DATE WITH DESTINY

“Go for yourself from your land, from your relatives, and from your father’s house.” (12:1)

Wheeling his lone Lancaster above the target at eighteen hundred feet, Freddy leveled off and tried to bomb the target one more time. Suddenly the cockpit radio spluttered into life:

“Freddy! — What are you playing at?! Get out of there now! There’s more flak around those dams than guests at a Buck House tea party!”

“Sorry, skipper. I’m going in one more time — even if it means that you’ll have to pick up my medal for me…”

Hashem tested Avraham Avinu ten times. The first of these tests was to leave his land, his birthplace and his father’s house.

However, the ‘extra words’ here — “for yourself” — indicate that Hashem told Avraham that this journey was for his own benefit.

If Avraham Avinu knew that leaving his roots was for his own benefit, how could this be a test?

The answer is that sometimes it is easier for us to serve G-d when we think we are being self-sacrificing, than when we know there’s something in it for ourselves.

It appeals to our innate sense of self-dramatization to see ourselves as martyrs to the cause. Many are the epics that play in the cinemas of our minds in which we have the title role of the selfless hero, taking arms against a sea of troubles, and all without benefit or profit to ourselves.

The test that Hashem gave Avraham was that he would have to work without the romanticism of self-sacrifice and still do Hashem’s will with the same enthusiasm as some dashing hero flying his plane to a date with destiny.

COUNTING STARS I

“And He took him outside, and said, ‘Gaze, now, toward the Heaven, and count the stars, if you are able to count them!’ And He said to him, ‘So will be your offspring!’” (15:5)

The Jewish People are like the stars. Even though there are a myriad stars, Hashem calls every one of them by name.

Even though there are a myriad of Jewish souls, every one has its own name — its own purpose and uniquely appointed task.

“The purpose of every soul is unique and irreplaceable, as is the purpose of every star.”

COUNTING STARS II

Avraham Avinu’s unique quality was that he obeyed Hashem even in contradiction to human logic.

When Hashem took Avraham outside and told him to count the stars, that’s exactly what Avraham started to do! “One, two, three…” Hashem said to him “Can you count them?” Is it possible for a man to count the stars? Thus will be your seed: They will do the will of their Father in heaven even when the task seems hopeless.

That quality of unbending, unquestioning loyalty is what Avraham Avinu bequeathed to the Jewish People in his spiritual genes.

THE LETTER OF THE LAW

“If so much as a thread or a shoe-strap; or if I shall take from anything of yours! … Far from me! Only what the young men have eaten…” (14:23,24)

For his part in defeating the four kings, the king of Sodom offered Avraham a share of the victors’ spoils, as was his right. But Avraham would take nothing, for he wanted to show his devotion to Hashem, declining personal gain so that the king of Sodom could not claim that he made Avraham rich.

However, Avraham applied this stringency to himself alone. When it came to his followers, he permitted them to take everything that was lawful.

This teaches us a powerful lesson. Never to be ‘frum’ (pious) on someone else’s spiritual expense account! If, after careful consideration, we want to take upon ourselves stringencies, that’s up to us. But from others, we should never demand, or even expect, more than the letter of the law.

• Based on Rabbi Yechezkel Weinfeld, as heard from Rabbi Daniel Travis

• Based on the Ksav Sofer, as heard from Rabbi Calev Gestetner

• Based on Rabbi Meir Shapiro

• The Chafetz Chaim
“For I have lit by candles and arranged by bed... in honor of Shabbos.”

In the Torah passage about Jews observing the Shabbos and establishing the Shabbos “ledorosam” (Shmos 31:16) the literal meaning of the word is “for their generations.” A careful look at the word in the Torah indicates that it is spelled in such a manner that it could be read as “ledirosam” which means “to their homes.”

The message communicated by this spelling is that if a Jew lights Shabbos candles, sets his table and arranges his furniture in a manner which transforms his weekday house into a “Shabbosdig” with the Divinity in the house the Divine Presence declares that it wishes to enter such a home. But if the spirit of Shabbos is not reflected in the house the Divine Presence avoids a home which lacks a Jewish flavor.

Thank you so much for your quick reply. I love your magazine and I get it every week.

Dedicated by
HERSCHEL & RACHEL AINSPAN
White Plains, NY
in honor of the birth of their b’chor
SHMUEL YERUCHOM

VOWEL-UP FOLLOW-UP

In ‘Ask the Rabbi’ for Parshat Bereishit, Vol. 4 No. 121, Case E. Krell asked why there are no vowels written in the Torah. We offered a few answers, including the idea that the Torah’s words can be understood in many different ways. Writing the vowels would limit the different ways the Torah can be read. (Please refer to that issue for more details.)

Since then, Rabbi Zev Rosen directed me to a very interesting source describing the 13 Torah scrolls that Moses wrote. At the end of his life, Moses wrote 13 Torah scrolls. He gave one scroll to each of the twelve tribes, and the thirteenth was placed in the Holy Ark. According to some, this thirteenth scroll was indeed written with vowels and accent marks.

