

O H R N E T

SHABBAT PARSHAT LECH LECHA · 13 CHESHVAN 5761 · NOV. 11, 2000 · VOL. 8 NO. 3

PARSHA INSIGHTS

AND WITH THIS WE'LL CLOSE...

"And you shall be a blessing." (12:2)

There's something that Abraham had in common with a lot of today's Jews. He didn't grow up *frum* (religious).

The attrition of the Jewish People didn't stop with Nazi Germany. After six million Jews had been murdered in Europe, an equal number of Jews have been lost to Judaism through assimilation. While some mixed relationships have led to the creation of genuine and enthusiastic Jewish spouses, the vast majority have produced children who are either not Jewish or not interested in being Jewish.

However, ever since the Six Day War, there's been a fascinating anti-historical trend. Since 1967 — shortly, and coincidentally, after the Western Wall returned to Jewish hands — thousands of Jews from non-religious backgrounds have become *frum*. And not just *frum*; today you can find *ba'alei teshuva* who have become the "professors" of Jewish learning. Their numbers are minuscule compared to the vast figures for intermarriage, but they are a significant and visible trend in today's community.

What does it mean when we see a large number of unaffiliated Jews embracing their Jewish spirituality and identifying as the children of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob?

In this week's Torah portion, Abraham leaves his land, his

relatives and his father's house to travel to a spiritual land and be the founder of the Jewish People. Abraham didn't have the benefit of a great Torah sage for a father. His father was in a different line: He was an idol manufacturer. Not a job for a Jewish boy. Even though Abraham's son, Isaac, had a grandfather who was an idol maker, he at least had the advantage of growing up in the home of a spiritual giant, his father Abraham. And Jacob, the "choicest" of the patriarchs, was completely removed from Abraham's roots; he inherited both his father's and his grandfather's spiritual achievements and their lifestyle.

In the first blessing of the *Amidah*, the standing prayer, we address the Creator through our family connections. We call on Him as "the G-d of Abraham, the G-d of Isaac and the G-d of Jacob." However, when we come to the end of that blessing we only address Him as "the G-d of Abraham." What happened to Isaac and Jacob?

The first blessing of the *Amidah* depicts a historical process. Eventually at the end of the road, when history draws to a close, G-d will be seen in the world as the G-d of Abraham. For it will be those Jews who have emulated Abraham and left their land, "their relatives and their father's house to travel to a spiritual land" who will be the ones to write the last chapter of Jewish history.

Sources:

Rashi, Rabbi Shimon Shkop as heard from Rabbi C. J. Senter

LOVE OF THE LAND

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

A LAND LIKE YOURS

When Sancheriv followed up his destruction of the Kingdom of Israel and the exiling of the ten tribes which inhabited it with a siege of Jerusalem, Capital of the Kingdom of Judea, he sent messengers to persuade the besieged Jews to surrender. He promised to transfer them to "a land like



your own land." (*Melachim II 18:32*).

The respect he showed for *Eretz Yisrael* by not daring to suggest that there was a land superior to it, say our Sages, gained for him the merit of being referred to elsewhere (*Ezra 4:10*) as "the great and noble Asnappar" (*Sanhedrin 94a*).

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 recognize Hashem's existence, and thus merits that Hashem appear to him. At the beginning of this week's *Parsha*, Hashem tells Avram to leave his land, his relatives and his father's house and travel to an unknown land where Hashem 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 Hashem. When they reach the land of Canaan, Hashem 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 Hashem 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, Hashem 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 Hashem commanding Avram to circumcise himself and his offspring throughout the generations as a covenant between Hashem and his seed. Hashem changes Avram's name to Avraham, and Sarai's name to Sarah. Hashem promises Avraham a son, Yitzchak, despite Avraham being ninety-nine years old and Sarah ninety. On that day, Avraham circumcises himself, Yishmael and all his household.

