

# OHR NET

SHABBAT PARSHAT VAYECHI · 13 TEVET 5765 · DEC. 25, 2004 · VOL. 12 NO. 12

## PARSHA INSIGHTS

### ON OUR WAY HOME

*"...please don't bury me in Mitzraim." (47:29)*

Over the millennia, the constant hope of the Jew was to return to Eretz Yisrael — and if not while alive, then suffice it at least that our physical remains should be interred in its holy soil.

The source of this desire comes from this week's Torah portion.

Why did Yaakov so desire to be buried in Eretz Yisrael? There were several reasons:

The mystical sources teach that those who are buried in Eretz Yisrael will be the first to arise at the time of the Resurrection of the Dead. For those who are buried in the Diaspora, G-d will create special tunnels. Through these tunnels a person's body will roll until it reaches Eretz Yisrael. Yaakov wanted to spare himself the pain of rolling through these tunnels.

Another consideration was that the Egyptians might turn

him into a god posthumously. If he were buried in Egypt the chance of them worshipping his remains was that much higher.

Also, Yaakov foresaw the Ten Plagues that would afflict Egypt, and he knew that the plague of lice would infest corpses as well as the living. He did not want G-d to perform a miracle for him to escape that fate.

However, the reason that speaks to us most loudly across the millennia is that Yaakov did not want to be buried in Egypt because he was concerned that the generations that came after him might surmise that if Yaakov was buried in Egypt, the land of Egypt must also be a holy place.

We are the descendents of Yaakov. It was the wish of our great ancestor that however comfortable we may become in our exile, we should never forget that there is nothing holy about the soil of Sydney, Paris or Boro Park.

They are just temporary stops on our way home.

Source:

• *Bereshet Rabba, Rabbeinu Bachya*

## PARSHA OVERVIEW

After 17 years in Egypt, Yaakov senses his days drawing to a close and summons Yosef. He has Yosef swear to bury him in the Machpela cave, the burial place of Adam and Chava, Avraham and Sara, Yitzchak and Rivka. Yaakov falls ill and Yosef brings to him his two sons, Ephraim and Menashe. Yaakov elevates Ephraim and Menashe to the status of his own sons, thus giving Yosef a double portion that removes the status of first-born from Reuven. As Yaakov is blind from old age, Yosef leads his sons close to their grandfather. Yaakov kisses and hugs them. He had not thought to see his son Yosef again, let alone Yosef's children. Yaakov begins to bless them, giving precedence to Ephraim, the younger, but Yosef interrupts him and indicates that Menashe is the elder. Yaakov explains that he intends to bless Ephraim with his strong hand because Yehoshua will descend from him, and Yehoshua will be both the conqueror of Eretz Yisrael and

the teacher of Torah to the Jewish People. Yaakov summons the rest of his sons in order to bless them as well. Yaakov's blessing reflects the unique character and ability of each tribe, directing each one in its unique mission in serving Hashem. Yaakov passes from this world at age 147. A tremendous procession accompanies his funeral cortege up from Egypt to his resting place in the cave of Machpela in Chevron. After Yaakov's passing, the brothers are concerned that Yosef will now take revenge on them. Yosef reassures them, even promising to support them and their families. Yosef lives out the rest of his years in Egypt, seeing Ephraim's great-grandchildren. Before his death, Yosef foretells to his brothers that Hashem will redeem them from Egypt. He makes them swear to bring his bones out of Egypt with them at that time. Yosef passes away at the age of 110 and is embalmed. Thus ends Sefer Bereishet, the first of the five Books of the Torah. *Chazak!*

## JERUSALEM UNDER SIEGE!

Jerusalem under siege of foreign army! This is the headline which would have appeared almost two and a half millennia ago this week. On the tenth day of the Hebrew month of Tevet observant Jews fast to recall the tragedy which took place when Jerusalem was besieged by the Babylonia invaders, the first stage of the catastrophe of destruction of the *Beis Hamikdash* and a seventy-year exile.

