

O H R N E T

SHABBAT PARSHAT LECH LECHA · 8 CHESHVAN 5768 · OCT. 20, 2007 · VOL. 15 NO. 3

PARSHA INSIGHTS

ESSENTIAL NOT CONSEQUENTIAL

"...and all the families of the earth will bless themselves by you." (12:3)

Our introduction to Avraham Avinu in this week's Torah portion must rank as one of the most perfunctory of all time.

Suddenly, seemingly out of nowhere, G-d chooses to conduct the entire future of the world through a single man — Avraham Avinu — and his progeny.

Why doesn't the written Torah tell us a little about Avraham's background?

Avraham was the first person to recognize G-d; he was like a traveler who comes upon a mansion ablaze with light and surmises that the mansion has to have an owner. So too Avraham saw this wonderful world of light and knew it had to have an Owner. Then G-d revealed Himself to Avraham.

Yet the written Torah makes no mention of this or any of the other great qualities of Avraham.

Why is Avraham seemingly thrust into the limelight with no mention of his credentials?

The spiritual masters teach us that any love that depends on something else will evaporate when the

'something else' disappears. The divorce courts are full of wives who married rich men who became poor, and husbands who married thin wives who committed the unspeakable crime of getting fat.

True love is a unique species in our world. It is the only thing where the cause is the effect and the effect is the cause. Real love means you love someone because ...you love them. Why do you love them? Because you love them.

True love is like two mirrors facing each other reflecting till eternity.

If the Torah had listed Avraham's credentials, we might have concluded that G-d's choice of Avraham was based on those qualities, and that if, at some point in the future, his offspring no longer exemplified those traits, G-d would call the deal off; He would reconsid-

er His choice.

Thus the Torah says nothing of Avraham's great qualities to teach us that G-d's great love for Avraham and the Jewish People is essential, not consequential.

OHRNET magazine is published by OHR SOMAYACH Tanenbaum College

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PARSHA OVERVIEW

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 the inescapable Truth of G-d's existence, and thus merits that G-d appear to him. At the beginning of this week's *Parsha*, 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 would 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 from 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 Parsha concludes with G-d commanding Avram to circumcise himself and his offspring throughout the generations as a covenant between G-d and his seed. G-d changes Avram's name to Avraham, and Sarai's name to Sarah. G-d promises Avraham a son, Yitzchak, despite Avraham's being ninety-nine years old and Sarah ninety. On that day, Avraham circumcises himself, Yishmael and all his household.

ISRAEL Forever

THE ULTIMATE PROMISE

When was "Israel Forever" mentioned in the Torah? Listen carefully during the Torah reading this Shabbat and you will hear the promise given by G-d to the Patriarch Avraham (*Bereishet* 17.8) "I will give to you and to your offspring the Land in which you dwell, *all* of the Land of Canaan, as a possession *forever*."

In his commentary, Ramban points out that this was the

fourth time that the Land was promised to Avraham, each promise an increment on its predecessors. This promise as a reward for his performing circumcision was not only an assurance that *all* of the land would belong to his posterity but that even if they were exiled from the Land it would remain their possession to which they would return.

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PARSHA Q&A ?

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 kings 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?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

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. 12:8 - 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. 14:1 - 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. 14:14 - 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 - Hashem had promised Avraham wealth, and Avraham didn't want Sodom's king to say, "I made Avraham wealthy."
15. 15:13 - 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.

- Man's obligations to his wife — *ketubah* and its guarantee, redemption from captivity and medical expenses
- Woman married to a non-*kohen* who is violated
- Redemption from captivity of a woman he cannot retain as a wife
- Limitations on funds for redemption of any Jewish captive and on a wife
- Propriety of advising a litigant how to plead his case in court
- Other obligations to a wife and her children
- Disowning an heir
- When a woman loses her right to collect the *ketubah* or her support
- Adding to or subtracting from the sum which the Sages set for a *ketubah*
- Circumstantial evidence (*umdanah*) in determining financial litigation
- When the Sages made their decrees stricter than Torah Law.
- Time period allotted to a man and woman to prepare for marriage in days when *kiddushin* and marriage were separated in time

THE ARISTOCRACY OF SILENCE

“**T**he aristocrats refrained from speaking and placed their hands on their mouths.” (*Iyov* 29:9) This is the passage that the Sage Rav applied to another distinguished Torah Sage, the father of the Sage Shmuel.

