

OHRNET

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PARSHA INSIGHTS

SCHNORRERS!

“G-d said to Avram, ‘Go for yourself...’” (12:1)

Opening his front door, the Rabbi found himself face to face with the local priest. “Rabbi, may I have a few words with you?” asked the priest. “Of course, Father,” replied the Rabbi somewhat nervously.

“Rabbi,” began the priest, “It must be evident to you that in this town we are plagued by thieves. Scarcely a day passes without one of my flock coming to me bemoaning the fact that his house has been broken into. On the other hand, I have noticed that thieves do not bother you Jews nearly as much.”

“Father, you are correct.”

“Yes, but why is that?” inquired the priest.

“Look at this little box here on the side of my doorpost” said the Rabbi. “It’s called a *mezusa*. We Jews believe that when we put a *mezusa* on the entrances to our houses, the Holy One, may His Name be blessed, protects both us and our property.”

“In that case”, replied the priest, “I must have one!”

Not wishing to be the cause of an incipient pogrom, the Rabbi reluctantly handed over a *mezusa* to the priest.

Some two weeks later the Rabbi was awakened by the sound of someone pounding violently on his door. Dressing himself hastily, he made his way down the stairs. “Who’s there?” the Rabbi asked tremulously. “Open the door! Open the door!” screamed a voice on the other side. Leaving the door on the latch, the Rabbi cracked the door wide enough to see the priest stand-

ing in front of him, his eyes wild with great distraught.

“What happened?” asked the terrified Rabbi, “Robbers?”

“No!” screamed the priest, “Schnorrers!”

If there’s one thing of which the world does not accuse the Jewish People, it’s being mean to our own.

The word “charity” does not exist in Hebrew. “Charity” implies that I’m doing the recipient a favor. What the world calls “charity”, the Jew called *tzedaka*. *Tzedaka* comes from the same root as the word *tzekek*, meaning “right and correct”. Giving to those in need is simply doing what’s right — it’s obligatory, not self-congratulatory.

In mystical thought, Avraham, the progenitor of the Jewish People, epitomizes the quality of kindness. It’s not by coincidence that Avraham was also the first person to look at the world and see in it the existence of G-d.

What is the connection between being kind and belief in a Creator?

Kindness means giving of myself. If I sensitize myself to the act of giving, it’s a small step from that sensitivity to seeing existence as the biggest gift there is.

And that gift has to have a Giver.

Avraham’s belief in G-d came from his kindness, from being a giver. It’s no wonder then that the people who proclaim G-d’s existence should have an unparalleled number of individuals and institutions that dispense kindness without measure.

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

PREP FOR THE TEST

Difficult challenges face Jews in Israel. Threats from enemies outside the country and from terrorists within its borders present the Jewish homeland with tests of its faith in the Creator Who gave this Land to His chosen people.

This week's Torah portion that describes many of the tests to which the Patriarch Avraham was subjected serves as a sort of an explanation how Jews in all gener-

ations were prepared for their own tests. Our commentaries point out that every one of Avraham's ten tests was a microcosm of what his descendants would face. This success in passing every one of them with perfect faith in Heaven endowed all of his progeny with the strength to pass their own tests with a faith in Heaven that will secure Israel forever.

לע"נ
מרת יוטא רחל בת ר' יחזקאל יצחק ע"ה
ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

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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.

- Honoring parents with service – at whose expense?
- Correcting a father on a point of Torah
- When honoring a parent or Sage is waived and honor shown to the aged
- Which *mitzvot* are women obligated to fulfill
- When Jews are considered the children of G-d
- Sacrificial services restricted to males only
- *Mitzvot* relating only to Eretz Yisrael and universal ones
- Three agricultural prohibitions and where they apply
- The reward for fulfilling *mitzvot* and avoiding sin
- The heroism of Sages in resisting temptation
- The mere thought of acting in regard to fulfilling a mitzvah or committing sin
- How the world hangs on the single performance of one person
- Torah study or mitzvah fulfillment — which is greater?
- Effecting marriage through an agent
- The priority of doing a mitzvah by yourself
- Torah source for the concept of agency in regard to marriage, divorce and other matters

WHEN THE THOUGHT COUNTS

The reward of long life promised by the Torah for honoring parents and performing the mitzvah of sending away the mother bird before taking her fledglings, contends Rabbi Yaakov, refers to life in the World-to-Come. As proof that the reward is not for long life in this world, the Sage cites an incident he witnessed.

A father asked his son to climb up to a high place and send away the mother bird and bring him the fledglings. The son did as he was told and on his way down fell and died. The Sages challenge Rabbi Yaakov's conclusion that this proved that the long life promised as a reward for these *mitzvot* did not relate to life in this world. Perhaps the son was contemplating idol worship, and even though G-d does not punish one for mere contemplation of sin in general, He does punish for mere contemplation of idol worship.

