

# OHRNET

PARSHAT VAYERA 15 CHESHVAN 16 NOVEMBER 2024

• VOL 32 NO. 3

## PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

### Voting for the Existence of the World

*“...and all the nations of the world will bless themselves by him (Avraham)” (18:18)*

How valuable was your vote on November 5th?

In 2020 political spending, including rallies and TV ads, billboards etc. was 14.4 billion dollars. This year OpenSecrets predicts it will have been at least 15.9 billion. 16 billion dollars!

How important is our vote to them? How much do they value your time? What they are asking you to do is to leave work, leave your family, leave whatever you'd rather do - and vote.

Maybe it will take you half an hour – maybe less.

The question is how much do they value your time?

Well. Let's do the math.

If you divide 15.9 billion dollars between 186.5 million people – that's the number of Americans who are registered to vote as of September 2024 - you will be giving each one of them 85 dollars and 25 cents.

Not bad for half an hour of your time!

But let's look at your time another way. Nefesh HaChaim says that the reason Hashem created the world as a sphere was that it would always be day somewhere. Somewhere on the globe, people will be awake, and there will be a Jew burning the midnight oil toiling in Torah. Because, if there would be one split second when no Jew was learning Torah, the world would return to Tohu u'vohu. Without that constant energy of Torah learning and observance, the whole world would return to primordial emptiness.

The Worldometer's World Population Clock says that right now there are 8.2 billion people in the world. On Erev Rosh Hashana the year before last, the Jewish Agency said the number of Jews worldwide stood at approximately 15.7 million compared to 15.6 million in the year

before that. More conservative estimates put it nearer 14 million, but whichever way you look at it, we are little more than 0.2 per cent of the world.

But it doesn't stop there. According to the Institute for Jewish Policy research in 2022, only one in seven Jews are religious. In other words, there are only 2 million people giving life to the 8.2 billion inhabitants of this planet.

If you do some simple math, every second you learn Torah, or you do a mitzvah, you just gave life to 4000 people. Four Thousand.

And if, G-d forbid, Jews would suddenly take a day off all together, stop doing the mitzvahs, learning, davening, giving, the world – 8.2 billion people - would, quite literally, cease to exist.

It's quite impressive how powerful our actions are! Not just in the next world, not for just our children, but for the world to exist today, for all of Mankind.

Those who keep the Torah — less than a tiny 0.2 percent of the world – are supporting 8.2 billion people.

Politicians may value your vote at 85 dollars and change, but a religious Jew breathes life – the most valuable gift in the world - into 4000 people every single second.

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## TALMUD TIPS

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by Rabbi Moshe Newman

### **Bava Batra 137-143**

#### **Baby Girls First**

*Rav Chisda said, "If a daughter is born first, it is an auspicious sign for sons born afterwards." ("Bat techila siman yafeh l'banim.")*

The *gemara* on our *daf* cites this statement from Rav Chisda as one possible way to understand the *mishna*, which seems to indicate a preference for the birth of a daughter, based on the larger monetary amount promised to a daughter than to a son.

The *gemara* gives two reasons for Rav Chisda's to explain idea. The first reason is that if a daughter is born first, she will be a special blessing to the family by helping to raise her younger siblings. Presumably, if a son would be born first, he would not be as available due to his mitzvah to be constantly immersed in Torah study, a mitzvah that is unique to males.

To be clear: This does not mean that sons and husbands are exempt from helping to raise their siblings and children, or to help out at home.

The second way to understand Rav Chisda's statement is, "So that the 'evil eye' will not rule over him." This begs explanation of what this particular "evil eye" is in this case, and who is being "protected" from it when a daughter is the firstborn. Rabbeinu Gershom Me'or HaGolah explains this to mean that since the firstborn is a daughter, other people will not look at the father with an "evil eye" of envy, saying: "Look at this person who has so many sons!" The Maharsha offers a different viewpoint. If a son was the firstborn, he would receive a "double portion" of the inheritance, twice that of his brothers. This could be cause for resentment and jealousy of him from his younger brothers. But when a daughter is born first, her brothers all share equally in the inheritance. Accordingly, Rav Chisda's teaching that "If a daughter is born first, it is a good sign for the sons that are born afterwards," means: It is a good sign for the brothers born after her, since there will not be an "evil eye" of contention and jealousy amongst the brothers regarding inheritance since all brothers share equally in the inheritance of their father's estate.