The background for this exchange was a ruling by Shmuel's father that was challenged by Rav. Although there was a possibility for refuting this challenge Shmuels' father chose to remain silent.

There is no indication in our *gemara* that this silence

indicated a concession on the part of Shmuels' father that his position was indeed wrong. We are therefore left with a mystery as to why he refrained from defending his position. It is also difficult to understand what Rav meant in comparing his colleague's silence to the scriptural silence of aristocrats for it is unthinkable that he was gloating over having stumped such a respected colleague.

It appears that there is some subtle aristocracy in maintaining silence in particular situations that only such great Torah scholars as Shmuels' father and Rav were capable of appreciating.

• *Ketubot 51b*

WHAT THE Sages SAY

“Do not disown an heir, even to disown an evil son in favor of a good one, because you do not know what the children of the disowned one will be like.”

• *The Sage Shmuel advising his disciple Rabbi Yehuda (Ketubot 53a)*

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LOVE of the LAND

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GLOBAL WARMING

From: Olga in Odessa

Dear Rabbi,

Global warming seems to be a hot issue on the international scene. What does Judaism say about the human role in the problem, and our responsibility for preventing/correcting it?

Dear Olga,

Allow me to clear the air for our readers regarding what global warming is and its causes before I address your question.

One of the functions of the atmosphere is to simultaneously enable sunlight to reach the Earth to energize life while keeping some of the heat from escaping back into space. In this way, the atmosphere serves as a giant “greenhouse” which keeps the Earth’s climate viable; without which, the Earth’s surface would be 60 degrees Fahrenheit cooler.

The emission of certain gases from Earth and their presence in the atmosphere, insofar as they trap more heat from escaping, compounds the natural greenhouse effect of the atmosphere, resulting in what is commonly referred to as global warming. Since this warming affects winds and ocean currents that move heat around the globe in ways that can cool some areas, warm others, and change the amount of rain and snow falling, it is claimed by some to be more accurately referred to as “climate change”.

Two of the major gases (referred to as greenhouse gases, GHGs) compounding the greenhouse effect are methane and carbon dioxide. The major source of the first is emitted from the digestive system of grazing animals. The major source for the second is combustion of fossil fuels in cars, factories and electricity production.

While humans are obviously responsible for historically unprecedented CO₂ pollution, we are also indirectly responsible for the former. Unprecedented meat consumption results in greatly increased grazing which means much more methane. The problem is in turn exacerbated since more grazing requires more grazing land, resulting in the deforestation of millions of trees that would otherwise absorb and convert our CO₂ waste into oxygen instead of it being emitted into the atmosphere.

According to the scientific community, global warming is not only a hot topic, but an issue of top priority which can adversely affect weather conditions, resulting in severe floods in some areas and severe droughts in others, harm or wipe out animal and plant species, raise sea levels displacing coastal inhabitants world wide, reduce world wide water supplies coming from snowmelt, and make the world a much hotter place to live in.

According to the Torah view, to the extent to which we

contribute to the problem, we are culpable for it. Similarly, to the extent that we can prevent/correct the problem, we are responsible to do so. This is evident from the following Torah teachings:

“When the Holy One Blessed Be He created the first man he took him and showed him all the trees of the Garden of Eden and said to him — ‘See My works, how beautiful and praiseworthy they are; and I created all of it for you. Be careful not to spoil or destroy My world because if you spoil it, there will be no one after you to repair it.’” (Kohelet Rabbah 7:13)

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch describes the magnitude of this mandate in no uncertain terms: “‘Do not destroy anything!’ is the first and most general call of G-d, which comes to you... If you regard the creations as objects without rights, not perceiving G-d Who created them... you have no right to the things around you... If you use them unwisely, you commit treachery against My world, you commit murder and robbery against My property... With this call He defends the greatest and the smallest against you and grants the greatest and the smallest a right against your presumptuousness.” (Horeb, London: Soncino Press, 1962, chap. 56, #397)

We find that the Sages prohibited burning wood from olive trees and grape vines on the altar. According to one opinion this was to avoid air pollution, since these woods burn with a great deal of smoke. (Baba Kama 82b)