This raises a question, however, in regard to something

which Rabbeinu Osher (ROSH) writes in explanation of what the *gemara* (*Mesechta Rosh Hashana* 17b) states regarding the twice repeated Name of G-d in the Thirteen Attributes of Divine mercy: "I am the G-d of mercy before one sins and I am the G-d of mercy after one sins and repents."

What need is there for mercy before one sins? asks the Rosh. One answer is that even if one only contemplated idol worship he is forgiven by the mercy of G-d. This seems to run counter to what our *gemara* says. A fine distinction is made, however, by the *Korban Netanel* in his commentary on the Rosh. If someone contemplated idol worship and had the opportunity to carry out his thought but succeeded in resisting the temptation he will not be punished for the thought alone. In the case of Rabbi Yaakov it is possible that the son was intending to actually worship an idol had he not fallen to his death and he therefore forfeited the reward of long life in this world.

• *Kiddushin* 39b

What the SAGES Say

"The first thing a person will be held accountable for on his day of Heavenly judgment is whether he fulfilled his duty of studying Torah."

• *Rabbi Hamnuna - Kiddushin* 40b

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A POINTED QUESTION

From: B. Altman

Dear Rabbi,
There is a custom to remove knives from the table before Birkat Hamazon (Blessing after Meals). What is the reason for this, and does it include plastic knives?

Dear B. Altman,

There are two main reasons for removing knives prior to Birkat Hamazon.

The Talmud relates that a person was once reciting Birkat Hamazon. When he came to the third blessing in which we ask G-d to rebuild Jerusalem and the Holy Temple, he became so distraught at the thought of the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile, that he picked up a knife from the table and stabbed himself.

Because of this event, we remove the knives on the one hand to recall how strongly we should feel about the destruction of the Temple and desire its restoration, while removing the possibility that the event described in the Talmud be repeated.

It's for this reason that the knives are not removed for

blessing after the meals on Shabbat: to indicate that on such a holy day as the Sabbath we are not to feel sad, nor are we capable of being so sad as to allow such an incident to happen.

Another reason for removing knives is based on the idea that a table one dines on is compared to the altar in the Holy Temple. Just as it is forbidden to use any iron utensil when hewing the stones for the altar, so too, we remove any metal knives from the table/altar prior to Birkat Hamazon.

According to both reasons above, one would not have to remove plastic knives. Regarding the first reason, plastic knives aren't 'lethal' in the classic sense so they are not considered dangerous in this context. Regarding the second, the concern is specifically regarding metal instruments, but knives of other materials should be okay.

Rabbi Moshe Shternbuch, *shlita*, was asked this question and concurred that one need not remove plastic knives before Birkat Hamazon.

Sources:

- Shulchan Aruch 180:5
- Aruch HaShulchan 180:5
- Rokeach 332

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it was recalled that a philanthropist by the name of Mendel Rand had established this neighborhood and made its homes available rent-free to Torah scholars. Many distinguished Torah greats, including Rabbi Isser Zalman Meltzer, rosh hayeshiva of Yeshivat Eitz Chaim and father-in-law of Rabbi Aaron Kotler, lived in Batei Rand and provided it with a shield of safety.

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GUARDING TONGUE — AND EARS

Question: I have recently made a serious effort to avoid speaking or hearing *lashon hara* –the slander and gossip that is so sinful and socially harmful. But I inevitably find myself in the company of fellow workers or neighbors who are indulging in sinful speech. What is the right thing to do?

Answer: One of the greatest challenges to the person who wishes to “guard his tongue” is how to avoid *lashon*

hara without losing friends.

Nevertheless, it is worth making an effort to save yourself and others from this terrible talk by calling their attention to the vulgar aspect of speaking about others. If you find it impossible to change the subject, the right thing to do is to simply excuse yourself from participation in this gabfest by declaring that you have made a personal resolution to not only guard your tongue but your ears as well from being polluted by *lashon hara*.

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY _____

ROOM AT THE TOP DOWN UNDER

“I’m sorry, sir, but you cannot carry that large item onto the plane. It must be stored in the luggage compartment.”

This was the stern message given by the Australian airline clerk to a Jew who was carrying a Sefer Torah for delivery to another city in the Land Down Under.

“This is a sacred item which I insist on holding on to during the flight,” came the very determined reply.

As impatient people in the line were calling for service, the clerk decided to end the discussion by warning the passenger that he would never get past security and cer-

tainly not be allowed to get on the plane with the Sefer Torah. Both at security and at boarding the same exchange occurred and he finally reached his seat holding onto his precious cargo.

Now it was the turn of the stewardess to order him to either place the Sefer Torah under his seat or in the overhead luggage compartment. When he refused to relinquish his hold she summoned the pilot. He took one look at the Sefer Torah and announced:

“A Sefer Torah! Please bring it to the cockpit where I can put it in a nice safe place right next to my *tefillin*.”

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