HAFTARAH

YESHAYA 40:27 - 41:16

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General Editor:
Rabbi Moshe Newman
 Editorial & Web Advisor:
Rabbi Reuven Laufer
 Associate Editor:
Rabbi Reuven Subar
 Contributing Writers:
Weekly Daf, Love of the Land:
Rav Mendel Weinbach
Insights, Overview:
Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

Web Production: **Michael Treblow**

Produced and Designed by the Office of Communications
Rabbi Eliezer Shapiro, Director

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In the time of Nimrod, the entire world, with its power-crazed worship of might, knew only battle and destruction. Enter Avraham. Avraham dedicated his life to proclaiming G-d's presence through every step and every action, bringing light into a world of darkness. When the world's nations were fighting, Avraham's sword and bow were left to gather dust. But when it became a necessity for Avraham to engage in battle, G-d gave him victory. The biggest miracle was not that Avraham won the battle, but that he won the war. By remaining a peace loving servant of G-d, he won the war against the prevailing mentality of war and destruction.

So too, says the Prophet Yeshaya, will Avraham's descendants return to Jerusalem in peace as G-d delivers us from our oppressors. However we

must first be worthy of being called "the descendants of Avraham." Like Avraham, we must live our lives in peace and harmony fulfilling G-d's will with our every action.

HARD HITTER

"Every man would support his friend and say 'Be strong' ... as the hammer polisher supports the anvil striker." (Yeshaya 41:6,7)

When the hammer strikes the anvil it appears that the purpose is to shape and form the anvil. The opposite is true: It is the hammer that is knocked into shape. So, when a person helps and supports his friend, the giver often gains more than the recipient. The root of the word "ahavah" (love) is "hav" (give). The more a person gives, the more he develops love and other positive traits.

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INNOCENT ACTS AND GUILTY INTENTIONS

If a woman made a vow to be a *nezirah* and, unaware that her husband cancelled her vow, drank wine or came into contact with the dead, she is not punished by lashes for violating the Torah command prohibiting a *nazir* from indulging in these activities. Even though her intention was to violate Torah law, for she assumed she was a *nezirah*, the fact is that her husband's cancellation rendered her actions free of sin.

There is no doubt, however, that her intention to do wrong is sinful. This is why the Torah states (*Bamidbar 30:13*) "her husband cancelled them (her vows) and Hashem will forgive her," to teach us that she must atone for her actions in order to gain forgiveness. When Rabbi Akiva reached this passage, he wept as he exclaimed: "If someone who intended to eat swine flesh and ended up eating the kosher meat of a lamb requires atonement and forgiveness, how much more so one who intended to eat swine flesh and ended up doing so!"

Rabbi Yehuda goes one step further: Such a woman may not be liable for lashes by Torah law, because she was in fact not a *nezirah*, but she is liable for *makkat mardut*, the lashes given for violating rabbinic law, because of her intention to sin. How many lashes are given under this category?

Tosefot (*Nazir 20b*) cites the *gemara* (*Mesechta Makkot 22a*) that although the Torah legislated a maximum of 39 lashes for the violation of a Torah law, there is no such limit for *makkat mardut*, whose literal translation is "lashes for rebellion." A Jew who refuses to perform a positive *mitzvah* like eating matza or sitting in a succah is given lashes until his rebellion is subdued and he consents to perform the *mitzvah*.

But, points out Tosefot, this lack of a limit upon the number of lashes may apply only to situations in which those blows are used as a way of inducing him to perform a *mitzvah* against which he has shown rebellion. In the case of the *nezirah* with evil intentions, she is being punished for something she has already done. Since these lashes are punishment of the past rather than coercion for the future, concludes Tosefot, it may very well be that the number of these rabbinically mandated lashes should not be more than those mandated by the Torah for violation of Torah law.

• *Nazir 23a*

A "SIN" FOR HEAVEN'S SAKE

A sin committed for the sake of Heaven is equal to a *mitzvah* performed with an ulterior motive. This equation is made by Rabbi Nachman bar Yitzchak on the basis of a passage (*Shoftim 5:24*) comparing Yael — the woman who ended the Canaanite threat to *Eretz Yisrael* by slaying their general — to the Patriarchs. Although she utilized forbidden relations to weaken him and accomplish her mission, this action performed for Heaven's sake to save her people is granted credit equal to that of the Patriarchs, whose *mitzvah* relationships with the Patriarchs had an element of an ulterior motive of personal pleasure.

