

# OHRNET

SHABBAT PARSHAT LECH LECHA · 8 CHESHVAN 5772 · NOV. 5, 2011 · VOL. 19 NO. 3

## PARSHA INSIGHTS

### TO BE A BLESSING

*“And I will make of you a great nation; I will bless you, and make your name great, and you will be a blessing.”*

One of the more interesting reactions to Gilad Shalit’s release from more than five years of incarceration in Gaza was a ‘tweet’ from an Arab in Syria who said that the Israelis were prepared to give up 1,000 people to save one life, but their government treated its citizens’ lives as though they were worthless.

The Jewish People are very often held to a higher and double standard.

In this case, we ourselves held ourselves to a higher standard. And so it should be. If nothing else, Shalit’s release showed the world the sanctity with which the Jewish People prize human life and freedom.

***“And I will make of you a great nation; I will bless you, and make your name great, and you will be a blessing.”***

The above sentence is part of the first recorded communication between G-d and man. The beginning of the relationship. As it is the beginning, these words must also con-

tain the essence of that relationship. For all beginnings contains essence. A seed is not just the beginning of an oak, it is also its essence.

When G-d spoke to Avraham, He promised him many things: that he would be a great nation; that he would be blessed and that his name would be made great. However all of this was predicated on a single condition — that Avraham would be a reason for people to bless G-d. This was to be the essence of the relationship between G-d and man. That through his every action, man would sanctify G-d’s name. That he would bring a blessing to the lips of the world.

Our actions are scrutinized by the world. If we are held to a higher — and sometimes double — standard, whether as individuals or as a nation, it is because the world recognizes subconsciously that our job in this world is ‘to be a blessing’, to sanctify G-d’s name.

## 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 handmaiden, 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.

## WHOSE LAND IS IT?

One of the stickiest points in the Israel-Arab conflict is the stubborn refusal of the Palestinian Authority to recognize Israel as the homeland of the Jewish People.

While this is not surprising in light of the historical persecution of Jews by radical Moslems, what is shocking is the attitude of some Jews in Israel and throughout the world that perhaps the Arabs are right in their claims.

These radical, assimilated liberals unfortunately ignore the

Divine promise which all synagogue-going Jews will hear this Shabbat: "To your offspring I will give this land." (*Bereishet* 12:7)

It is not enough that a prime minister eloquently recalls this promise as he addresses the US Congress and the UN. It is the responsibility of every Jew to internalize that Eretz Yisrael was given to our people, and even if we have to make some compromises for the sake of survival, we must always keep in mind that it will be ours forever.

## LOVE OF THE LAND

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

### ERETZ ZAVAT CHALAV U'DVASH – A LAND FLOWING WITH MILK AND HONEY

During a visit to the Bnei Brak of Talmudic times the Sage Rami bar Yechezkel observed a scene which offered him a graphic understanding of the meaning of a "land of milk and honey" which is the description given in the Torah of Eretz Yisrael.

He saw goats grazing beneath fig trees. The



honey oozing from the very ripe figs merged with the milk dripping from the bountiful goats to form a large stream of milk and honey.

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*This publication contains words of Torah. Please treat it with due respect.*

## 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 - G-d 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.

- The mitzvah of giving the *kohen* the first shearing of the flock – where and when it applies
- Why it does not apply to animals of the Sanctuary
- Partnership with a Jew or non-Jew in regard to a number of *mitzvot*
- Comparison of the mitzvah of first shearing with *terumah* and other *mitzvot*
- To which animals does this mitzvah apply and what is the minimum amount of such animals
- How much must the sheared wool weight
- Shearing purchased from a Jew or non-Jew
- The mitzvah of sending away the mother bird before taking her offspring
- When it does not apply and why
- A nest on the sea, on the head of a man, or of a bird forbidden to eat
- If the mother bird is only hovering over the nest or if the nest contains only one bird or egg
- Is the offender who takes the birds without first sending the mother liable for lashes
- The reward for this and other *mitzvot*

## MINIMUM AND MAXIMUM

The *mishna* in *Mesechta Peah* quoted in the last perek of our *mesechta* lists the *mitzvot* which do not have a Torah designated minimum requirement. The mitzvah of tithing *terumah* does not appear in this list despite the fact that as regards Torah law one can fulfill his obligation by giving the *kohen* one kernel of grain and it is only by Rabbinic law that he is required to give more.

