

# OHRNET

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## PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

### Real Relaxation

"Go for yourself from you land, from your relatives, and from your father's house to the land that I will show you." (12:1)

"All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy," runs the well-known phrase. Alfred Hitchcock, the celebrated movie director and renowned workaholic, once rephrased it, "All work and no play – makes Jack."

A number of years ago, Rabbi Binyamin Zeilberger, zatzal, took his leave of this world. Rabbi Zeilberger was a remarkable person. During the Second World War, he made a miraculous escape from Lithuania to Japan with the Mir Yeshiva. After the war, he settled in the United States. He was an exceptional matmid, someone whose application to Torah knew no bounds. During the summer vacation, Reb Binyamin could sometimes be found sitting by the bay at the end of Bay Parkway in Brooklyn. One time, a colleague passed by. Rabbi Zeilberger was leaning back, his hands cupped behind his head, his legs stretched out and his gemara on a shtender in front of him. Seeing his relaxed pose, the colleague remarked:

"Reb Binyamin, this is the way you learn?"

"No," he replied, "This is the way I relax."

It may sound on the surface that there is little to choose between "All work and no play makes Jack" and "This is the way I relax." However there is a large and fundamental difference.

Hashem told Avraham Avinu to forsake everything he knew his land, his relatives, and his father's house. Hashem asked him to give up everything in

order that he could become the prototype and progenitor of a nation who would change the world the Jewish People. To fulfill this monumental task, Hashem gave the descendants of Avraham a vastly powerful tool to complete their task: the Torah. However this tool, to be effective, needs constant practice. Like any top-notch professional, the tools of the trade cannot be left idle, even for one day. As Jan Paderewski, the famous pianist, once remarked, "If I don't practice for one day, I know it. If I don't practice for two days, the critics know it. If I don't practice for three days, the audience knows it." If the Jewish People as a whole don't practice the Torah even for one second, not only do we know it, but also so does the whole world. The vital life-giving influx of spirituality from the supernal realm is halted and the world's continuing existence hangs in jeopardy. The Torah and its mitzvot are not just the lifeblood of the Jewish People. They are the lifeblood of existence. We are not in this world to "make Jack." Jack's job is to make the world, and even though we may need to go and sit by the ocean and lean back a little, we can never afford to chill too much because, in the process, the world may freeze over.

\* Sources: Nefesh HaChaim and story heard from Rabbi Yosef Shapiro

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# Q & A

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## Questions

1. What benefits did G-d promise Avraham if he would leave his home?
2. "And all the families of the earth will be blessed through you." What does this mean?
3. Who were the souls that Avraham and Sarah "made"?
4. What were the Canaanites doing in the Land of Canaan when Avraham arrived?
5. Why did Avraham build an altar at Ai?
6. What two results did Avraham hope to achieve by saying that Sarah was his sister?
7. Why did Avraham's shepherds rebuke Lot's shepherds?
8. Who was Amrafel and why was he called that?
9. Verse 14:7 states that the four kings "smote all the country of the Amalekites". How is this possible, since Amalek had not yet been born?
10. Why did the "palit" tell Avraham of Lot's capture?
11. Who accompanied Avraham in battle against the four kings?
12. Why couldn't Avraham chase the four kinds past Dan?
13. Why did Avraham give ma'aser specifically to Malki-Tzedek?
14. Why didn't Avraham accept any money from Sodom's king?
15. When did the decree of 400 years of exile begin?
16. What did G-d indicate with His promise that Avraham would "come to his ancestors in peace"?
17. How did G-d fulfill His promise that Avraham would be buried in "a good old age"?
18. Why did the Jewish People need to wait until the fourth generation until they returned to Eretz Canaan?
19. Who was Hagar's father?
20. Why did Avraham fall on his face when G-d appeared to him?

