

OHRNET

SHABBAT PARSHAT VAYEITZEI · 9 KISLEV 5766 · DEC. 10, 2005 · VOL. 13 NO. 7

PARSHA INSIGHTS

MEDICINE FOR THE SOUL

“...and she said to Yaakov; Give me children, or else I die!” (30:1)
(Rashi explains that “Give me children” means “Pray for me!”)

I have a friend who returned to his Jewish roots via the Himalayas. For several years he was deeply involved in Buddhism. When he subsequently discovered the depth and beauty of his own heritage he was surprised at how quickly he felt comfortable living a Jewish life: The radiance of Shabbat captivated him. The discipline of the dietary laws resonated with his regard for self-control. There was, however, one aspect of his newfound faith that continued to be problematic for him.

Prayer.

“How can prayer be meaningful if everyone has to use the same words? How can that be a personal expression of connection to G-d?” he would ask. “How can prayer be fixed at certain times? Is my heart supposed to open on demand?”

In truth, at the root of his question was a basic misunderstanding of the Hebrew word *tefilla*, woe-fully and inadequately translated into English as ‘prayer’. The verb *hitpalel* — ‘to pray’ — is a reflexive verb. Obviously, ‘reflexive’ does not mean that we pray to ourselves, so why should the verb ‘to pray’ be reflexive?

The root of the word *hitpalel* is *pillel*, which means

‘to judge.’ To understand the connection between praying and judging, we must understand the deeper function of a judge. A judge takes conflicting evidence, disunion, and injects into this situation of confusion Divine Truth as revealed in the Torah. This Truth penetrates to the very heart of the opposing views, the quarrels and dissention, and creates a new unity on a higher level.

Similarly, when we pray, we inject into the maelstrom

of our unquiet soul the Divine Truth which pierces through all the artifice, all the conflict and turmoil inside us. Prayer is reflexive because it brings us face to face with the great harmony at the core of our existence. In other words, *tefilla* is not an outflow of emotion: it is an influx of Divine energy, a prescription for the soul formulated by the greatest physicians of the soul — *Chazal* — the Jewish spiritual masters.

This is not to say that there is no place in Judaism for the outpouring of the soul. Quite the reverse. There are several other words to describe this process, such as *siach* and *techina*. *Tefilla*, however, is the prescription for the soul, and thus, like any medicine, it has to be taken at prescribed times and with exact repeatable doses, and very often,

just as with medicine, when we desire it least we need it most.

• Source: Rabbi Shimshon Rafael Hirsch on Bereishet 20:7; thanks to Rabbi Mordechai Perlman

Prayer is reflexive
because it brings
us face to face
with the great
harmony at
the core of our
existence.

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Fleeing from Esav, Yaakov leaves Be'er Sheva and sets out for Charan, the home of his mother's family. After a 14-year stint in the Torah Academy of Shem and Ever, he resumes his journey and comes to Mount Moriah, the place where his father Yitzchak was brought as an offering, and the future site of the *Beit Hamikdash*. He sleeps there and dreams of angels going up and down a ladder between Heaven and earth. G-d promises him the Land of Israel, that he will found a great nation and that he will enjoy Divine protection. Yaakov wakes and vows to build an altar there and tithe all that he will receive. Then he travels to Charan and meets his cousin Rachel at the well. He arranges with her father, Lavan, to work seven years for her hand in marriage, but Lavan fools Yaakov, substituting Rachel's older sister, Leah. Yaakov commits himself to work another seven years in order to also marry Rachel. Leah bears four sons: Reuven,

Shimon, Levi and Yehuda, the first Tribes of Israel. Rachel is barren, and in an attempt to give Yaakov children, she gives her handmaiden Bilhah to Yaakov as a wife. Bilhah bears Dan and Naftali. Leah also gives Yaakov her handmaiden Zilpah, who bears Gad and Asher. Leah then bears Yissachar, Zevulun, and a daughter, Dina. Hashem finally blesses Rachel with a son, Yosef. Yaakov decides to leave Lavan, but Lavan, aware of the wealth Yaakov has made for him, is reluctant to let him go, and concludes a contract of employment with him. Lavan tries to swindle Yaakov, but Yaakov becomes extremely wealthy. Six years later, Yaakov, aware that Lavan has become dangerously resentful of his wealth, flees with his family. Lavan pursues them but is warned by Hashem not to harm them. Yaakov and Lavan agree to a covenant and Lavan returns home. Yaakov continues on his way to face his brother Esav.