In Sefer HaChinuch, Rabbi Aaron Halevi of Barcelona writes, “This is the way of pious and elevated people... they will not waste even a mustard seed, and they are distressed at every ruination and spoilage they see, and if they are able to save, they will save anything from destruction with all of their power... Every person is obligated to master his inclinations and conquer his desires [to exploit and consume].” (Sefer HaChinuch 529)

Judaism’s attitude toward protecting nature is not just for tangible results in the present; the Torah also teaches to plan preservation strategies for the future. The Talmud relates that Choni HaMe’agel was walking on the road. He saw a man planting a carob tree. He asked the man, “How long until this tree will produce fruit?” He answered that it will take seventy years. Choni asked him, “Are you sure that you’ll still be around in seventy years?” The man replied, “Just as my fathers planted for me, so will I plant for my children.” (Ta’anit 23b)

We see from all these sources that we must take responsibility for maintaining and preserving G-d’s Creation not only for the here and now, but also for the benefit of posterity. This is something that must be taken very seriously, and we are required to follow the guidance of the experts in taking practical measures of conservation and preservation to save the world from irresponsible and destructive consumption.

WHO GETS THE PRIZE?

Question: I recently bought a few raffle tickets for the lottery of a charitable organization. Some time later I met a friend whom I invited to share in this mitzvah by buying one of the raffle tickets from me. His raffle ticket turned out to be the winner of the grand prize of an expensive automobile. Upon investigation I discovered that the drawing of the winning raffle ticket had taken place before I had sold it to my friend so that the sale was made on a mistaken premise since I never would have sold a raffle ticket that won such a prize. What do our authorities say about a case like this?

Answer: A somewhat similar case is found in the Talmud (*Ketubot* 97a). In the Babylonian city of Nehardoa there was such a sudden severe shortage of bread that many people sold their homes in order to purchase grain. It subsequently became known that at the time of the sale some ships loaded with grain and headed for the city had been held up by the swelling waters of the river. Those who sold their homes claimed that had they known that there was such

imminent relief from their famine they would never have sold their homes. When the case came before Rabbi Nachman he ruled in their favor and nullified the sales that were based on false premises.

Although this Talmudic ruling would seem to indicate that the sale of the winning raffle ticket was null and void, it should be noted that a case exactly like yours once came before one of the great halachic authorities of a previous generation, Rabbi Shalom Mordechai Schwadron, the rav of the European community of Brezhan. He distinguished between the case in the Talmud and the one of the raffle ticket. There was no way that the people who sold their homes could have become aware of the imminent arrival of the grain-bearing ships, and the sale was therefore made on false premises. In the case of the raffle ticket, however, it was very possible for the seller to find out if his raffle ticket won the prize before selling it and if he failed to do so it was an indication that he was selling the raffle ticket under all circumstances so that the sale was a valid one.

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

MIRACLE ON THE BRIDGE

“G-d saved me. There is no other explanation for such miracles.” This is what 20-year old Roman Koyrakh had to say about his miraculous escape from certain death when the car he was driving plunged into the Mississippi River following the tragic collapse of the I-35W Bridge in Minneapolis in early August.

This former student at Torah Academy, a yeshiva in suburban Minneapolis, heard a loud bang and felt the car

buckling. As dust and smoke surrounded him and he realized that he was plunging headfirst into the water, he quickly said the *Shema* prayer customarily said before dying. But he did manage to free himself from his seatbelt and open the car door. Upon reaching dry land he was taken to a hospital where he was treated for minor injuries.

Truly a miracle on the bridge!

LOVE OF THE LAND - THE WISDOM

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

THE ORIGINAL ALIYA

Although historians refer to the arrival of Jews in Eretz Israel a century ago as the “First Aliya” the truly original aliya took place almost four millennia ago. This was when the Patriarch Avraham was commanded by G-d “Go out from your country, from your birthplace and from your father’s house to the land that I will show you.” (*Bereishet* 12:1)

As we hear these words read in the synagogue this



Shabbat we should take note of the fact that Avraham was not told where this promised land was and yet he headed in the direction of the Land of Canaan which was to eventually become Eretz Israel.

In his commentary on the Torah, Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman (Ramban) suggests that Avraham instinctively knew that the Land of Canaan was the G-dly place which would be given to him for his spiritual perfection.