As a "footnote," we should correct an apparent misconception. Sometimes, a person says to a first-time father or mother, "*Bat techila siman l'banim*," with the clear intention that having a daughter first is a good omen for a wealth of sons in the future, and that they should rejoice and not be disappointed that their first child is not male. Although the well-wishers certainly intend well, they seem to be "misspeaking," since this statement of "*Bat techila...*" does not seem to allude to this idea particular idea according to either explanation offered by our great Sages of the *gemara* here.

▪ *Bava Basra 141a*

*Ohrnet Magazine is a weekly Torah magazine published by Ohr Somayach Institutions,  
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# COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

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by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

## KIDDUSH LEVANAH (PART 15)

### UNDER THE LIGHT OF THE SILVERY MOON

*“My walk on the moon lasted three days. My walk with G-d will last forever.”*  
(Charles Duke – Lunar Module Pilot, Apollo 16)

Kiddush Levanah then continues with chapter 150 of Tehillim: “Hallelu-kah, praise Hashem in His sanctuary, praise Him in the firmament of His power. Praise Him for His mighty acts, praise Him as befits His abundant greatness. Praise Him with the blast of the Shofar, praise Him with the lyre and the harp. Praise Him with drum and dance, praise Him with the organ and the flute. Praise Him with clanging cymbals, praise Him with resonant trumpets. Let all souls praise Hashem, Hallelu-kah.”

Chapter 150 is the final chapter of Tehillim. The Rabbis teach that it was chosen to conclude the beautiful, lyrical and poignant Sefer of Tehillim because it is a summary of the essence of the entire Sefer. As Rabbi Avrohom Chaim Feuer writes in his anthology on Sefer Tehillim, the challenge of life is recognizing Hashem in every situation. Sometimes it seems to us that Hashem is far above us in His “sanctuary” or in His “firmament of power.” But under all circumstances, we must praise Him for His “mighty acts.” Sometimes, we are overwhelmed by the awesomeness of Hashem’s judgment that reverberates like a shofar. And at other times, we feel His Presence as serene and tranquil like soft music.

What is its connection to Kiddush Levanah? The commentaries explain that the three-letter root word “hallel”— ‘heh’ ‘lamed’ ‘lamed’ – which means praise, appears in this chapter thirteen times in different variations. These thirteen times correspond to the twelve months in a regular year and the thirteenth month in a leap year.

Chapter 150 mentions nine different kinds of musical instruments. Perhaps the reason for such a detailed description is because musical instruments, playing at the same time but not synchronized, sound discordant. However, the moment they play together, their music blends together and produces one of the most elevating and soul-touching experiences a person can have.

Our Rabbis teach that true harmony is experiencing how enormously different factors can blend together to produce something truly wondrous. Anyone who has ever been to Switzerland in the summer will probably have experienced a sense of awe when looking at the majestic, snowy peaks of the famed Alps, surrounded by the deep, rich greenness on the lower slopes. Their beauty is undeniable, but it is the enormous contrast that turns their view into breathtaking. In the words of Rabbi Elie Munk (Likrat Tiferet, Ascent to Harmony), “The

great ideal that gives beauty and meaning to creation is not perfection but harmony. Perfection is a lofty and noble ideal but it is fixed and static. Once perfection is reached, progress must stop because there is nowhere to go. Perfection is a golden dead end; it leaves no room for further improvement. Harmony, on the other hand, is a dynamic, ongoing process. This is symbolic of life. It is the very purpose of life, for it is man's mission to harmonize the threads of his being, his talents, his thoughts, his actions and his emotions so that he will be in harmony with Hashem's Creation."

Rabbi Yaakov Tzvi Mecklenburg (1785-1865), the Rabbi of Konigsberg in East Prussia, writes in HaKetav v'Hakabblah that the Hebrew word for song – shir – is closely related to the Hebrew word for straight – yashar. He explains that in order for music to be appealing, the musical notes need to follow one another in a perfectly arranged sequence to provide a harmonious melody. In fact, the ability to create music is so profound that he calls it a "glorious wisdom."

Chapter 150, the final chapter in Tehillim, the "condensed version" of the entire Sefer, is replete with contrasting emotions and so many diverse musical instruments. Not to highlight their dissimilarities. But, rather, to teach us how to live with the differences. To celebrate their diversity. And to create the most harmonious composition of all – the Neshamah stretching upwards to unite together with Hashem in this imperfect world that we live in.

*To be continued*

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## WHAT'S IN A WORD?