ISRAEL Forever

STONES AND ELECTIONS

When the Patriarch Yaakov, on his way to the home of his uncle Lavan, stopped off at the site where the *Beit Hamikdash* would eventually stand, he gathered some stones which he placed at his headstead. Our Sages teach us that those stones quarreled with one another over which would have the privilege of having this saintly *tzaddik* use it as a pillow. G-d solved the problem by fusing all of the stones into one.

As we read about this in this week's Torah portion we cannot help but reflect on the quarrels among political parties in Israel which have created the need for early elections for prime minister and Knesset.

But are these quarrels also over who will have the privilege of supporting the *tzaddikim* in the country whose study of Torah and observance of *mitzvot* provide the

Divine protection for all of Israel? If that would be the sublime motive of their struggle for power, there would hardly be a need for elections because they would be fused into one solid rock.

The fact is, however, that neither Right nor Left has demonstrated a proper appreciation of the need to strengthen the spiritual backbone of Israeli society. What they are left with, therefore, is a frantic and futile power struggle which does not allow an elected government to last for more than a couple of years.

We must pray that G-d will open the eyes of our politicians to the need to support and encourage the activities and institutions of the nation's *tzaddikim* so that they will be blessed with the unity of Yaakov's stones and stability for Israel forever.

לע"נ

ח'יה צירל ע"ה בת צבי נ"י

ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

OHRNET magazine is published by Ohr Somayach Tanenbaum College

POB 18103, Jerusalem 91180, Israel • Tel: +972-2-581-0315 • Email: info@ohr.edu • www.ohr.edu

© 2005 Ohr Somayach Institutions - All rights reserved • This publication contains words of Torah. Please treat it with due respect.

PARSHA Q&A?

1. When Yaakov traveled to Charan, the Torah stresses that he departed from Be'er Sheva. Why?
2. On the night of his dream, Yaakov did something he hadn't done in 14 years. What?
3. G-d compressed the entire Land of Israel underneath the sleeping Yaakov. What did this symbolize?
4. Yaakov said "I will return with *shalom*." What did he mean by "*shalom*"?
5. Why did Yaakov rebuke the shepherds?
6. Why did Rachel, and not her brothers, tend her father's sheep?
7. Why did Yaakov cry when he met Rachel?
8. Why did Lavan run to greet Yaakov?
9. Why were Leah's eyes tender?
10. How old was Yaakov when he married?
11. What did Rachel find enviable about Leah?
12. Who was Yaakov's fifth son?
13. Who was Leah's handmaiden? Was she older or younger than Rachel's handmaiden?
14. How do you say *dudaim* in Arabic?
15. "Hashem remembered Rachel" (30:22). What did He remember?
16. What does "Yosef" mean? Why was he named that?
17. G-d forbade Lavan to speak to Yaakov "either of good or of bad." Why didn't G-d want Lavan to speak of good?
18. Where are there two Aramaic words in this week's parsha?
19. Who was Bilhah's father? Who was Zilpah's father?
20. Who escorted Yaakov into *Eretz Yisrael*?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

1. 28:10 - The departure of a righteous person leaves a noticeable void in that place.
2. 28:11 - Sleep at night lying down.
3. 28:13 - That the Land would be easy for his descendants to conquer.
4. 28:21 - Completely without sin.
5. 29:7 - He thought they were loafing, stopping work early in the day.
6. 30:27 - Her brothers weren't born yet.
7. 29:11 - He saw prophetically that they would not be buried together; or because he was penniless.
8. 29:13 - He thought Yaakov was carrying money.
9. 29:17 - She cried continually because she thought she was destined to marry Esav.
10. 29:21 - Eighty-four.
11. 30:1 - Her good deeds, thinking they were the reason Leah merited children.
12. 30:5 - Dan.
13. 30:10 - Zilpah. She was younger.
14. 30:14 - Jasmine (*Yasmin*).
15. 30:22 - That Rachel gave Leah the "signs of recognition" that Yaakov had taught her, so that Leah wouldn't be embarrassed.
16. 30:24 - "Yosef" means "He will add." Rachel asked G-d for another son in addition to Yosef.
17. 31:24 - Because the "good" that comes from wicked people is bad for the righteous.
18. 31:41 - *Yagar Sahaduta*, meaning "wall of testimony."
19. 31:50 - Lavan.
20. 32:1 - The angels of *Eretz Yisrael*.