The purpose of this fast, like another three throughout the year, is to reflect on the errors our ancestors made in their relationship with their Creator which brought those punishments upon them. These are errors, points out Rambam (Laws of Fasting 5:1), which we unfortunately perpetuate in every generation, and the spiritual experience of fasting is intended to open our hearts to a return to G-d.

Modern Israel is under siege today as well. In addition to the threat of Palestinian terror, which has not completely vanished despite the disappearance of the arch-terrorist Arafat, there is Hizbullah in the north and the nuclear capacity of Iran which create an atmosphere of life under

siege.

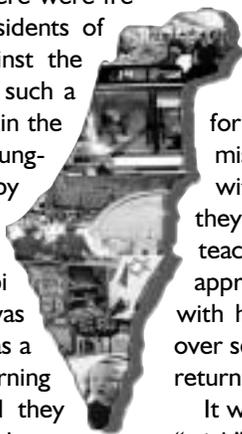
Despite the warnings of the Prophets of the impending danger, our ancestors continued in their sinful ways, confident that their defense was invincible. Some Jews in Israel today seem to have the same attitude. They refuse to learn from the past and recklessly persist in their battle against religion in the Jewish state. The head of a violently anti-religious political party recently made a remark about the religious public which would have been condemned as anti-Semitic demagoguery if said by a non-Jew. He demonstrated the same disdain for religious leaders that the citizens of Jerusalem did for the Prophet who warned them of the consequences of their actions.

Those who refuse to learn from history, it has been said, are condemned to relive it. We certainly do not wish to see the siege we are in today end the way the siege of old did. Our fasting on *Asara B'Tevet* should hopefully open the hearts of all Jews to return to G-d Who alone can protect Israel forever.

## LOVE OF THE LAND - THE LEGENDS Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael

### THE "TRICK" THAT FOILED THE KICK

During the British Mandate period preceding the establishment of the State of Israel, there were frequent curfews imposed upon the residents of Jerusalem by the British forces battling against the Hebrew underground. It was in the midst of such a curfew, in which no one was permitted to be in the streets, that the sound of tanks woke up a youngster in the old Shaarei Chessed neighborhood by the name of Yitzchak Schwadron. As he rushed to the window to see the tanks, his father, the legendary Jerusalem *maggid* Rabbi Sholom Schwadron, told him that since he was already up he had a mission for him. There was a *minyan* of Jews soon to complete their morning prayers in the neighborhood synagogue and they would be prevented by the curfew from going home.



It was his duty, therefore, to bring some cake and coffee for their breakfast.

When Yitzchak mentioned to his father that he would be putting his own life in danger by doing so, Rabbi Schwadron comforted him that he would pray for his safety. With this assurance he embarked on his mission, ignoring the British soldiers who followed him with drawn guns. Incensed at his ignoring the curfew, they waited outside the synagogue for him, determined to teach him a lesson. The officer in charge of the soldiers approached Yitzchak and raised his foot to give him a kick with his thick army boot. He suddenly slipped and rolled over several times, enabling the courageous boy to leisurely return home.

It was clear to him that his father's prayers had done the "trick" to foil the kick.

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## PARSHA Q&A ?

1. Why is kindness towards the dead called “*chesed shel emet*” — kindness of truth?
2. Give three reasons Yaakov didn't want to be buried in Egypt.
3. How do you treat a “fox in his time” (i.e., a commoner who rules)?
4. “When I was coming from Padan, Rachel died on me... I buried her there on the way to Efrat...” Why did Yaakov say all this to Yosef?
5. Initially, why was Yaakov unable to bless Efraim and Menashe?
6. What does *pillalti* mean?
7. What does “*Shechem*” mean as used in this week's Parsha? (two answers)
8. Which individual is called “the *Emori*”? Why? Give two reasons.
9. What did Yaakov want to tell his sons but was unable to?
10. What privileges did Reuven lose due to his rash actions?
11. What congregation from Yaakov's offspring did Yaakov not want to be associated with?
12. What did Yehuda do after he heard Yaakov rebuke Reuven, Shimon and Levi? Why?
13. What does milk do to teeth?
14. Why is Yissachar like a “strong-boned donkey?”
15. With what resource did both Yaakov and Moshe bless Asher?
16. In Yosef's blessing Yaakov said, “They embittered him...” Who are “they”?
17. Which descendants of Binyamin “will divide the spoils in the evening”?
18. From whom did Yaakov buy his burial place?
19. What oath did Yosef make to Pharaoh?
20. Which two sons of Yaakov did not carry his coffin? Why not?

