

O H R N E T

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PARSHA INSIGHTS

LIFE IN THE FAST LANE

“Go for yourself” (12:1)

Very soon, only the speed of light will limit our ability to communicate a thought, a picture, a sound or a sentence from one side of the world to the other, and beyond. The meaning of the word “distance” has changed forever.

Just as the electron has shrunk our world, so too there has been a quiet and maybe even more fundamental revolution in the way we look at travelling. We see nothing special in the fact that several hundred people can file into a large metal room and find themselves on the other side of the world in a matter of hours.

A little more than a hundred years ago, to circumnavigate the globe would have required months of arduous, dangerous and expensive effort, almost beyond our imagining. Nowadays, the major drawback in circling the earth in a plane is an aching back from sitting in a reclining chair that doesn't quite live up to its name. We have breached the last frontier. Distance has become no more than a function of time spent in a chair.

The electron and the 747 have had their impact on our culture in other ways. Our cultural mindset mandates that speed is of the essence. “How fast can I get there?” vies in importance with “Where am I going?” Immediacy has become an independent yardstick of worth. How fast is your car? Your computer?

Our age has sought to devour distance and time, rendering everything in a constant and immediate present. Now this. Now this. Now this. (Interestingly, the languages of the age - film and television and computer graphics — are languages which have trouble expressing the past and the future. They only have a present tense. Everything happens in a continuous present.)

All of this makes our spiritual development more and more challenging. Spirituality is a path. And like a path, you have to walk on it one step at a time. Your fingers cannot do

the walking on the spiritual path. You cannot download it.

Everything in the physical world is a paradigm, an incarnation, of a higher spiritual idea. Travel is the physical equivalent of the spiritual road. The quest for spirituality demands that we travel, but this journey is not a physical journey. Many make the mistake of thinking that hitchhiking around the world and experiencing different cultures will automatically make them more spiritual. The truth is that wherever you go, there you are. When your travel is only physical you just wrap up your troubles in your old kit-bag and take them with you.

Spiritual growth requires the soul to journey. Our soul must notch up the miles, not our feet. The spiritual road requires us to forsake the comfortable, the familiar ever-repeating landmarks of our personalities, and set out with an open mind and a humble soul. We must divest ourselves of the fawning icons of our own egos which we define and confine us, and journey.

Life's essential journey is that of the soul discovering its true identity. We learn this from the first two words in this week's Torah portion: “Lech lecha.” “Go to yourself.” Without vowels, these two words are written identically. When G-d took Avraham out of *Ur Kasdim* and sent him to the Land of Israel, He used those two identical words: “Lech lecha”, “Go to yourself.”

Avraham experienced ten tests in his spiritual journey. Each was exquisitely designed to elevate him to his ultimate spiritual potential. When G-d gives us a test, whether it's the death of a loved one or a financial reversal or an illness, it's always to help us grow. By conquering the obstacles in our spiritual path, be it lack of trust in G-d or selfishness or apathy, we grow in stature. We connect with the fundamental purpose of the journey, to journey away from our negative traits and reach and realize our true selves.

We “go to ourselves.”

Based on the Talmudic Sages found in the seven pages of the Talmud studied each week in the Daf Yomi cycle

SOTA 2-8

Rav Yehuda said in the name of Rav, "Forty days before the formation of the fetus, a voice from Heaven comes out and announces: 'The daughter of Ploni (so-and-so) will marry Ploni (the man whom the fetus will become); a certain house will belong to Ploni (this fetus/man); and a certain field will belong to Ploni.' "

This announcement seems to indicate a degree of predetermination in one's marriage partner and properties, a concept that the *gemara* discusses and clarifies.

Tosefos makes an interesting observation. He states that the future wife's identity is decreed at this stage, even if she has not yet been born or conceived. How does Tosefos know this? The Maharsha explains that this can be derived from the future marriage partners being listed together in the same statement that mentions the future ownership of the house and the field. These latter two events are mentioned as being dependent only upon the formation of the man. So too, the marriage partner is dependant on the formation of the man, even if the woman has not yet been conceived.

One may add that it is possible (and even probable, if the husband builds his own house as was the custom) that the particular house or the field does not yet exist (in the state he will later own it) at the time of the formation of the fetus of the man. Likewise, the announcement of his future wife may refer to a woman who has not yet come into the world.

The Maharsha adds that the novel idea of Tosefos fits well with the exact wording of the text of the *gemara*. The future wife is called "the daughter of Ploni", and not called "Plonit", since she may not be in the world yet to be referred to as "Plonit" (so-and-so). However, her father, Ploni, is already in the world.

• Sotah 2a

Rabbi Chanina from Sura said: Nowadays a man should not say to his wife, even in private, not to be alone with a certain man, since perhaps we hold like the ruling of Rabbi Yossi the son of Rabbi Yehuda who said "kinuy" (saying to one's wife not to be alone with a specific man) is valid even without witnesses, and perhaps she will be caught alone with that man, and this will result in her being forbidden forever to her husband since there is no longer (without the Beit Hamikdash) the possibility of clearing her status by means of the test of the "Sotah water" (a special drink and procedure that is a Divine test of guilt or innocence in the case of a suspected adulteress).