## Answers

1. 12:1 - He would become a great nation, his excellence would become known to the world, and he would be blessed with wealth.
2. 12:3 - A person will say to his child, "You should be like Avraham."
3. 12:5 - People they converted to the worship of G-d.
4. 12:6 - They were in the process of conquering the land from the descendants of Shem.
5. He foresaw the Jewish People's defeat there in the days of Yehoshua due to Achan's sin. He built an altar to pray for them.
6. 12:13 - That the Egyptians would not kill him, and would give him presents.
7. 13:7 Lot's shepherds grazed their flocks in privately owned fields.
8. Amrafel was Nimrod. He said (amar ) to Avraham to fall (fel ) into the fiery furnace.
9. 14:7 - The Torah uses the name that the place would bear in the future.
10. 14:13 - He wanted Avraham to die trying to save Lot so that he himself could marry Sarah.
11. 14:14 - His servant, Eliezer.
12. 4:14 - He saw prophetically that his descendants would make a golden calf there, and as a result his strength failed.
13. 14:20 - Because Malki-Tzedek was a kohen.
14. 14:23 - G-d had promised Avraham wealth, and Avraham didn't want Sodom's King to say, "I made Avraham wealthy."
15. With the birth of Yitzchak.
16. 15:15 - That his father, Terach, would repent and become righteous.
17. 15:15 - Avraham lived to see his son Yishmael repent and become righteous, and he died before his grandson Esav became wicked.
18. 15:16 - They needed to wait until the Amorites had sinned sufficiently to deserve expulsion.
19. 16:1 - Pharaoh.
20. 17:3 - Because he was as yet uncircumcised.

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# WHAT'S IN A WORD?

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by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

## Prime Property

The Hebrew word *rechush* (“property”) and its variants appear seven times in *Lech Lecha*, making it the Torah portion with the highest concentration of such instances. It appears when relating that Abraham took his “property” with him on his journey to the Holy Land (Gen. 12:5); when the abundance of “property” caused Abraham’s herdsmen to have a falling out with Lot’s herdsmen (Gen. 13:6); when the “property” of the Sodomites were captured (Gen. 14:11), along with Lot and his “property” (Gen. 14:12) and were later returned (Gen. 14:16); when Abraham allows the King of Sodom to take the “property” he won in the war (Gen. 14:21); and when Hashem promises Abraham that after his descendants will be enslaved, they will exit the land of their enslavement with much “property” (Gen. 15:15). But the word *rechush* is not the only word for “property” in the Bible – the words *mikneh* and *nechasim* also refer to “property.” In this essay, we will study the three Hebrew words for “property,” examine their etymologies, and show how they are not simply synonyms.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (to Gen. 12:5) – as well as Solomon Rabinowitz (d. 1943) – argues that *rechush* (with a final SHIN) is related to the word *reches* (with a final SIN), which refers to “tying/attaching” (see Rashi to Ex. 28:28). According to this, the term *rechush* alludes to the pursuit of wealth and riches, whereby one seeks to accrue as much as possible and add them to his repertoire. By doing so, one seeks to “tie” all these assets together to collectively add them to one’s net worth.

The word *mikneh* (or *miknei* in the construct form) is the most common term for “property” in the Bible, appearing over 75 times therein. The lexicographers trace this term to the root KUF-NUN-(HEY), from which words like *miknah* and *kinyan* (“transaction/acquisition”) are derived. Based on this, Nachmanides (to Gen. 14:18,

34:23) and Radak (in *Sefer HaShorashim*) clarify that *mikneh* is not a general term for all of one’s property; rather, it refers to specifically to one’s “livestock” as that is a person’s chief acquisitions. This was especially true of the ancient world, where the amount of livestock in one’s possession was a measuring stick of how rich one was. In fact, Dr. Gerald Leonard Cohen (from the Missouri University of Science and Technology) notes in his *Comments on Etymology* that the importance of livestock can be seen in the fact that of the first three letters of the Hebrew Alphabet, two letters refer to domesticated animals (ALEPH means “ox” and GIMMEL is related to *gamal*, “camel”).

Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim of Breslau (1740–1814) sees the core meaning of KUF-NUN as “minimal home/domicile.” The most obvious derivative of this root is the word *ken* (or *kan* in the construct form), which refers to a bird’s “nest.” Another derivative is the concept of *kinyan*, which often causes a shift in domicile as an item moves from one party’s domain to another’s. Based on this, Rabbi Pappenheim argues (like Nachmanides) that *mikneh* relates to the central role of livestock in commerce, explaining that domesticated animals can be used for a wide variety of purposes (for its shearings, for its milk, for its fur/skin, for its offspring, for eating, for working the field, etc...), as opposed to produce, which can only be eaten. Alternatively, Rabbi Pappenheim sees *mikneh* in the sense of “livestock” as directly related to the core meaning of KUF-NUN, because such beasts are often kept in minimal living accommodations (like a small barn), as opposed to the more respectable sorts of housing typically granted to people.

