

OHRNET

SHABBAT PARSHAT VAYERA • 17 CHESHVAN 5782 OCTOBER 23, 2021 • VOL 29 NO. 2

PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

Make Yourself at Home!

"And behold - three men were standing over him!" (18:2)

There are some people who look like they are giving but they are really taking. And there are some people who look like they are taking when they are really giving.

Anyone who buys a \$5,000-a-plate charity dinner is giving a lot of charity, but he is also getting a lot of status mixed in with his sushi.

On the other hand, there are people who look like they are takers but they are really giving.

Once there was a Jewish traveling salesman who found himself in a largely non-Jewish town on Friday afternoon. His business had delayed him way beyond his expectations and there was now no way he could get home for Shabbat. He had heard that there was just one Orthodox family in town where he could spend Shabbat, and as the sun was starting to set he made his way there.

The owner of the house opened the door to him and showed him into the living room. "May I stay here for Shabbat?" asked the traveling salesman. "If you like," replied the host. "The price is \$200." "\$200!" exclaimed the traveling salesman. "That's more than a first-class hotel!" "Suit yourself," replied the host.

Realizing that he had no option, the salesman reluctantly agreed. In the short time left before Shabbat, the host showed the salesman his room, the kitchen and the other facilities for his Shabbat stay.

As soon as the host left the room, the salesman sat down and thought to himself. "Well, if this is going to cost me \$200, I am going to get my money's worth." During the entire Shabbat he availed himself unstintingly of the house's considerable facilities. He helped himself to the delicious food in the fridge. He had a long luxurious shower, both before and after Shabbat. He really made himself "at home."

When he had showered and packed, he made his way downstairs and plunked two crisp \$100 bills down on the table in front of his host.

"What's this?" inquired the host. "That's the money I owe you," replied the salesman. "You don't owe me anything. Do you really think I would take money from a fellow Jew for the miztvah of hospitality?" "But you told me that Shabbat here costs \$200."

"I only told you that to be sure that you would make yourself at home."

When a guest comes to your home, his natural feeling is one of embarrassment. No one likes being a taker. When a guest brings a present, the worst thing you can say is, "You shouldn't have done that!" Rather, take the bottle of wine (or whatever it is), open it, place it in the middle of the table, and say, "Thank you so much!" By allowing him to contribute to the meal, you will mitigate his feeling of being a taker and you will have done the mitzvah of hospitality to a higher degree.

The mitzvah of hospitality is greater than receiving the Divine Presence. We learn this from the beginning of this week's Torah portion. G-d had come to visit Avraham on the third day after his *brit mila*, the most painful day. G-d made the day extremely hot so that Avraham should not be bothered by guests. When G-d saw that Avraham was experiencing more pain from his inability to do the mitzvah of hospitality than the pain of the *brit mila*, He sent three angels who appeared as men so that Avraham could do the mitzvah of hospitality. When these "men" appeared, Avraham got up from in front of the Divine Presence to greet his guests.

Hospitality is greater than receiving the Divine Presence.

- Sources: Rashi, Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler and others

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Three days after performing *brit mila* on himself, Avraham is visited by Hashem. When three angels appear in human form, Avraham rushes to show them hospitality by bringing them into his tent, despite this being the most painful time after the operation. Sarah laughs when she hears from them that she will bear a son next year. Hashem reveals to Avraham that He will destroy Sodom, and Avraham pleads for Sodom to be spared. Hashem agrees that if there are fifty righteous people in Sodom He will not destroy it. Avraham "bargains" Hashem down to ten righteous people. However, not even ten can be found. Lot, his wife and two daughters are rescued just before sulfur and fire rain down on Sodom and her sister cities. Lot's wife looks back and is turned into a pillar of salt. Lot's daughters fear that as a result of the destruction there will be no husbands for them. They decide to get their father drunk and through him to perpetuate the human race. From the elder daughter, Moav is born, and from the younger, Ammon.

Avraham moves to Gerar where Avimelech abducts Sarah. After Hashem appears to Avimelech in a dream, he releases Sarah and appeases Avraham.