## PARSHA Q&A!

### Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

1. 47:29 - Because the giver expects no reward from the recipient.
2. 47:29 - a) Egypt's ground was to be plagued with lice; b) At the time of the resurrection, those buried outside Israel will suffer; c) So the Egyptians wouldn't make him into an idol.
3. 47:31 - Bow to him.
4. 48:7 - Yaakov thought Yosef harbored resentment since Yaakov had not buried Yosef's mother, Rachel, in the *Ma'arat HaMachpela*.
5. 48:8 - The *Shechina* departed from him.
6. 48:11 - “I thought.”
7. 48:22 - a) The actual city of Shechem; b) A portion.
8. 48:22 - Esav. a) He acted like an Emorite; b) He trapped his father with words (*imrei pi*).
9. 49:1 - When *mashiach* will come.
10. 49:3 - Priesthood and Kingship.
11. 49:6 - Korach and his congregation.
12. 49:8 - He drew back. He was afraid that Yaakov would rebuke him for the incident with Tamar.
13. 49:12 - It makes them white.
14. 49:14 - Just as a donkey bears a heavy burden, so the tribe of Yissachar bears the yoke of Torah.
15. 49:20 - Oil-rich land.
16. 49:23 - Yosef's brothers, Potifar and his wife.
17. 49:27 - Mordechai and Esther.
18. 50:5 - From Esav.
19. 50:6 - Yosef swore not to reveal Pharaoh's ignorance of Hebrew.
20. 50:13 - Levi, because he would carry the *aron* (holy ark). Yosef, because he was a king.

## THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

### HALF-HEARTED TIP, WHOLE-HEARTED CONFESSION

**D**uring a recent condolence visit to a neighbor whose mother passed away at the age of 95, one of her sons told a touching story about her piety.

One of her relatives observed the earnest manner in which she would always say the *viduy* confession of sins. On one occasion he asked her what sin could such a righteous woman be guilty of.

Her reply took her back more than seventy years to Frankfurt, Germany, where her mother ran a little restaurant in their home. As a waitress in this very homey eatery, it was customary for her to receive tips from the customers whom she served. “I suspect,” she concluded, “that there was one client who gave me a tip but failed to do so wholeheartedly and it is for accepting such a tip that I am doing penitence.”

## FEAR OF A RUSTLING LEAF

In their desire to relay the maximum amount of information with the minimum amount of words, the Talmudic Sages sometimes used a poetic turn of phrase to communicate a subtle message. We thus find in our *gemara* that they referred to a certain form of *tumah* – ritual impurity – with the term *madaf* in order to indicate that it was of a slighter nature than other forms of ritual impurity.

This term *madaf* is based on the word *nidaf* found in a Torah passage which describes the suffering which G-d declares He will inflict upon Jews for abandoning their religious responsibilities. Not only will they be exiled from their land but “I shall instill a fear in their hearts, in the land of their enemies, and they will feel pursued by the sound of a *nidaf* leaf from which they will flee as on fleeing from the sword and falling, although there is no one in pursuit.” (*Vayikra* 26:36)

*Nidaf*, explain the commentaries, refers to the rustling sound made by the leaf of a tree when it is blown by the wind against another leaf. That such a slight, innocent sound can strike fear in the hearts of threatened people is illustrated in a story the Midrash tells of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Korcha.

