

OHRNET

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PARSHA INSIGHTS

RELIGIOUS FANATICS

“And it occurred, as he was about to enter Egypt, he said to his wife Sarai, ‘See now, I have known that you are a woman of beautiful appearance. And it shall occur, when the Egyptians will see you, they will say, ‘This is his wife!’ - then they will kill me...” (12:11-12)

An oft-repeated litany characterizes Orthodox Jews as overly zealous in their observance. Or as they say in Yiddish, they are “*fer-frumt!*”

Of course it goes without saying that everyone who is less religious than me is an atheist and everyone who is more religious than me is a religious fanatic. That’s human nature. But really, do the Orthodox have to be quite so ORTHODOX? Couldn’t they lighten up just a little around here? Why be so fastidious, so FRUM?

The following is a quote from no less than the Vilna Gaon: “In every generation new barriers need to be erected, for every generation is less than its predecessor and the *eruv rav* (descendants of the Egyptians who left Egypt at the time of the Exodus) grow stronger. Therefore, it is necessary to barricade anew the breaches (in morality) perpetrated by the *eruv rav*. This is what the Torah means when it says “*Guard my guardings!*” (Vayikra 29:9)

The author Jacob Bronowski wrote a famous TV series and book called “The Ascent of Man.” In classical Jewish thought the reverse is true. From Sinai and onwards our story has been “The Descent of Man.” Every generation steps down another rung on the spiritual and moral ladder.

“And it occurred, as he was about to enter Egypt, he said to

his wife Sarai, ‘See now, I have known that you are a woman of beautiful appearance.’”

How was it possible that only now Avraham recognized Sarah’s beauty? The Arizal says that up till this point in time Avraham had no concept of physicality – like Adam before he sinned. However, as he approached Egypt, the world center of decadence, even his lofty spiritual level lessened until he perceived good and evil – the domain of physicality. Sensing this change in himself, Avraham recognized the depths of impurity that was Egypt. He now sensed that it was indeed possible for man to sink to murder in order to satisfy his physical desires.

Like Avraham, the closer we get to our own little Egypts - the larger our cars, our houses and our physical well-being loom in our lives - the more we know that we need to build stronger and stronger fences against a world that celebrates immorality and conspicuous consumption. And that’s far from being ‘*fer-frumt.*’

• Sources: *Emes L’Yaakov*; *Biur HaGra l’Tikunei Zohar Chadash 83:3 in Mipirushei HaGra al HaTorah*;
thanks to Rabbi Chaim Zvi Senter

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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 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 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.

LOVE OF THE LAND

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

HILLEL

“...One who is ashamed to ask cannot learn, and one who is quick to anger cannot teach.” — *Hillel (Avot 2:5)*

One who hesitates to ask others to explain something vague or puzzling which he has read or heard because he is afraid he will look foolish will stay foolish.

One who is easily angered is not suited to be a



teacher or a spiritual leader of a community. Anger deprives him at that moment of the wisdom required to explain things properly, and therefore confuses both talker and listener. Furthermore, how can a student be expected to pay attention to someone who is hostile to him? “The words of the wise are heard when they are gentle.”

• *Tiferet Yisrael*

לעילוי נשמות
מרת אסתר בשה בת ר' משה יחזקאל ע"ה
אשה יראת ה' ובעלת חסד
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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 - 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.

PESACHIM 114 - 121

“Mizmor l’David” (a song to David) – this teaches that he (David) first said a ‘shira’ (song) and then the Divine Presence rested upon him; this teaches you that the Divine presence does not rest upon a person when he is sad, frivolous or wasting time, but only when he is in a state of happiness of a mitzvah.”

This *beraita* is taught on our *daf* to inform us of the essential connection between achieving a joyous condition from performing a mitzvah and thus becoming a vessel fit to receive the Divine Presence. Rashi explains that the *Tana* derives this concept from the order of the first two words of the first verse of the Psalm – Mizmor and David. First comes the *mizmor*, the song of mitzvah that brings about happiness, and then the Divine Presence dwells in that person who is in the appropriate spiritual state.

• *Pesachim 117a*

“What is meant by the verse (that we say in Hallel), ‘Let all the nations praise G-d, for His loving-kindness to us is so great’ (Tehillim 117:1-2) – is the fact that G-d does merciful acts for Klal Yisrael a reason for the other nations of the world to praise Him?”