### Synonyms in the Hebrew Language

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

### **The Princess' Gaze (Part 2/2)**

In Part 1 of this essay we explored the two more common names for Abraham's wife, Sarai and Sarah, and the interplay between them. In this installment, we examine a third name associated with her — Ischah — and will explore how that particular name of hers fits into the story.

When the Torah introduces us to the Abraham and his family, it discusses Abraham and his brother Nahor getting married. The full verse reads: "And Abram and Nahor married wives, the name of Abram's wife is Sarai, and the name of Nahor's wife is Milcah, daughter of Haran, who was the father of Milcah and Ischah [Yiscah in Hebrew]" (Gen. 11:29). This difficult-to-read passage introduces us to a character named Ischah, who is never again mentioned in the Bible. An ancient tradition preserved in rabbinic sources (Seder Olam Rabbah ch. 2, Megillah 14a, Sanhedrin 69b, and Targum pseudo-Jonathan to Gen. 11:29) and by Josephus (Antiquities of the Jews, Book I, Ch. 6) maintains that Ischah is none other than Sarai/Sarah!

Rabbeinu Nissim offers proof to the assertion that Iscah is the same person as Sarai/Sarah from the fact that the Torah provides the paternity of Nahor's wife Milcah, yet does not mention the paternity of Abraham's wife Sarai. Given that the Torah delineates the father of one brother's wife (Nahor's), we would have expected it to mention the father of the other brother's wife as well (Abram's). This difficulty can be resolved if we assume that Sarai is indeed Iscah, since the Torah states that Haran was the father of Iscah, which gives us Iscah/Sarai's parentage.

On a more esoteric level, Baal HaTurim, Peirush HaRokeach, and Rabbeinu Efrayim bar Shimshon (to Gen. 11:29) explain that the identification of Sarah as Iscah is alluded to in the very name Sarah: under the At-Bash cipher, the name Sarah becomes Bagatz, and the gematria of Bagatz equals that of Iscah (=95).

Nonetheless, it should be noted that Ibn Ezra and Shadal (to Gen. 11:29) express skepticism regarding the identification of Iscah with Sarai.

The Talmud (Megillah 14a, Sanhedrin 69b) offers two ways of explaining why Sarai/Sarah was called Iscah: the first is that she had the ability to "gaze" (sachta) with the prophetic Holy Spirit, and the second is that all people "gazed" (sachin) upon her beauty. Both of these explanations are seemingly based on connecting Iscah to the root SAMECH-KAF-(HEY), which refers to "seeing/looking/staring/gazing" in Rabbinic Hebrew. Examples of words derived from that root appear in HaBachur's Meturgaman, as he lists declensions of this root being used by the Targumim as translations for various Hebrew terms related to "seeing" like habatah, hashkafah, tzofeh, shur, and hover.

Indeed, Dr. Alexander Kohut (in HeAruch HaShaleim) connects this root SAMECH-KAF-(HEY) to the Talmud's exegesis on the name Iscah. He also theorizes that perhaps this root is of an Indo-European etymology, related to the German schauen ("look") and the Sanskrit sku (and the English see).

Rabbi Avraham Abba Herczl (in Sifsei Chachamim to Megillah 14a) also seems to follow this explanation of the Talmud, although he understood that the Talmud connects the name Iscah to the root SAMECH-KAF-LAMMED (from whence the histakel, "looking/staring" derives). But then, Rabbi Herczl suggests that perhaps the Talmud meant to connect Iscah with sukkah ("hut/covering/canopy") to stress Sarai/Sarah's extreme modesty in hiding ("covering") her prophetic levels without showing off. He also explains that perhaps the Talmud's second explanation of Iscah means that everybody "talked about" (sichah, with a CHET) Sarai/Sarah's superlative beauty, rather than they "gazed" upon it.

*\*To access the full version of this essay and other essays by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein in this series, please visit us online at: [https://ohr.edu/this\\_week/whats\\_in\\_a\\_word/](https://ohr.edu/this_week/whats_in_a_word/)*

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# Q & A

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## Questions

1. Why did G-d appear to Avraham after the brit mila?
2. Why was Avraham sitting at the entrance to his tent?
3. What were the missions of the three angels?
4. Why did Avraham enjoin the guests to wash the dust off their feet?
5. Why did Avraham ask specifically Yishmael, and not someone else, to prepare food for the guests?
6. Why did the angels ask Avraham where Sarah was?
7. When G-d related Sarah's thoughts to Avraham, He did not relate them precisely. Why?
8. What "cry" from Sodom came before G-d?
9. How many angels went to Sodom?
10. Why was Lot sitting at the gate of Sodom?
11. Lot served the angels matza. Why?
12. Why did Lot delay when he left Sodom?
13. Why were Lot and his family not permitted to look back at Sodom?
14. Lot's wife looked back and became a pillar of salt. Why was she punished in this particular way?
15. In what merit did G-d save Lot?
16. Why did Avraham relocate after the destruction of Sodom?
17. Why did Avimelech give gifts to Avraham?
18. Why was Avraham told to listen to Sarah?
19. Why did G-d listen to the prayer of Yishmael and not to that of Hagar?
20. Who accompanied Avraham and Yitzchak to the akeidah (binding)?