The Midrash (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 22:8) assumes that the word *nechasim* is related to the Hebrew word *kisui* (“covered/hidden”), explaining that *nechasim* are called such “because they are hidden from this [person] and revealed to this [person].”

Meaning, the ephemeral nature of material possessions is such that a person only holds onto such belongings temporarily, they do not inherently become an inseparable part of him (unlike physical strength or wisdom, which might be said to become part of one's person).

Rabbi Shmuel de Uçeda (1545-1604) in Midrash Shmuel (to Avot 2:8) sharpens this point by noting that oftentimes man spends much of his life trying

to accrue riches, but then dies – thus allowing others to end up reaping the benefits of his hard work. According to this explanation, *nechasim*

relates to *kisui* because although on the surface material possessions seem like attractive prizes, there is always a “hidden” aspect to materialism, whereby the one who toils and puts in the effort does not always get to enjoy the fruits of his labor. De Uçeda concludes his discussion by cynically commenting, “many people gather up money for the benefit of their wives' future husbands.”

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## COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

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by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

### THE AMIDAH (PART 23) – BLESSING OF THANKSGIVING (Part 2)

*“Prayer is not a miracle. It is a tool, man’s paintbrush in the art of life. Prayer is man’s weapon to defend himself in the struggle of life. It is a reality. A fact of life.”*

*(Rabbi Avrohom Chaim Feuer)*

The eighteenth blessing continues: “For our lives, which are committed to Your power, and for our souls that are entrusted to You; for Your miracles that are with us every day... And for Your wonders and favors in every season – evening, morning and afternoon. The Beneficent One, for Your compassions were never exhausted, and the Compassionate One, for Your kindnesses never ended – always have we put our hope in You. For all these, may Your Name be blessed and exalted, our King continually forever and ever.”

Rabbi Yitzchak Blazer cites Rabbeinu Bachya ibn Paquda (*Chovot Helevavot*) to explain the three different descriptions that appear in our blessing:

- i. For our lives, which are committed to Your power
- ii. For Your miracles that are with us every day
- iii. For Your wonders and favors in every season

Rabbeinu Bachya writes that every Jew needs to give three different kinds of thanks to Hashem. First, every person – Jewish or not – must thank Hashem for having made them an integral part of His world. Every single creation in this world benefits from Hashem’s sustenance and it is incumbent upon us to acknowledge this fact. Second, we must thank Hashem for having selected us, as Jews, to be His Chosen People and for protecting us constantly. And last, we must thank Hashem for having created us in His image and for supplying us with our needs. Rabbi Blazer correlates these three categories of thanks to the three statements that we recite. The first statement of thanks corresponds to, “For our lives, which are committed to Your power,” which is a generic statement applicable to all mankind. The second category of thanks corresponds to “For Your miracles that are with us every day,” which is applicable to the chosen nation. And the last statement, “For Your wonders and favors in every season” is a reference to the fact that Hashem provides for each individual.

Our Sages teach that the Jewish day begins at nighttime (*Brachot* 2a), which is why our blessing at night continues with the words, “Evening, morning and afternoon.” I once heard the most poignant explanation about why the Jewish day begins at night. In Judaism nighttime symbolizes a lack of clarity. The absence of light represents the difficult times that we all experience, both individually and nationally. Daytime, on the other hand, represents the clarity and the goodness in our lives. In Judaism, the light follows the darkness to teach us that despite whatever adversities we are grappling with right now, there will come a time when the darkness in our lives will be banished. The sun will rise and spread its beneficence and life-giving heat into every dimension of our existence.

In its narration of the Creation, the Torah states at the end of the first day (*Bereshet* 1:5), “And there was evening and there was morning...” At its very onset, the Torah is teaching that regardless of how difficult things may seem in our lives, the darkness is always a prelude to the light and the warmth of the sun that *will* follow it. Possibly the most significant message found within our blessing is that we do not just thank Hashem for the daytime. Rather, we thank Him for the darkness as well because only through experiencing the darkness are we able to appreciate the light. In the words of the Midrash (*Tehillim* 22), “If I would not have sat in darkness, [my life] would not have been illuminated.”

From the time of Avraham onward, perhaps the notable characteristic of the Jewish nation has been our ability to never give up hope even under the

most threatening and bleak circumstances. As our blessing declares, “Always we put our hope in You.”