Rebbe asked the ailing Rabbi Yishmael the son of Rabbi Yossi to share the teachings that he had learned from his father Rabbi Yossi. One of these teachings is the above question and the answer that his father supplied. “The nations of the world praise G-d for the acts of might and wonder He does throughout the world, and therefore all the more so should we – His Jewish People – praise G-d for the even greater kindness and mercy He has shown us.” (*Gemara* according to the Rashbam)

Abarbanel

ON PARSHAT LECH LECHA

By Rabbi Pinchas Kasnett

Abarbanel offers three reasons why Avram had to leave Haran. First of all, the region was full of heretics who did not recognize G-d’s existence. Secondly, these idolaters — who were his friends, neighbors and relatives — were opposed to his “proselytizing”. They saw what had happened to him in Ur Kasdim, where he was miraculously saved from a fiery furnace, and forbade him from continuing his teaching. Thirdly, Avram was reluctant to correct the behavior of his father and brother who were manufacturers of idols. G-d does not tell him explicitly where to go, in order to prevent his family from following him.

Realizing that such a drastic move would be difficult for Avram, G-d assures him that he will make him “a great nation” — meaning he will have offspring who will be more dear to him than his father and brother, upon whom he had always relied. Secondly, to replace the friends and associates who had helped him to prosper, G-d assures him that “I will bless you and make your name great.” G-d is the ultimate source of all prosperity. G-d also assures him that “I will bless those who bless you, and he who curses you I will curse”.

“Those who bless you” is in the plural, indicating that they will be far more numerous than those who curse. Finally, not only will Avram benefit from the new land, but those who accept his teachings will benefit as well — “and all the families of the land will be blessed through you.”

How then does Avram know where to go? Abarbanel offers five reasons:

1. Avram knew that Canaan had been the ultimate destination of the family when they had left Ur Kasdim.
2. Avram knew that the very air of Canaan imparted wisdom.
3. Avram knew that Canaan was in the portion bequeathed to Shem, the most righteous of Noach’s sons and that part of it was ruled by Malcheitzedek, a man committed to monotheism.
4. Avram knew that Canaan was under G-d’s direct Divine Providence.
5. Given that there was a tradition that Adam was buried there it makes sense that Avram would be drawn to that area.

IS A J FOR J A JEW?

From: Caren

Dear Rabbi,

I have a friend who is a Christian minister. At times, he will tell me about an article he has read regarding the so-called "Messianic Jews". I have tried to get across to him that these so-called "Messianic Jews" are just another sect of Christianity, that the minute someone says J is G-d, that person has essentially disavowed their Judaism.

He argues that once someone has been born Jewish one is always Jewish. I concede the point only in the case where someone who was born Jewish, then converted, but was nevertheless arrested and taken into the concentration camps. Otherwise, the person is considered a Christian. Further, the person would not be able to make aliyah under the Law of Return.

Am I correct in my arguments? What else can I say to this gentleman who, otherwise, in his own way, does try to do good in the world?

Dear Caren,

This is a very interesting discussion, and in some points you are correct, in others, he.

You are right that, according to Jewish standards, what's referred to as "Messianic Judaism" is absolutely Christianity. Therefore, a Jew who ascribes to this denomination of Christianity has certainly disavowed Judaism.

On the other hand, your friend is right that a person who is Jewish according to the halacha, either by birth or conversion, will always be Jewish, and conversion out of Judaism does not make him "not Jewish" in the sense of being a non-Jew.

Of course, most Jews for J or Messianic Jews are not actually Jewish. Rather, they are Christians who, through various means, seek to lure Jews to Christianity. But what is the status of a person who is in fact Jewish but accepts J as the

Messiah, or who believes any of the other tenets of Christianity (or any other religion for that matter)?

Such a person is a Jewish apostate, which, as unfortunate as this is, means, while alive, he can always do teshuva and be accepted back into the fold without conversion. However, as long as he does not do teshuva he is held accountable for all the obligations of Judaism while also being denied all of its privileges.

The point you make about the Israeli Law of Return is an interesting one. It's true that the State of Israel considers "Messianic Judaism" to be Christianity for the purposes of *aliya* such that an adherent of this group cannot claim citizenship on this basis alone. But this is irrelevant to our discussion since, unfortunately, this Law's definition of being Jewish is not according to the halacha, and many people with only a very distant and tenuous connection to being Jewish are accepted by the Law of Return.

In fact, ironically, the very non-Jewish nature of this Law has, in an absurd way, enabled certain adherents of "Messianic Judaism" to be accepted as Jewish citizens of the State of Israel. Since the Law grants Israeli citizenship even to those with a solely patrilineal connection to Judaism, excluding in the conversion clause only a "person who has been a Jew and has voluntarily changed his religion", non-Jewish Messianics with Jewish fathers but non-Jewish mothers have been able to thereby gain citizenship as Jews based on the non-halachic Law of Return. They thereby circumvent the otherwise exclusionary conversion clause on the basis that they had never been Jews according to the halacha to be barred on account of their adherence to "Messianic Judaism" i.e., Christianity.

