therefore, it was up to the people to choose whether to fast or not. The people actually chose to fast, being that this was the day when many other tragedies had occurred in the past, such as the sin of the spies and the destruction of the first Temple.

Josephus, writing about the Second Temple period, writes that they did fast.

Sources:

- Zecharia 7
- Rosh Hashana 18b
- Rabbeinu Chananel, Maharsha, *Ibid.*
- Rambam, *Pirush Hamishnayot*
- Me'am Loez, Zecharia 7