## Answers

1. 18:1 - Avraham was sick, so G-d came to "visit" him.
2. 18:1 - He was looking for guests.
3. 18:2 - To announce Yitzchak's birth, to heal Avraham and to destroy Sodom.
4. 18:4 - He thought they were among those who worship the dust, and he didn't want any object of idolatry in his home.
5. 18:7 - To train him in the performance of mitzvot.
6. 18:9 - To call attention to Sarah's modesty, so as to endear her to her husband.
7. 18:13 - For the sake of peace.
8. 18:21 - The cry of a girl who was executed for giving food to the poor.
9. 19:1 - Two; one to destroy the city and one to save Lot.
10. 19:1 - He was a judge.
11. 19:3 - It was Passover.
12. 19:16 - He wanted to save his property.
13. 19:17 - As they, too, deserved to be punished, it wasn't fitting for them to witness the destruction of Sodom.
14. 19:26 - She was stingy, not wanting to give the guests salt.
15. 19:29 - Lot had protected Avraham by concealing from the Egyptians the fact that Sarah was his wife.
16. 20:1 - Because travel in the region ceased and Avraham could no longer find guests.
17. 20:14 - So that Avraham would pray for him.
18. 21:12 - Because she was greater in prophecy.
19. 21:17 - Because the prayer of a sick person is more readily accepted than the prayer of others on his behalf.
20. 22:3 - Yishmael and Eliezer.

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## PARSHA OVERVIEW

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Three days after performing *brit mila* on himself, Avraham is visited by Hashem. When three angels appear in human form, Avraham rushes to show them hospitality by bringing them into his tent, despite this being the most painful time after the operation. Sarah laughs when she hears from them that she will bear a son next year. Hashem reveals to Avraham that He will destroy Sodom, and Avraham pleads for Sodom to be spared. Hashem agrees that if there are fifty righteous people in Sodom He will not destroy it. Avraham "bargains" Hashem down to ten righteous people. However, not even ten can be found. Lot, his wife and two daughters are rescued just before sulfur and fire rain down on Sodom and her sister cities. Lot's wife looks back and is turned into a pillar of salt. Lot's daughters fear that as a result of the destruction there will be no husbands for them. They decide to get their father drunk and through him to perpetuate the human race. From the elder daughter, Moav is born, and from the younger, Ammon.

Avraham moves to Gerar where Avimelech abducts Sarah. After Hashem appears to Avimelech in a dream, he releases Sarah and appeases Avraham. As promised, a son, Yitzchak, is born to Sarah and Avraham. On the eighth day after the birth, Avraham circumcises him as commanded. Avraham makes a feast the day Yitzchak is weaned. Sarah tells Avraham to banish Hagar and Hagar's son Yishmael because she sees in him signs of degeneracy. Avraham is distressed at the prospect of banishing his son, but Hashem tells him to listen to whatever Sarah tells him to do. After nearly dying of thirst in the desert, Yishmael is rescued by an angel, and Hashem promises that he will be the progenitor of a mighty nation.

Avimelech enters into an alliance with Avraham when he sees that Hashem is with him. In a tenth and final test of Avraham, Hashem instructs Avraham to take Yitzchak, who is now 37, and to offer him as a sacrifice. Avraham does this, in spite of ostensibly aborting Jewish nationhood and contradicting his life-long preaching against human sacrifice. At the last moment, Hashem sends an angel to stop Avraham. Because of Avraham's unquestioning obedience, Hashem promises him that even if the Jewish People sin, they will never be completely dominated by their foes. The Torah portion concludes with the genealogy and birth of Rivka.