This teaching is codified in the Shulchan Aruch, Even Ha'Ezer 178:7. The Rema adds that if the husband nevertheless says to her not to be alone with a certain man, he should retract his statement immediately and withdraw what he originally told her. He should retract his words "immediately" since if she is indeed caught alone with that man it is too late to retract and cancel his earlier statement, and she will be forbidden to him forever (see Even Ha'Ezer 178:12).

• Sotah 2b

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Rav Bulman *zt"l*
on the
Torah Portion of the Week

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.

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Abarbanel

ON THE PARSHA

By Rabbi Pinchas Kasnett

Lech Lecha

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 dearer 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:

Avram knew that Canaan had been the ultimate destination of the family when they had left Ur Kasdim.

Avram knew that the very air of Canaan imparted wisdom.

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.

Avram knew that Canaan was under G-d's direct Divine Providence.

Given that there was a tradition that Adam was buried there it makes sense that Avram would be drawn to that area.

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.

BY RABBI YIRMIYAHU ULLMAN

THE CIRCLE DANCE

Matthew from Silver Spring, Maryland wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

I really enjoyed dancing with the Torah on Simchat Torah, and it made me wonder: Why do we have the custom of dancing round and round in a circle on Simchat Torah? Why not a "square dance" for a change? I hope you like my question and sense of humor and thanks in advance for your reply.

Dear Matthew,

The mystics teach us that G-d's Unity is revealed in this world to the extent that there is unity amongst His ambassadors in this world, the Jewish People. When His ambassadors are united, G-d's presence is detected unmistakably.

One of Judaism's great gifts to mankind is the verse in the Torah, "And you will love your neighbor as yourself." (Leviticus 19:18) When we love each other and we are genuinely happy for our friends' successes, this causes a greater perception of G-d in the world. When we do the reverse, when we see ourselves in a dog-eat-dog world, we take a step down towards the canine world. We lose that G-dly radiance which shows that He made us in His image.

On Simchat Torah we complete the annual reading of the Torah. As soon as we finish the last verse, we start again at

the beginning. Without a break. We read the Torah in a continuous cycle because the circle is a symbol of eternity. It goes on forever. It is eternal, just as the One who gave us the Torah is Eternal.

The circle symbolizes eternity. It starts nowhere and it finishes nowhere. The circle is also a symbol of equality. Every point in the circle is equidistant from its center.

There is an ancient Jewish custom to dance for hours around the *bima* (lectern) on Simchat Torah, the festival on which we celebrate the completion of the yearly Torah cycle. This circle of dancing symbolizes the eternity of the Torah and its Divine Author.

The mystics tell us that in the next world the righteous will make a circle around G-d. And they will dance around and around Him just like we do around the *bima* on Simchat Torah. There will be many different kinds of Jews represented there: Jews from Iran and Jews from Indianapolis. There will be Jews of all colors and from all walks of life. There will be those who, while keeping faith with unbroken tradition, strongly differ in the emphasis in their service of the Creator. There will be *Chassidim* and *Litvaks*, *Ashkenazim* and *Sephardim*. As they dance in that circle they will all realize that you can be 180 degrees away from your neighbor and yet you can still be equidistant from the center, from G-d.

• Sources: Rabbi Zev Leff and others

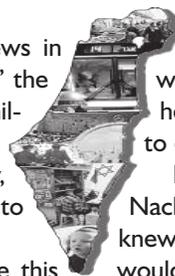
LOVE OF THE LAND

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.

SHEMONEH ESREI: SEVENTEENTH BLESSING

The seventeenth blessing marks the beginning of the third and closing section of the Shemoneh Esrei, where we offer up words of thanksgiving and departure as we take leave. Here is a passage from the Talmud elaborating on the essential nature of the three sections in our Shmoneh Esrei prayer:

Rabbi Chanina said, "In the first three blessings one is likened to a servant who offers praise before his master; in the middle blessings he is like a servant requesting an allotment from his master; and in the last three blessings he is like a servant who has received his allotment from his master."

Of these three parts, the final section presents a difficulty. When saying this section it seems obvious that the worshipper has not yet received his requests, for he only made them a very brief time ago. As such, what exactly is he thanking G-d for? It is not possible to answer that the worshipper is thanking G-d for deciding to grant his request, since he does not yet know whether G-d has in fact decided to do so.

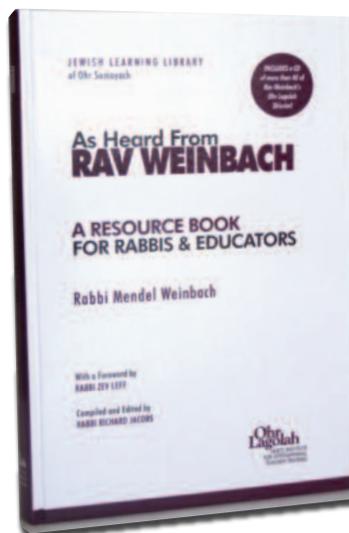
The answer is that one who prays to G-d must walk away from his prayer as if he has already been granted that which he has requested. But this appears difficult to understand. What if in the end the person does not get what he asked

for? Would his words of thanks be uttered in vein?