Why did a married Jewess like Yael not allow herself to be slain rather than submit to the heathen Sisra, since adulterous relations require martyrdom? Tosefot here answers this question in the same manner that the *gemara* (*Mesechta Sanhedrin 74b*) explains why Esther did not sacrifice her life rather than submit to Achashverosh: Since the woman is the passive partner in such a forbidden relationship, martyrdom is not expected of her.

In Sanhedrin Tosefot takes a radically different approach. From the account of Yael's incident with Sisra in *Sefer Shoftim*, it appears that she was not at all coerced into relations as was Esther. Sisra was fleeing for his life after the destruction of his forces and hardly had time for such things. On the contrary, Tosefot adds, he only asked her to hide him from his pursuers, and it was she who took the initiative of seducing him in order to weaken him.

Tosefot does not say, however, why it was permissible for Yael to do what she did. The answer may be the same as the one given by Rabbi Yechezkel Landau (*Responsa of Noda Biyehuda, Vol. II Yoreh Deah 161*) for Esther taking the initiative in going to Achashverosh for relations upon Mordechai's command. Her justification was the rescue of the entire Jewish nation, and Yael's case can be seen as comparable.

• *Nazir 23b*

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PARSHA Q&A ?

1. What benefits did Hashem 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 Hashem indicate with His promise that Avraham would "come to his ancestors in peace?"
17. How did Hashem 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 Hashem 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 Hashem.
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. 4:14 - 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.

KASHA! (KASHA MEANS "QUESTION")

Question: Avraham didn't accept any money from the king of Sodom, not wanting the king of Sodom to say "I made Avraham rich." Why then was he willing to take presents from Pharaoh, king of Mitzrayim?

Answer: If Avraham had refused the gifts offered for Sarah, he may have aroused Pharaoh's suspicion that he was indeed her husband, and spoiled the charade.

• Abarbanel

Or: Avraham suspected that the king of Sodom would publicize the fact that he enriched Avraham. Pharaoh, on the other hand, wouldn't brag about his gifts to Avraham. Since they were given under embarrassing circumstances, Pharaoh would avoid mentioning them in order to avoid drawing attention to the incident.

• Heard from Rabbi Michael Bachar

Do you have a KASHA? Write to kasha@ohr.org.il with your questions on any Parsha!

O JERUSALEM

From: Bart Epstein
<imyourbart@yahoo.com>

Dear Rabbi,
Jerusalem isn't mentioned in Islam's "Koran," but it's not mentioned in the Five Books of Moses either. Why isn't it mentioned? I've heard it argued that the Koran's omission of mentioning Jerusalem shows a lack of connection between Islam and Jerusalem, but can't the same be said of Judaism?

Dear Bart Epstein,

Jerusalem is mentioned many hundreds of times in the Jewish Bible. As for the *Chumash* (Five Books of Moses), it is true that the word "Jerusalem" does not appear there. Most simply, this is because it was not yet called Jerusalem.

Under Jebusite rule and earlier, Jerusalem was divided into two cities, the western part called Jeru (*Yere*) and the eastern part called Salem (*Shalem*). Both of these names do appear in the Five Books: "And Malki-Tzedek, King of *Shalem*" (*Genesis 14:18*). "And Abraham called that place...*Yere*" (*Genesis 21:14*).

Around the time of Joshua's conquest, the Amorites consolidated the two halves of the city, and they combined the two names: Jeru-salem. From this point on in history, our Bible refers to Jerusalem countless times.

Furthermore, the Chumash refers 19 times to "the place that G-d will choose" as the center for Jewish life and religion (e.g. *Deuteronomy 12:11, 14*, etc.) The Prophets Shmuel and Gad finally reveal to King David that this chosen place is Jerusalem and the Temple Mount.

So here's another reason Jerusalem isn't mentioned explicitly in the Chumash as the holy city: It hadn't yet been revealed as such. Maimonides, writing around 800 years ago, offers three reasons that the Chumash does not reveal the identity of the holy city:

- If the nations had learned that this place would express the highest Jewish ideals, they would have united in an effort to occupy and prevent the Jews from ever controlling it. (Sound familiar?)
- If they had known of Jerusalem's spiritual stature, they may have tried to take advantage of its spiritual nature by making it into a center of idol worship.
- Each of the twelve tribes would have desired to have Jerusalem in their borders, and this would lead to disunity.