Rashi explains this omission by pointing out that the amount of tithing established by the Sages is hinted at in cer-

tain passages and therefore does not fit in with the other *mitzvot* for which there are no such scriptural hints.

Tosefot cites the Talmud Yerushalmi's approach to the problem which is to point out that all the *mitzvot* mentioned in the *mishna* (*peah*, *bikurim*, *raion*) have neither minimum requirements nor maximum limits. *Terumah*, on the other hand, has a maximum limit, for if one wishes to give away his entire harvest as *terumah*, it will not become *terumah*. This is so because tithing means giving away a portion of your crops but not the entirety.

• *Chullin* 137b

## WHAT THE Sages SAY

"Those who are involved in the performance of a mitzvah will be safe from any danger."

• *Rabbi Elazar - Chullin* 142a

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# WHERE CREDIT IS DUE

## Reflections on the Return of Gilad Shalit

BY RABBI MENDEL WEINBACH

“Welcome home, Gilad!” The joy with which the Israeli public welcomed the safe return of Gilad Shalit after five years of captivity can certainly be seen as an expression of the profound concern of all Jews for the well being of a Jew suffering in captivity. Without taking a side in the great debate over whether it was worth the price of releasing so many terrorists with blood on their hands, we must view the widespread concern for this soldier as an echo of the concern shown for Lot by his uncle Avraham when he learned of his captivity. Our Patriarch immediately went to war against four mighty kings in order to liberate him.

As in all other matters, Avraham instilled in the genes of his descendants a concern for a captive and a determination to liberate him.

Along with the concern comes credit.

While some claim credit for making an extremely diffi-

cult decision, others criticize them for doing so under media pressure or for ulterior motives. Perhaps these critics should learn a lesson from the credit which our great teacher Moshe gave to the man who initiated the rescue of Lot by informing Avraham of his captivity. When approaching a war with Og, King of Bashan, Moshe needed special reassurance from G-d that he would be victorious because he feared that the merit of informing Avraham would make Og invincible. Og, our Sages teach us, had the ulterior motive of enticing Avraham into a war in which he would be slain, thus enabling him to marry Sarah — a powerful lesson that credit is due even where the motive is not as pure as the act.

One sad note about the return of Gilad is that no one, neither the family nor the officials, gave any credit to the ultimate “Liberator of captives” by offering a simple thanks to G-d.

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## A STANDING QUESTION

**From: David**

Dear Rabbi,

*I have a question that recently had practical implications. We were sitting in a restaurant and some older people walked in as they had a booking. The restaurant management confused the booking and it turns out that there was no space for them to be seated. They were angry that we as the younger generation did not show "derech erez" by getting up for them and offering our table. We were surprised at this and my question is, is there an obligation to get up for older people in a commercial setting where we are paying customers like all other customers? What is the halacha and would there be a difference between a bus situation and a restaurant?*

Dear David,

First of all, it's important to distinguish between "old" and "sick." The Torah teaches us to honor the elderly even if they are healthy, and to help sick people even if they are young. So, in order not to confuse these issues, let's assume we are talking about healthy 70 year olds who need no physical assistance. Assuming this, you were not obligated to give up your table. Depending on the situation, however, it may have been a good thing to do.

The Torah says, "Rise before an old person, and honor the presence of a sage." The Shulchan Aruch defines "old" as age 70. If a 70 year-old person walks by, you must stand. This is not in order to offer him your seat, but rather as a way of showing honor by recognizing his presence.