Rabbi Meir Shapiro (1887-1933) was the legendary initiator of the *Daf Hayomi*. He also opened and headed the famed Yeshiva in Lublin, Poland, called “*Chachmei Lublin*.” He was one of the most dynamic and charismatic spiritual leaders in pre-Holocaust Europe and was renowned for his brilliance and his multi-faceted talents. Rabbi Shapiro asks why Noach was not successful in saving his generation from the flood. After all, the Torah describes Noach as being the most perfectly righteous person in his generation (*Bereshet* 6:9). Presumably, if anyone could influence all those around them, it would have been Noach.

Rabbi Shapiro suggests that Noach believed that people of his generation were beyond salvation. Due to the fact that they had sunk to the very lowest spiritual levels, Noach thought that there was no longer any hope for them. Therefore, Rabbi Shapiro explains, it is now possible to understand why it was specifically a rainbow that Hashem sent as His sign that the world would never again be totally destroyed by a flood (*ibid.* 9:8-11). A rainbow typically occurs when there is a beautiful day, when suddenly it becomes overcast and pours with rain. As the weather begins to clear up, the clouds disperse and the sun returns. And when the sun hits the rain, a beautiful, multi-colored rainbow is formed in the sky. The rainbow teaches that no matter how dark the world may be, after the darkness the sun will shine and reflect its beautiful light into the world. That, says Rabbi Meir Shapiro, was the message that Hashem was sending to Noach. There is always hope. Never give up on others and never make the mistake of assuming that they are beyond redemption.

*To be continued...*

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# TALMUD TIPS

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by Rabbi Moshe Newman

## A Land Without Sin

Rabbi Elazar said, “Anyone who lives in the Land of Israel dwells without sin.”

He learns this from a verse in Isaiah (33:24) that states, “One who lives there will not say ‘I am ill’; (because) the nation that dwells there is forgiven of sin.” The word “ill” is understood to be synonymous with sin. This statement is codified by the Rambam (Laws of Kings 5:11).

Does this really mean that just by living in Israel a person automatically and constantly has a “clean slate”? Can this be true? Numerous Rishonim and Achronim offer various approaches to help understand this teaching. One approach is that our gemara is speaking about a person who lives in the Land of Israel for the sake of the mitzvah, and wants to live in a place of this kedusha (holiness) to help prevent him from sinning. Such a person, even if he does sin, will very likely regret it and will return to G-d in teshuva (repentance), thereby being free of sin (Pnei Yehoshua).

*Rav Anan said, "One who is buried in the Land of Israel is as if he is buried under the Altar*

Rav Anan teaches that burial in the Land of Israel provides a degree of atonement, just as the Altar did, based on comparing two verses in the Torah (Deut. 32:43 and Ex. 20:22). This teaching is also cited by the Rambam (Laws of Kings 5:11).

Man was formed from a place of his atonement, the ground, as we are taught that the Altar is made from the ground. The idea that Man receives atonement from burial in the ground points to his lofty nature. Just as his non-physical soul returns in purity to the place from which it originated, so too the physical “ground” of body returns to a place of purity from which it was originally formed. (Maharsha)

Ketuvot 111a

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## PARSHA OVERVIEW

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Ten generations have passed since Noach. Man has descended spiritually. In the year 1948 from Creation, Avram is born. By observing the world, Avram comes to recognize G-d’s existence, and thus merits G-d appearing to him. At the beginning of this week’s Torah portion, G-d tells Avram to leave his land, his relatives and his father's house and travel to an unknown land where G-d will make him into a great nation. Avram leaves, taking with him his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, their servants, and those whom they converted to faith in G-d. When they reach the land of Canaan G-d 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 could cause his death at the hand of the Egyptians, Avram asks her to say that she is his sister. Sarai is taken to Pharaoh, but G-d afflicts 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. During a quarrel over grazing rights 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 Avram demurs at accepting any of the spoils of the battle.

In a prophetic covenant, G-d 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. Sarai 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. Sarai deals harshly with her, and Hagar flees. On the instruction of an angel, Hagar returns to Avram and gives birth to Yishmael. The weekly portion concludes with G-d commanding Avram to circumcise himself and his offspring throughout the generations as a Divine covenant. G-d changes Avram’s name to Avraham, and Sarai’s name to Sarah. Hashem promises Avraham a son, Yitzchak, despite Avraham being ninety-nine years old and Sarah ninety. On that day, Avraham circumcises himself, Yishmael and his entire household.