LOVE OF THE LAND - THE MITZVOT

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

SHEMITA

TORAH SOURCE

"But the seventh year you shall let it (the land) rest and lie fallow, that the poor of your people may eat, and what they leave will be eaten by the beast of the field." (*Shmot* 23:11)

"In plowing time and in harvest time you shall rest." (*ibid.* 34:21)

"It shall be a year of solemn rest for the land." (*Vayikra* 25:5)

FULFILLMENT

Abandoning ownership of all agricultural produce of the seventh (*shemita*) year so that anyone who



wishes to acquire this produce can do so.

To cease working the land in the seventh year.

REASON

To remind us every seventh year that G-d created the world *ex nihilo* in six days and rested on the seventh.

In addition to resting from agricultural labor in the seventh year as we rest from all labor every seventh day, we are also commanded to leave ownerless all that the land will produce in this year to remind us that the land which grows produce for us every year does not do so by its own power but that there is a L-rd over it who truly owns it and its earthly owner.

- Prayer when intoxicated
- Crying over spilled wine
- A non-Jewish neighbor in an adjoining courtyard
- Can rights be purchased from the non-Jew on Shabbat?
- How making an *eiruv* and purchasing rights of non-Jew compare
- When a Jew who forgot to participate in *eiruv* can relinquish his rights to his neighbor who did
- Relinquishing rights from one courtyard to those in another
- When the situation changes after start of Shabbat
- Status of the mini-island in regard to carrying from it into the sea and vice versa
- Why the two Sages did not make an *eiruv*
- Different solutions for the problem of hot water for the *brit*
- Does relinquishing rights in the courtyard extend to house?
- The status of the *tzeduki*, the *mumar* and the public violator of Shabbat restrictions
- What the one(s) who forgot to join the *eiruv* can and cannot do
- How the death of one of the neighbors on Shabbat affects the others
- Interaction of *shitufei movuot* and *eriruvei chatzeirot*

THE LONG AND SHORT OF IT

“Doesn’t Abba need sleep? This question was put to Rabbi Chisda by his daughter when she noticed that he was neglecting sleep in order to study Torah.

“There will come the days,” he replied, “that are long and short and then we will have plenty of time to sleep.”

How can days be both long and short?

Maharsha explains that “long” is a reference to the eternity of afterlife which is described in the Torah as “the length of days” earned by those who live by the Torah. The opportunity to earn that reward, however, is available only during one’s lifetime on earth. This is

expressed in the Talmud’s comment (*Eiruv* 22a) on the Torah’s use of the term “today” (*Devarim* 7:11) in connection with the performance of the *mitzvot* commanded by G-d. “Today – this world – is the time for performing,” say our Sages, “and tomorrow – the World-to-Come – is the time for receiving the reward for such performance.”

The term “short” used by Rabbi Chisda in his response to his daughter is a reference to the total absence of any opportunity to perform and gain reward once life in this world comes to an end.

This then is the long and short of Rabbi Chisda’s perspective of life and afterlife and explains why he was loath to waste his time on sleep when eternity was at stake.

WHAT THE Sages SAY

“Anyone in whose home there is not the same reaction to spilled wine as to spilled water has not achieved the full measure of blessing (even if he is a wealthy man in general terms – Rashi).”

• Rabbi Chanina bar Papa - *Eiruv* 65a

subscribe

www.ohr.edu

for Ohrnet and other publications delivered to your email

FREE TO BE ME?

From: Alberto in Israel

Dear Rabbi,

I'm Israeli but not Jewish. My parents are Brazilian. I'm religious and I keep mitzvot like every Jew. But I'm not Orthodox or Reform, I just keep the mitzvot in my life in my own way. I never wanted to become a "member" of a "community" in the way that the Orthodox do, being limited from other communities. I want to be free to go into every synagogue, to respect everyone according to his way. But reading your post I want to ask your "halachic" vision about me. Am I free to be like I am? Or maybe I should convert? Why? I'm already married to a convert reform woman. Does the halacha give me freedom to be myself? Thank you all.

Dear Alberto,

Let me commend you on your candidness. You raise many very important issues, and I'll try to deal with them one by one.

It is significant that you realize the unfortunate fact that Israel gives "Jewish"/Israeli citizenship to people who identify with Judaism/Israel but are not halachically Jewish. This policy is part of Israel's on-going demographic war against the growing Jewish religious population in Israel. A surplus of sympathetic non-Jews sustains the secular status quo.