“We were once studying between some trees,” related this Sage, “when we heard the rustling of wind – blown leaves. We were afraid that the enemy was approaching and fled for our lives. After a while we realized that no one was pursuing us and we wept that the curse in the Torah had come upon us.”

It is this slight, rustling leaf representing physical danger which serves as a simile for a slight form of the spiritual danger of *tumah*.

• *Niddah* 4b

## LADIES IN WAITING

In the Torah’s account of the relationship between Yehuda, the son of the Patriarch Yaakov, and Tamar, the passage which speaks of the discovery that she was pregnant states that this happened in “around three months” (*Bereishet* 38:24).

This passage is cited by the Sage Sumchus in the name of Rabbi Meir as a hint to the fact that a woman’s pregnancy is discernible after three months from conception, with the halachic ramifications discussed in the previous *mishna*.

Although the very mention of three months offers such a hint as to the rule for women who have full-term nine-

month babies, this does not exclude the possibility that the pregnancy of a woman who gives birth after seven months is discernible after only a third of that period. As Rashi points out, it may indeed be the case that the pregnancy of such a woman is discernible after only two and one third months, but we must assume that every expectant woman is of the majority who have full-term babies and we cannot accord her the halachic status of pregnancy until a full three months have passed since conception.

As regards Tamar herself, the Midrash, quoted by Rashi in his commentary on the Torah, states that she gave birth to her twin sons after only seven months. The passage describing this birth (*ibid.* 38:27) omits the phrase used in regard to the birth of Rivka’s twin children that “her days leading to her giving birth were completed” (*ibid.* 25:24), to indicate that Tamar’s was not a full-term birth.

In regard to Tamar, therefore, the above-mentioned “around three months” is interpreted by the Midrash as meaning a part of the first and third months, for a total of two and a third months. Nevertheless, the very mention of three months serves as the hint sought by the Sages in regard to discerning the pregnancy of all women.

• *Niddah* 8b

## The Weekly Daf

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## MAKING MUSIC

**From: Ken Cohen**

*Dear Rabbi,  
Is playing live music, namely a guitar, allowed during services on Shabbat or holidays. If not, why? Thank you.*

Dear Ken,

Musical instruments play a very important role in Torah. They were used by the Prophets to put them in the correct frame of mind to receive prophecy, they are used to enhance and beautify prayers, and they can even be used to inspire people to greater diligence in their Torah studies.

When the Jewish People were doing what G-d required of them, they merited receiving the Divine Presence. However, after the destruction of the First Temple this incredible gift was taken away. Our lack of prophecy is one of the repercussions of exile. Together with this, beautiful and inspiring Jewish melodies that

were beyond compare were lost, and even many of the instruments themselves have been forgotten.

Regarding playing musical instruments on Shabbat, the Sages decreed that no instruments can be played on Shabbat and Yom Tov out of concern that in search of spiritual enlightenment, or while in the throes of religious rhapsody, a person might come to build or repair an instrument on Shabbat which is a Torah transgression.

A decree passed by an earlier Bet Din, court of Jewish Law, is binding on the generations that come after it. This is because in order for a Bet Din to be able to annul a ruling of an earlier Bet Din, it must be greater in both wisdom and number. This is almost unheard of since each generation further removed from the Revelation at Sinai is further away from the source of truth and understanding. This means that even if a person were the proud owner of one hundred Stradivarius violins, he would not be allowed to play even one of them on Shabbat!

Sources:

- *Eruvin 104a*
- *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 339*
- *Rabbi Reuven Lauffer*

## WHAT'S THE RIGHT THING TO DO?

REAL-LIFE QUESTIONS OF SOCIAL AND BUSINESS ETHICS

### WHAT'S THE TIME?

**Question:** It often happens that a child who is a complete stranger will meet me on the street and ask me what time it is. I find it difficult to understand how knowing the right time is significant to such a youngster, whose parents have not seen the need to provide him with a wristwatch, and I am tempted to ignore the request. What is the right thing to do?