The obligation to show honor is not limited to standing up, but can also involve giving your seat, helping with a package, or otherwise offering assistance. However, one is not required to incur a financial loss as a result. Since there is a definite monetary value in having a seat in a restaurant, you were therefore not required to offer your seat. Although a similar argument can be made for a bus seat, as you have paid for the right to sit there (again, assuming the older people are physically able to stand in relative comfort), one should still stand for an elderly person on a bus or subway since the loss of forfeiting one's seat is usually relatively small.

That having been said, keep in mind that "*derech erez kadma l'Torah*" — good manners and character traits are a prerequisite to observing the Torah. Depending on the situation, simple etiquette and common sense may require you to stand. This is especially true if you are a visibly observant Jew, because people tend to generalize about others based on their dress. Therefore, as such, you are "Judaism's ambassador" and should generally keep to a higher standard than the letter of the law requires.

In the case of a restaurant booking, I don't think this applies, as it is normal to be seated on a reservation or on a "first come first served" basis, and one is not expected to relinquish his seat for another. In a pizza shop, or other informal setting where people "eat and run," you probably should offer your seat.

Sources:

- *Leviticus 19:32*
- *Shulchan Aruch Yoreh De'ah 244:1*

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## TALKING TO THE WALLS?

**Question:** I am frequently asked to deliver lectures on Torah subjects to audiences who are interested in spiritual strengthening. What happens if through some mistake in notification hardly anyone shows up? Is there still an obligation for me to deliver my talk?

**Answer:** A beautiful story is told about a renowned Jerusalem rabbi who was called upon to deliver a talk for a group of Jews in the city of Holon. Some fifty Jews had expressed an interest in gathering for this talk in a private home. At the last minute the scheduled speaker couldn't make it and an emergency call came to Rabbi Binyamin Finkel to fill in for him.

Rabbi Finkel jotted down the address and proceeded to Holon. After a long search he finally found the home he was looking for and knocked on the door. His wonder at not hearing the noise he would expect to hear from inside a home filled with 50 people was surpassed only by the failure of anyone to respond to his repeated knocking. Just as he was about to give up in despair, the door opened slightly and there stood the host of the lecture in pajamas.

"Wasn't there supposed to be a lecture here?" asked the Rabbi.

"I'm so sorry," was the embarrassed reply, "but I forgot about the entire affair and failed to notify anyone about the right date." When he expressed deep regret that the Rabbi had come all the way from Jerusalem he was surprised to hear this response: "You are as important to me as 50 people. I am ready to study Torah with you in the time period set for my talk and if there is anyone else in your family who wishes to join us he is welcome to do so."

The offer was gladly accepted and the host's young son joined them for a very special hour of study that included the host's first introduction to Talmud. Twenty years later Rabbi Finkel met a Jew in Jerusalem whom he did not recognize. The stranger identified himself as the Jew in Holon whom he had introduced to Torah study. He was so moved by that experience that he and his son completely dedicated themselves to Torah study and now the two of them have established a kollel for married scholars in Jerusalem. All because the Rabbi didn't leave.

## THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

### THE INSEPARABLE CONNECTION

The head of the Inquisition court of Spanish priests was about to sign another execution order against a Jew who had been caught by Torquemadas agents practicing his religion by praying in *tallit* and *tefillin*.

This time, however, his hand was unable to move. He tried again and again to pen the death sentence but to no avail. The shock of this paralysis sent his mind racing back to his childhood and he recalled being kidnapped by agents of the church from his Jewish home and being raised in a monastery to become a priest. His superior intelligence was quickly recognized and he was promoted from post to post until he became the chief judge of an ecclesiastical court trying Jews who refused to accept the dictates

of the church. He had been separated so long from his family that he hardly remembered them. But now it occurred to him that the Jew whose death sentence he found so difficult to sign might be his own father.

He quickly summoned the condemned prisoner to his chambers and asked him if he had a son who was kidnapped by church agents as a child. When the answer was affirmative, he broke into tears and embraced the man in chains, crying, "Father, Father!"

Not only did he acquit the man he discovered to be his father, but also he soon found a way to abandon the church and return to his Jewish roots.

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