If in fact you are not Jewish, there is nothing wrong with that at all. However, as far as being religious in Judaism means observing the commandments as a Jew, you are not considered religious. You may be very spiritual, and a very good person, and there are *mitzvot* that you can do as a non-Jew such as prayer and charity, while also refraining from prohibitions such as theft and immorality. However, these things won't make you a religious Jew, but a religious non-Jew. G-d expects gentiles to observe the seven commandments enumerated for them in the Torah, through which they earn the

World-to-Come.

As far as Reform Judaism or reform Jews are concerned, there is no such thing as being religious in one's own way. A person has free will to choose what *mitzvot* to keep, what prohibitions to transgress, and to what extent. This is part of every Jew's highly individual relationship with G-d, whether for good or bad, blessing or curse. However, Judaism itself is not subject to each individual's 'take' on it; the Torah cannot be reduced to a smorgasbord of subjective pseudo-spirituality. While an individual Jew who does this is certainly Jewish, a movement that espouses it is not Judaism.

It is for this reason that Orthodoxy accepts non-observant Jews as Jews, but rejects non-observant communities that purport to represent Judaism. Since these movements' explicit intention is to undermine the Torah and 'free' the Jew of observance, tolerance is tantamount to spiritual suicide; proposing pluralism is tantamount to spiritual genocide. Even visiting the meetinghouses of these movements gives tacit approval to their agenda. However, that doesn't mean that Orthodoxy and Orthodox Jews don't respect and care for other Jews. The number of rabbis, teachers, schools, organizations, funds, publications, etc., that are dedicated to outreach and bridging the gap between Jews of all backgrounds and levels of observance is rapidly growing.

Regarding your halachic status, you are free to continue as you are, with the qualifications I made above (there are a few *mitzvot* that a non-Jew may not do, consult an Orthodox rabbi). Regarding your wife, if she had a halachic conversion, was observant for a time, and then left Judaism for Reform, she would have the unfortunate status of a non-observant Jew married to a non-Jew and she must see a competent rabbi. If she converted Reform (even though she may be Israeli), she is not Jewish, since Reform does not uphold the halachic criteria for conversion. You would both be free to explore spirituality as non-Jews according to the Torah, realizing that your children are/will not be Jewish. However, since you both obviously have an affinity for Judaism, you might want to gradually explore the option of converting together – but only according to halacha.

COMING IN OUT OF THE COLD

Question: During these cold winter days my mother keeps reminding me to dress warmly to avoid catching cold. She refuses to accept my response that if G-d wants me to catch cold it will happen no matter how I dress. What is the right thing to do?

Answer: Your mother is right!

“Everything is in the Hands of Heaven,” say our Talmudic Sages, “except for cold and heat.” (*Mesechta Ketubot* 30a).

This means that any adversity suffered by man is dictated by Heaven except for the consequences resulting

from a lack of caution in avoiding the effects of extreme cold or heat. While a person has the free will to bring harm upon himself by placing himself in a dangerous situation, the harm that befalls him in situations beyond his control is certainly ordained by Providence. The exception is the climate, which is determined by Heaven, against whose effects one can take measures to protect himself – and if he fails to do so, he has only himself to blame.

So don't use misunderstood theology to ignore your mother's warning, and put on that overcoat to stay warm.

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY _____

A TRIPLE-HEADER FOR CHICAGO

While most Chicagoans are still beaming over the White Sox's winning the World Series, there is one family in the windy city more excited about winning a very unique “triple-header”.

It all began when Ohr Somayach alumnus Rabbi Yehuda Albin, who heads the office of Ohr Somayach International in Chicago, succeeded in getting one of the people he regularly learns with to become involved with mitzvah observance. With the birth of his first son and the need for a *pidyan haben*, a little investigation was launched to determine whether a *pidyan haben* had been performed for the newborn's father and grandfather who were both first-born sons. An elderly great-grandmother, who is still lively and sharp, conclusively convinced the rabbi that neither of

them had been redeemed.

In accordance with halacha the grandfather first redeemed himself and made it a double-header by subsequently redeeming his son at a ceremony conducted by Rabbi Albin with a resident *kohen*. Then came the *pidyan haben* of the third generation a couple of weeks later to complete the triple-header.

What's so special about all this?

Since *pidyan haben* relates only to a first-born male in a family where neither parent is a *kohen* or *levi*, the chances of such a redemption being required is about one out of five births. For three such ceremonies to take place in one month in one family is a record more exciting than winning the World Series.

get in synch with
Ohr Somayach

ohr.edu

AvantGo



**GET THE LATEST FEATURES
FROM OHR SOMAYACH
DIRECT TO YOUR HANDHELD DEVICE AT**

www.ohr.edu