Sources:
• Handbook of Jewish Thought, by Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, Ch. 7 footnote 136, citing Tzafanat Pa’ananeach, Deut. 31:9.
He adds, “This may be supported by Bahir 115, which speaks about the ‘vowels in the Torah of Moses.’

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YIDDLE RIDDLE

Last week we asked:

Shalom: I had a quick question for “Ask the Rabbi”: I recently bought a new hair brush. After purchasing it in a hurry, I noticed that the package boasts the fact that it’s bristles are made of 100% BOAR HAIR!! So, my question is, is there something inherently “unkosher” about brushing my hair with such a brush?? Is there a restriction about possessing non-edible pig products?

Sources:
• Leviticus 11:8
• Torat Kohanim 4:8

Dear Jack,

About inkers, The Torah says “You shall not eat of their flesh.” The Sages explain that the Torah prohibits eating the flesh only. But the hoofs, hair and bones (excluding the marrow), you are allowed to eat.

Certainly, then, your 100% Boar’s-hair brush is 100% kosher!

Sources:
• Leviticus 11:8
• Torat Kohanim 4:8

Dear Rabbi,

So, my question is, is there something inherently “unkosher” about using non-edible pig products?

Is there a restriction about possessing non-edible pig products?

Sources:
• Leviticus 11:8
• Torat Kohanim 4:8

Dear Rabbi,

One of the things I find fascinating is that the Torah prohibits eating the flesh of the Remai (excluding the marrow), you are allowed to eat. Certainly, then, your 100% Boar’s-hair brush is 100% kosher!

Sources:
• Leviticus 11:8
• Torat Kohanim 4:8

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it is alive how can we eat the eggs which
not eat from the flesh of the chicken while
ing milk applies to eggs as well. If we can-
The same problem which is raised regard-
holy land. would not be utilized as a praise for the
honey," leading to the conclusion that
as a "land flowing with milk and
Yisrael reference to milk being consumed. One
problem concerning the milk of a cow.
Before the cow is slaughtered it is forbid-
ban includes the milk and other secretions
forbidden animal life (with the excep-
other forbidden bird. There is really no
"hera"
• CHULLIN 61 - 67
• Abarbanel

Weekly Daf

Insights, explanations and comments for the seven pages of Talmud studied in the course of the worldwide Daf Yomi cycle.

Great Fish for Dinner

The Leviathan is a kosher fish.

An interesting source is proposed by
.An interesting problem is raised by
 }

• Chullin 64b

The Chicken Before the Egg

How do we know that it is permissi-
Not why should there be any problem
The Talmud (Bechoros 5b) states a rule
This ban includes the milk and other secretions
Before the cow is slaughtered it is forbid-

The resolution of this problem is that
in a number of places in Scripture there is
reference to milk being consumed. One
of these is the Torah’s description of Eretz
Yisrael as a “land flowing with milk and

The same problem which is raised regard-
ing milk applies to eggs as well. If we can-
not eat from the flesh of the chicken while
it is alive how can we eat the eggs which

come from it? The revelations which are
found in the various passages about the
legitimacy of milk are not there in regard
to eggs.

An interesting source is proposed by
the Ba’al Hillel Gedolos. Our Gemara
states that the eggs of a non-kosher bird
are forbidden because one of the birds
listed by the Torah as forbidden is “the
daughter of the ya’anah,” which is inter-
preted as meaning the eggs of that or any
other forbidden bird. There is really no
need for a source to prohibit eggs of for-
bidden birds since they are covered by the
aforementioned general ban on anything
coming from a forbidden species. The
purpose of mentioning a ban on ya’anah
eggs, therefore, is to communicate that
only the eggs of a forbidden bird are for-
bidden but not the eggs of a kosher fowl.

Tosefos finds this interpretation of the
Gemara a bit difficult to reconcile with the
text. He suggests an alternative source.
In regard to the mitzvah of sending away
the mother bird before taking the eggs
found along the road there is an exception
made if the eggs are those of a forbidden
species even if the bird sitting on them is
kosher. This distinction communicates
the message that if the eggs have been laid
by a kosher bird they may be eaten.

Avraham didn’t accept any money from The King of S’dom, not
wanting the king of S’dom to say “I made Avraham rich.” Why
then was he willing to take presents from Pharaoh, King of
Mitrajaim?

If Avraham had refused the gifts offered for Sarah, he may have aroused
Pharaoh’s suspicion that he was indeed her husband, and spoiled the
charade.