Once the Jews had conquered and divided the land, the above ceased to be considerations.

So, in conclusion, Jerusalem played a prominent part in Jewish history and writings more than two thousand years before Islam's rise and the writing of the Koran, which makes no mention of Jerusalem.

Source:

- *Jerusalem, Eye of the Universe* by Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE STORY

Giving People the Benefit of the Doubt

Judging favorably is a mitzvah that can bring a strained relationship...

BACK TO NORMAL

This past summer, a friend here in Israel asked if I knew anyone coming from England. His Kenwood mixer had broken and he wondered if I knew anyone coming from England who could bring one. (Kenwood mixers are considerably cheaper in England where they are manufactured).

It just so happened that my sister from England was due to come to Israel in just a few days; so, I told my friend that I would ask her if she would bring a mixer.

Shortly thereafter, I bought a fan in Jerusalem to make my sister's stay more pleasurable, as the heat had been quite stifling! As I was not going directly home that evening, I asked this friend, who is also my neighbor, if he would take the fan

home for me.

Now, my friend and I both live in a suburb 20 minutes away from Jerusalem. We both study in a "kollel" (yeshiva) in Jerusalem, and a minibus takes us directly to and from the kollel. Therefore, I did not think it would be a major imposition on my friend to ask him to bring the fan home for me.

He felt it, indicated towards his briefcase as if to say, "sorry, got my hands full already," and asked if I could ask someone else!

"What chutzpa!" I said to myself. This "friend" expects me to ask my sister to go out, buy him a 13 pound mixer and *shlepp* it across the ocean; yet he won't do me a favor and carry a fan across the street!

The next day my friend came over to me and apologized for not helping me. He explained that around a year ago he had done his back in and had had to spend a month in bed, and that was why he had to be careful!

- G.W. Israel <gershonw@barak-online.net>

SEND YOUR STORIES ABOUT JUDGING FAVORABLY TO INFO@OHR.ORG.IL

YIDDLE RIDDLE

I was eating a snack when I had a sudden urge for some bread. I asked my Rabbi, "Should I wash my hands in the special ritual way which is usually required before eating bread." "No," said my Rabbi. "Should I say the 'hamotzi' blessing usually said before eating bread?" "No," he said. After eating, I asked, "Should I say the 'Birkat Hamazon' - the 'Grace after Meals' - which is normally required after eating bread?" "No," said my Rabbi.

Can you explain what's going on in the above story? Why do the "usual" halachot (Jewish Laws) seem not to apply?

Answer next week...

I DIDN'T KNOW THAT!

"And you will call his name Yitzchak... (17:19)"

Avraham's name was changed from Avram (*Bereishet 17:5*), and Yaakov's name was changed to Yisrael (*Bereishet 32:29*). Why was Yitzchak's name never changed? Because Avraham and Yaakov received their names from their parents, while Yitzchak received his name from Hashem.

• *Jerusalem Talmud - Berachot 1:6*

PUBLIC DOMAIN

Comments, quibbles and reactions concerning previous "Ohrnet" features

My name is Avrohom Lukacs. I have been copying your weekly columns giving them out to the *shuls* (synagogues) in my neighborhood in Midwood, Brooklyn. My family and friends, including my rabbi, are happy that I bring these to *shul* because some people in my *shul* don't know what you can do on the Internet, and also there are people who don't know how to use a computer. Thank you again and may we only meet at *simchas* (joyous events).

• *Allen Lukacs <lukacsallen@hotmail.com>*

RECOMMENDED READING LIST

RAMBAN

12:6 A Sign for the Children
12:8 Proclaiming the Name of Hashem
12:10 The Sin of Avram
13:7 The Quarrel of the Shepherds
14:1 The Four Kings
15:12 The Dreadful Vision

16:12 Yishmael

SFORNO

12:17 Pharaoh's Plague
16:12 Yishmael
17:1 Attaining Perfection

שאלו שלום ירושלים
"Pray for the peace of Jerusalem..."

Psalms 122