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# PEREK SHIRA: The Song of Existence

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by Rabbi Shmuel Kraines

## THE SONG OF THE SWALLOW

The swallow says: “[You transformed my mourning into joyous dancing,] so that my soul shall sing to You and not be silent. Hashem, my G-d, forever I will thank You!”

Swallows have slender, streamlined bodies and long pointed wings, making them superb flyers. They possess extraordinary endurance, which allows them to spend most of their time in the air. Quick and

nimble, they hunt tiny insects in mid-flight. They fly with grace and sing with sweetness, constantly, without pause. Thus, they express the message of the verse, “So that my soul shall sing to You and not be silent...” As it migrates southward and northward every year, the swallow calls out to all mankind: “Sing to Hashem while you live, thank Him while you have the ability to do so.”

Just as the swallow’s very nature is to dance and sing, the nature of every soul is to dance and sing to its Creator, as long as it resides within a body. It is therefore our obligation to do so, and it is certainly incumbent upon us to avoid using our Divinely

granted ability of speech for destructive purposes instead.

A metzora is a person who has been rendered contaminated with tzaraas, usually because of lashon hara. As part of his purification process, he requires two chirping birds, and the Gemara says that swallows are suitable for this. Chirping birds teach the penitent metzora an important lesson: the uncontrolled chirp-like chatter of his mouth that caused him stumble upon the evils of lashon hara. However, the solution is not to simply remain silent. Man was granted the ability and the desire to speak so that he may actually do so, but only for good purposes. He may choose to study Torah, which our Sages teach is a remedy for lashon hara. He may also use it as a tool of encouragement, a builder of society – and a source of perpetual song to the Creator.

Sources: Beis Elokim, Yaavetz, Knaf Raananim, Lechem Rav, Mesores Ha’of, Wikipedia

*\*In loving memory of Harav Zeev Shlomo ben Zecharia Leib*

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# LETTER AND SPIRIT

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*Insights based on the writings of Rav S.R. Hirsch by Rabbi Yosef Herschman*

## Count to Ten

When Avraham returns triumphant from his battle against the four kings, Malki Tzedek, a priest to Hashem, greets him with bread and wine, blessing both Avraham and Hashem for the miraculous victory. Avraham then gives Malki Tzedek *maaser*, a tenth of the spoils of war, as a tribute to Hashem.

This is the first mention of *maaser* in Scripture. Later, the Torah will set forth the obligation to tithe produce and give it to the Kohen and the Levi (and also to the poor). One who gives this tenth to the Levi expresses the following: “Hashem, Whose Name you proclaim, is the One Who gave me these possessions.” By giving the tithe to Malki Tzedek, Avraham acknowledges that Hashem, Whose Name Malki Tzedek proclaims, is the One Who graced him with victory.

As a rule, the word for “tenth” is *asirit*. But in this sense of tithing, it is called *maaser*. Had the tithe been called *asirit*, the tenth would have no special significance. It could just as well have been any other fraction. In dedicating assets to Hashem, it is not the fraction that is significant, but it is the act of giving, and specifically the act of giving the concluding tenth of each unit. This is why the verb form is an active form – *maaser* means to ‘make the ten.’ Ten is a significant number, conceptually and mathematically. It always represents a unit, a whole. There are nine digits and then the tenth concludes the first unit and also begins the next. We round to the nearest ten, count years in decades, and count all material things

in tens. This is one of the reasons why a *minyan* is a minimum of ten individuals – it is the smallest unit that can represent the whole.

The obligation to tithe animals and produce was effected in this manner: Each tenth animal that passed under the staff would be separated as *maaser*. When tithing produce, they would not measure the whole quantity and then designate a tenth. Rather, they would designate every tenth measure as *maaser*. *Maaser*, then, does not mean *a tenth part*, but rather *every tenth one*. In this way, both the first and the concluding separation of property to the Kohen or Levi were dedicated to Hashem: The “first” – the first fruits, the first-born animal, and the “last” – the concluding tenth. This served as an ever-present reminder that all property belongs to Hashem.

When a person earns his first penny, he is still humble. With the memory of his previous state of need still fresh in his mind, he knows well that his success depends on the grace of Hashem. But the tenth, the one-hundredth, the thousandth, appear to him as natural as the ninth, or ninety-ninth, or nine hundred and ninety-ninth that came before. The commandment to give *maaser*, every tenth one, is to preserve his awareness that every unit is a direct gift from Hashem.

- Sources: Commentary, Bereishet 14:22-24