According to this exemplary decision of the Israeli Supreme Court (April 16, 2008), Messianics, considered by Israeli Law to be adherents of Christianity, have been accepted as Jewish citizens of the State of Israel under the Law of Return, enjoying all the rights and privileges thereof, presumably grateful for the opportunity to inspire Jews, not only internationally, but now also within Israel, of their doctrines.

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THE FIRST PRAYER

“Now all the trees of the field were not yet on the earth, and all the herbs of the field had not yet sprouted, for G-d had not sent rain upon the earth and there was no man to work the land.” (Gen. 2:6)

Rashi explains this verse, based on Talmud (*Chullin 60b*), that when G-d finished creating the world the earth remained desolate until Adam was created. Once Adam realized that both he and the world depended on rain for their survival, Adam began praying. Once the rain began to fall, trees and plants appeared on the earth.

Why did G-d wait for Adam to pray before He sent rain? Furthermore, why was man needed to work the land? G-d could surely have maintained the trees and plant life without man's assistance!

Chazal explain in the Zohar that man is referred to as a “miniature world” since he was endowed with a portion of all the worlds — a soul from the upper worlds and a body that was formed from the four corners of the earth. Consequently, man was charged with the duty to turn to G-d and pray on behalf of all of creation.

Working the Land

Man's first expression of working for the betterment of the world was not by actually cultivating the land, but rather by

praying for it. Why, then, is it stated in this verse: “and there was no man to work the land”?

The Torah calls prayer “the work of the heart” (*Ta'anit 2a*). It follows that the word “work” in the above verse can be understood as a reference to Adam's prayer. Accordingly, the phrase “There was no man to work the land” teaches us that there was no one to pray for the land.

In the Beginning

Before man committed the first sin, he was not required to do any physical work. All he had to do was adhere to G-d's instructions; namely, to fulfill the *mitzvot* required of him, and to help sustain the creation through his prayers. By fulfilling these precepts, man expresses his devotion to G-d and dependence on G-d. Consequently, these deeds alone provided Adam with the necessary merit of partaking of the world's goodness.

The requirement for man to do physical work was added to his role as a punishment for his having committed the first sin. Nowadays, even though according to the natural order of things man must do physical work, one must not forget that the essential work of man is the work of the heart — i.e., prayer. Prayer serves as a testimony to man's faith in G-d and it is the true source of all G-d's blessings.

@ OHR *Profiles of Ohr Somayach Alumni and Students*

Pinchas Toshner, London, U.K. – Age: 44 Mechina Program

The Grandest Piano

“Eight times out of 10 I can do any request; that's the thing that gets to people the most.” explains marvel pianist Pinchas Toshner. Since Pinchas returned to the U.K. from Ohr Somayach he was stuck in dead-end piano jobs, playing for 5 pounds (\$7.70) an hour, including at McDonald's. Suddenly, Pinchas was given the opportunity to perform in a massive music show with worldwide musical superstars, and for good pay. Yet the show was scheduled for the first day of Succot, when such a performance is not permitted in Judaism.

Pinchas frantically called a whole list of his rabbis in hope of finding a leniency in Jewish law that might allow him to perform. Yet no such leniency was found and Pinchas faithfully watched his gateway to success float away. “I was doing the right thing but wasn't happy about it,” recounts Pinchas, having played piano at McDonald's and Burger King for the past year at the time.

Seconds after Pinchas chose Jewish observance over career

opportunity, an appointment with a sponsor landed in his lap. In that appointment Pinchas walked away with a check for *three times* the amount he would have earned for the show on Succot, plus a commitment for future help with his artistic career.

Pinchas then went to play piano for free at a shopping center which hosts a beautiful grand piano. Out of nowhere a billionaire businessman walked up to him and said, “Meet me at Hyde Park Hotel at 5 pm.” When Pinchas showed up to the luxury hotel the billionaire asked him two questions: “What kind of piano would you like?” and “How much money do you want?” Just like that, Pinchas went from fast-food piano gigs to featured entertainment at a luxury hotel with a sponsor for his album. “And it all started from doing the right thing at Succot,” says Pinchas.

According to Pinchas, what really makes a person happy is doing the right thing. But knowing what, when, and why it's right requires spiritual guidance. Pinchas says he is grateful to be connected to his rabbis for such guidance, especially Rabbi Schiller.



by Daniel Keebler