**Answer:** The child asking you for the time may indeed be in need of knowing the hour because he or she was told to be at home or school at a designated time. The absence of a watch of his own may be attributed either to the economic situation of his parents or to their distrust

of his ability to properly care for such a delicate instrument.

Like many adults in the same situation, you are likely to suspect that the juvenile inquirer is not really interested in the correct time, but is merely seeking an opportunity of engaging an adult stranger in conversation, a pastime which children treasure as a contact with the "big world" outside their home and classroom. You may be correct in making such an assumption, but so what! Isn't it worth a few seconds of your time to do a child a favor? As you provide him with the right time in a patient, friendly tone, try adding a few words of encouragement for him. You would be surprised at how much you can achieve with this.

**Really?**

I am surprised at your publication of a recent Ohrnet with a discussion about “*Dybuk*.” How can you address a topic of this nature to a reader who (I assume) is not a person who is a great Torah scholar and *filled* with fear and love of G-d? How could you expect the person to readily comprehend a text like *Sha’ar Hagilgulim* by a great Kabbalist? People might think this topic is for real. In addition, today Jews do not practice exorcism. I use most of your writings in a class of adults I have been teaching for the last 12 years, but will not use the above item *Dybuk*.

• Y. H.

**Ohrnet replies:**

Thank you for your response and we appreciate your point of view. However, topics that originate in Kabbalah are openly discussed by Orthodoxy today. While we may not openly teach Kabbalah per se, the topics may be presented in a general way. The Chofetz Chaim in his classic *Shemirat HaLashon* quotes the Zohar profusely, and makes many references to these matters. I see you wrote your note after the first installment of the article. By now you should have received Part 2 about the topic which records the phenomenon of *dybuk* from Rabbi Elchonon Wasserman, *zatzal*.

In addition, the references to *Sha’ar Hagilgulim* are not to encourage all of the readers to learn that text, but rather are intended to substantiate the points and present the source for the material, as we are usually careful to provide references for all the articles.

Many mystical matters are reality. They are to be understood literally, even though they pertain to the spiritual realm and are difficult to fully comprehend. They should not be avoided just because some people may not be able to identify with the subject. Otherwise, why speak about monotheism to a pagan? When presenting Judaism to others, we must be willing to cover all aspects of Jewish belief, as long as we can clearly articulate and substantiate them based on sources.

Several years ago a well-publicized exorcism was performed in Jerusalem. I am not commenting on whether

the *dybuk* was real or not. But very respectable rabbis were convinced at the time that it was real, and therefore performed the exorcism. They certainly would not have subjected themselves to criticism for something foreign to Jewish belief.

Nowadays, when so many people, even non-observant Jews and non-Jews, publish ideas about the Kabbalah, it can only help to set the record straight from an authoritative Orthodox opinion, and articulate the true Torah perspective.

We are pleased that you regularly find the articles informative enough to share with others. Thank you, and may you have continued success. If you choose not to share this one, that is your prerogative. Perhaps you could confer with a colleague?

**Harvard and Beyond**

I am a undergrad at Harvard and am usually described as a “cold, intellectual academic” type but I don’t really care for such categorizations and stereotypes.

Recently, a friend here showed me a copy of your Ohrnet magazine, with an article about something called “*dybuk*.” I had never heard the word before, but my friend briefly told me the idea. Exorcism is, of course, a well-known concept in literature and the media. I thought I’d read a few lines and share a good laugh with my friend. Instead, surprisingly, I found myself drawn into reading the entire article, and, afterwards, the entire magazine. The way you treated the subject was most fascinating, intellectual and credible. But there’s something more. I felt something “stir” within me (not a *dybuk* I hope!) and found myself considering that there is more to life than succeeding in my secular studies and making good money — my priorities in life. Soon after, I saw a sign advertising a Torah class, which I attended, and that interested me even further. I am now seriously considering taking a year off from my studies here in order to study at a Torah institution such as yours for the coming year. I don’t know how much feedback you receive, but I felt an obligation to share this little story with you.

Thank you.

• R. H.