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# TAAMEI HAMITZVOS – Reasons behind the Mitzvos

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by Rabbi Shmuel Kraines

*“Study improves the quality of the act and completes it, and a mitzvah is more beautiful when it emerges from someone who understands its significance.” (Meiri, Bava Kama 17a)*

## THE ROOTS OF AMON AND MOAV

Mitzvahs #561-562 (*Devarim* 23:4-7)

*Parashas Va'eira* records the births of Lot's two sons, the forebears of the nations Amon and Moav. Centuries later, when the Jewish people left Egypt and passed by the lands of these two nations on their way to Eretz Yisrael, they refused to offer the Jewish people food and drink and Moav even hired Bilaam to destroy them (see also *Ramban*). This cruel conduct bore evidence of the faulty character of Amonite and Moavite men, but not of the women, because it is not the way of women to go out and bring refreshments for wayfarers (*Yevamos* 76b). As a result, the Torah commands us in *Parashas Ki Seitzei* not to allow the male members of these nations to marry into our people, even if they convert. Moreover, while we are usually required to seek peace with other nations, we may not accord this merciful treatment to Amon and Moav. *Sefer HaChinuch* explains that their cruel conduct revealed them as being despicable in the core and undeserving of our mercy. These Mitzvos thus educate us about the importance of kindness and compassion.

If we explore the history of Amon and Moav, we gain further insight into these Mitzvos. Lot was an orphan; his father Haran died in Ur Kasdim. His illustrious uncle Avraham took him under his wing and shared with him the good fortunes which he merited on account of his righteousness. When Lot's city was conquered by an axis of world powers, Avraham came to rescue him; when his city Sodom was overturned, it was only in Avraham's merit that he survived. Lot's descendants Amon and Moav are not only at fault for lacking compassion, but also for repaying with cruelty the immense kindness that the forebear of the Jewish people dealt to their ancestor (*Ramban* and *Bechor Shor*). The Torah refers to an ungrateful person as a *naval*, a despicable person (*Devarim* 32:6). Indeed, someone lacking the sensitivity to even *recognize* the kindness of others is surely rotten at the core. In contrast, the great men of our nation are well-known for possessing a fine sense of gratitude to others, and above all, to Hashem.

The ungrateful streak of Amon and Moav would continue for all generations; the Sages call them "the bad neighbors of Yerushalayim." They relayed to Nevuchanetzar that the Jewish prophets were predicting the destruction of Yerushalayim and urged him to come and conquer it, and they gleefully joined his forces (*Sanhedrin* 96b).

If we ponder the matter at its roots, it appears that the irreversible spiritual blemishes of these two nations began from the time of their conception. When Sodom and its sister cities were

destroyed, Lot's daughters, thinking that the entire world had been destroyed, had an incestuous union with their father to perpetuate mankind, for the same reason Kain and Hevel were allowed to marry their sisters. Lot, though, had been told by the visiting angels that only that region would be destroyed, and he knew good and well that there was no such permissibility. The Gemara (*Horayos* 10b) remarks about this act of incest that it was considered virtuous for Lot's daughters and at the same time shamefully sinful for Lot. Amon and Moav emerged from those unions. Since only the male participant in those unions sinned, the male descendants would emerge blemished and forbidden from entry into the Jewish people, while the female descendants would emerge pure (*Rabbeinu Avigdor HaTzarfati to Horayos* ibid.). Indeed, the entire Davidic dynasty, including the Mashiach, emerged from Rus, a Moavite woman.

The above-stated law, that the ban against marrying Moavites is limited to male Moavites, is an oral tradition, which was a matter of dispute when Rus converted and Boaz sought to marry her. Boaz eventually did so, with the consent of the Beis Din of Beis Lechem. Rav Shlomo Alkabetz wrote a commentary to *Megillas Rus* called *Shoresh Yishai*. In his introduction, he suggests that this Megillah was written in order to publicize the authenticity of this oral tradition, which was necessary to legitimize the Davidic dynasty. Based on what we have written above, we may add that *Megillas Rus* substantiates the ruling of the Beis Din of Beis Lechem by describing the kindness and compassion of Rus in detail, thus demonstrating that the cruelty that characterizes Moav is clearly not shared by its female members.

It emerges that the moral sensitivities are largely dependent on the pureness of the soul and on spiritual genes that pass on from generation to generation. That is why it is strictly forbidden to mix the pure seed of Avraham, in whose spiritual genes are embedded kindness, compassion, and bashfulness (*Yalkut Shimoni* §82), with the impure seed of Lot's male descendants.

In closing, it is fascinating to note that Avraham himself eventually decided to separate himself from Lot upon observing his twisted values (see *Panim Yafos to Bereishis* 13:9). The impure roots of Amon and Moav had sprouted forth even before they were born.

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