• Chullin 67b
Parsha Overview

Ten generations have passed since the time of Noach. Man has descended to lower spiritual depths. In the year 1948 after the Creation, Avram is born. Through observing the world, Avram comes to the inescapable Truth of Hashem’s existence, and thus merits that Hashem reveals Himself to him. At the beginning of this week’s Parsha, Hashem tells Avram to leave his land, his relatives and his father’s house and travel to an unknown land where Hashem will make him into a great nation. Avram leaves, taking with him his wife Sara, his nephew Lot, their servants, and those who he converted to faith in Hashem. When they reach the land of Canaan, Hashem appears to Avram and tells him that this is the land that He will give to his descendants. A famine ensues and Avram is forced to relocate to Egypt to find food. Realizing that his wife’s beauty would cause his death at the hand of the Egyptians, Avram tells her to say that she is his sister. Sara is taken to the Pharaoh, but Hashem afflicts the Pharaoh and his court with severe plagues and she is released unmolested. Avram returns to Eretz Yisrael (Canaan) with much wealth given to him by the Egyptians. After a quarrel over grazing rights breaks out between their shepherds, Avram decides to relocate to Egypt to find food. Realizing that his wife’s beauty would cause his death at the hand of the Egyptians, Avram tells her to say that she is his sister. Sara is taken to the Pharaoh, but Hashem afflicts the Pharaoh and his court with severe plagues and she is released unmolested. Avram returns to Eretz Yisrael (Canaan) with much wealth given to him by the Egyptians. After a quarrel over grazing rights breaks out between their shepherds, Avram decides to part ways with his nephew Lot. Lot chooses to live in the rich but corrupt city of Sodom in the fertile plain of the Jordan. A war breaks out between the kings of the region, and Sodom is defeated. Lot is taken captive. Together with a handful of his converts, Avram rescues Lot, miraculously overpowering vastly superior forces, but demurs from accepting any of the spoils of the battle. In a prophetic covenant, Hashem reveals to Avram that his offspring will be exiled to a strange land where they will be oppressed for 400 years, after which they will emerge with great wealth and return to Eretz Yisrael, their irrevocable inheritance. Sara is barren and gives Hagar, her Egyptian hand-maiden, to Avram in the hope that she will provide them with a child. Hagar becomes arrogant when she discovers that she is pregnant. Sara deals harshly with her and Hagar flees. On the instruction of an angel, Hagar returns to Avram and gives birth to Yshmael. The Parsha concludes with Hashem commanding Avram to circumcise himself and his offspring throughout the generations as a covenant between Hashem and his seed. Hashem changes Avram’s name to Avraham, and Sara’s name to Sara. Hashem promises Avraham a son, Yitzchak, despite Avraham being ninety-nine years old and Sara ninety-one. On that day, Avraham circumcises himself, Yshmael and all his household.

Dust and Jewels

“...as much dust as Avraham used, turned into swords...” (41:2).

Nachum Ish Gamzu was a man whose very name expressed his essence — whatever happened to him he would always say — “This is also for the good!” He never doubted that what Hashem does is always for the best.

Nachum was chosen to travel to the Emperor and present him with a box filled with precious stones as tribute from the Jewish People. On the way, and unknown to Nachum, the jewels were switched with worthless dust. With great ceremony, the ‘jewels’ were presented to the Emperor and slowly the box was opened in front of him...

The Emperor’s rage knew no bounds at this unbelievable insult from the Jews. Suddenly, the prophet Eliyahu appeared in the guise of one of the Emperor’s ministers and said: “Your Imperial Majesty, this must be the special dust that the Jews’ forefather Avraham used to defeat the four kings as it says ‘...as much dust as Avraham used, turned into swords...’ Let us, at least, try the dust and see if it works for us as well.”

The Emperor agreed and Hashem caused a miracle — the dust indeed proved to be lethal against the Emperor’s enemies. We must remember that even in the darkest moments of exile, when all our jewels look like dust, Hashem will bring the prophet Eliyahu to announce the dawn of redemption.

Parsha Q&A

Answers to this Week’s Questions!

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

1. 12:2 - Offspring, wealth and fame.
2. 12:3 - A person will say to his son, “You should be like Avraham.”
3. 12:5 - People they converted to the worship of Hashem.
5. 12:13 - That the Egyptians would let him live and give him presents.
6. 13:7 - Lot’s shepherds grazed their flocks in privately owned fields.
7. 14:1 - Amorfof was Nimrod. He said (Amar) to Avraham to fall (fel) into the fiery furnace.
8. 14:10 - To a mountain.
9. 14:13 - He hoped Avraham would die trying to save Lot, so that he might be able to marry Sara.
10. 14:14 - His servant, Eliezer.
11. 14:20 - Because Malki-Tzedek was a kohen.
12. 14:23 - Hashem had promised Avraham wealth, and Avraham didn’t want the King of S’dom to be the one to take credit for it.
13. 15:1 - He was afraid that his victory was Hashem’s reward for all his good deeds.
14. 15:13 - With the birth of Yitzchak.
15. 15:15 - That his father, Terach, repented and became righteous.
16. 15:15 - Avraham lived to see his son, Yshmael, repent and become righteous, and he died before his grandson, Esau, became wicked.
17. 15:15 - So as not to see Esau begin his pursuit of evil.
18. 15:16 - They needed to wait until the Amorites had sinned sufficiently to deserve expulsion.
19. 16:1 - Pharaoh.
20. 16:16 - Eighty-six.