No. When one prays, he is meant to be thankful, hopeful and understanding. On the one hand, he should display hope that his request will be granted. However, if in the end it isn't, he must accept that outcome as well without regret. One must be grateful for the opportunity to have been able to approach G-d with his request, knowing that a decision not to grant his request is also for the best.

From the above we see that prayer is not merely about getting what we are asking for, since in many instances we are not granted our request. Rather prayer is about approaching G-d, displaying our total dependency and trust in Him to take care of our needs. Accordingly, we thank G-d both for giving us the opportunity to approach Him with our requests, and for the love and care that we receive from Him.

Based on this we can understand why we continue to beseech G-d over and over for the same thing. In each request there is merit. In fact, the more we persist and continue to ask, the greater is our display of trust in G-d. Accordingly, we can now understand why we are in fact encouraged to continue praying to G-d even if we do not see answers.



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WINE AND CANDLELIGHT, WITH A TWIST

Oliver is a poor orphan, who lives in squalid conditions, working day and night to earn his keep. He finds it particularly difficult to keep Shabbat, as the boss of his workhouse is not sympathetic to Jews, to say the least. One day, he is “saved” from his toil and strife by a certain Mr. Sowerberry, who takes him on as an apprentice and gives him room and board. He also respects Oliver’s Jewish beliefs and allows him time off to keep Shabbat. Mr. Sowerberry is even nice enough to give him a few pennies each Friday, to cover the cost of a little kosher wine, so that Oliver can make Kiddush on Shabbat. The money is only enough for a small amount of wine, but it’s enough to do the mitzvah, so Oliver is delighted.

Time passes and Oliver begins to learn more about his Judaism, studying a little each morning and night. While learning the Code of Jewish Law he comes across a halacha that reads: “Men and women alike are obligated to have a candle burning in their house on Shabbat.”

He had always thought that lighting candles for Shabbat was a mitzvah for women and not men! Oliver decides he wants to start keeping this mitzvah too. So when Friday comes and Mr. Sowerberry calls Oliver into his office to give him the customary pennies, Oliver plucks up the courage to say to him, “Please, sir, I want some more! You see, I just found out that I’m also supposed to be lighting candles for Shabbat. The minimum requirement is to light just one candle. Mr. Sowerberry, with a kindly smile, says “I’m sorry, my boy, but I cannot give you any more. As it is, my wife is not happy with the fact that I give you anything for your Sabbath observances, and I cannot risk upsetting her.” Oliver finds himself in a bit of a pickle. He has only enough money to buy wine for Kiddush, or to buy a candle. Which should he buy?

Well, Kiddush, which means “sanctifying”, fulfills a mitzvah mandated by the Torah. In fact, it’s one of the Ten Commandments: “Remember the Sabbath day, to sanctify it (Hebrew: *Iekadesho*)”. Lighting Shabbat candles, however, is not a Torah mitzvah. Rather, it was instituted by the early Rabbis. Throughout the Jewish legal system, a command of the Torah takes precedence over

a Rabbinical decree. So Oliver reasons that it must be better to buy the wine and fulfil the Torah mitzvah. But he has been learning Torah for a while now, and he knows that it’s often not quite that simple! So he goes back to the Code of Jewish Law and reads on:

“If one cannot afford to buy a candle for Shabbat and wine for sanctifying the day (Hebrew: Kiddush), a Shabbat candle takes precedence in order to create a peaceful atmosphere in the home.”

“As I suspected,” he thinks, “as with everything in Judaism, it’s not quite that simple!”

But why should this be? Even though one of the reasons for our Sages decreeing to light Shabbat candles was to create a nice ambience on Shabbat, how does this make it more important than Kiddush? Why doesn’t the Torah mitzvah of Kiddush trump the Rabbis’ instruction to light candles?

The answer is furnished by the Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan in his Mishna Berura (a staple commentary on the Code of Jewish Law). He explains that the Torah’s instruction to sanctify Shabbat (Kiddush) can be fulfilled simply by reciting Kiddush. The requirement to use a cup of wine is a “supplementary requirement” added by the Sages! In that case, the very same Rabbis who instituted Shabbat candles also instituted wine for Kiddush. Thus they are perfectly within their rights to give a reason why we should prefer one of their edicts over another. In this case they were more concerned about setting a tranquil mood for Shabbat and Oliver should spend his pennies on a candle, rather than on wine!

Our tale raises a question. Why wine? Why should it be that we make Kiddush on wine? In fact, if you think about, every time Jews sanctify anything wine represents physicality. The world’s general idea of spirituality, of holiness, is that it is necessarily something separate from the physical. Monks, nuns and other certain ascetic religions abstain from wine. The Jewish view of things is very different. Our rabbis marry and raise families. We involve ourselves in the physical world. We sanctify the physical world. We take the mundane and we infuse it with holiness. We make Kiddush on wine.