As promised, a son, Yitzchak, is born to Sarah and Avraham. On the eighth day after the birth, Avraham circumcises him as commanded. Avraham makes a feast the day Yitzchak is weaned. Sarah tells Avraham to banish Hagar and Hagar's son Yishmael because she sees in him signs of degeneracy. Avraham is distressed at the prospect of banishing his son, but Hashem tells him to listen to whatever Sarah tells him to do. After nearly dying of thirst in the desert, Yishmael is rescued by an angel, and Hashem promises that he will be the progenitor of a mighty nation.

Avimelech enters into an alliance with Avraham when he sees that Hashem is with him. In a tenth and final test of Avraham, Hashem instructs Avraham to take Yitzchak, who is now 37, and to offer him as a sacrifice. Avraham does this, in spite of ostensibly aborting Jewish nationhood and contradicting his life-long preaching against human sacrifice. At the last moment, Hashem sends an angel to stop Avraham. Because of Avraham's unquestioning obedience, Hashem promises him that even if the Jewish People sin, they will never be completely dominated by their foes. The Torah portion concludes with the genealogy and birth of Rivka.

Q & A

Questions

1. Why did G-d appear to Avraham after the brit mila?
2. Why was Avraham sitting at the entrance to his tent?
3. What were the missions of the three angels?
4. Why did Avraham enjoin the guests to wash the dust off their feet?
5. Why did Avraham ask specifically Yishmael, and not someone else, to prepare food for the guests?
6. Why did the angels ask Avraham where Sarah was?
7. When G-d related Sarah's thoughts to Avraham, He did not relate them precisely. Why?
8. What "cry" from Sodom came before G-d?
9. How many angels went to Sodom?
10. Why was Lot sitting at the gate of Sodom?
11. Lot served the angels matza. Why?
12. Why did Lot delay when he left Sodom?
13. Why were Lot and his family not permitted to look back at Sodom?
14. Lot's wife looked back and became a pillar of salt. Why was she punished in this particular way?
15. In what merit did G-d save Lot?
16. Why did Avraham relocate after the destruction of Sodom?
17. Why did Avimelech give gifts to Avraham?
18. Why was Avraham told to listen to Sarah?
19. Why did G-d listen to the prayer of Yishmael and not to that of Hagar?
20. Who accompanied Avraham and Yitzchak to the akeidah (binding)?

Answers

1. 18:1 - Avraham was sick, so G-d came to "visit" him.
2. 18:1 - He was looking for guests.
3. 18:2 - To announce Yitzchak's birth, to heal Avraham and to destroy Sodom.
4. 18:4 - He thought they were among those who worship the dust, and he didn't want any object of idolatry in his home.
5. 18:7 - To train him in the performance of mitzvot.
6. 18:9 - To call attention to Sarah's modesty, so as to endear her to her husband.
7. 18:13 - For the sake of peace.
8. 18:21 - The cry of a girl who was executed for giving food to the poor.
9. 19:1 - Two; one to destroy the city and one to save Lot.
10. 19:1 - He was a judge.
11. 19:3 - It was Passover.
12. 19:16 - He wanted to save his property.
13. 19:17 - As they, too, deserved to be punished, it wasn't fitting for them to witness the destruction of Sodom.
14. 19:26 - She was stingy, not wanting to give the guests salt.
15. 19:29 - Lot had protected Avraham by concealing from the Egyptians the fact that Sarah was his wife.
16. 20:1 - Because travel in the region ceased and Avraham could no longer find guests.
17. 20:14 - So that Avraham would pray for him.
18. 21:12 - Because she was greater in prophecy.
19. 21:17 - Because the prayer of a sick person is more readily accepted than the prayer of others on his behalf.
20. 22:3 - Yishmael and Eliezer.

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

Words for Words

Over the years we have discussed many different words in these essays, but we have yet to discuss the words for “word.” In Hebrew there are at least two words for “word”: *milah* and *teivah*. Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim (1740-1814) seems to understand that *milah* is an original Hebrew term for “word,” while *teivah* is a later neologism coined by grammarians to refer to the more specific grammatical concept of a “word.” Indeed, the word *milah* in the sense of “word” appears in the Bible many times (Ps. 19:5, 139:4, II Shmuel 23:2, Prov. 23:9, and more than 30 times in Iyov, plus in the Aramaic sections of Daniel), while *teivah* in that sense first appears only in later rabbinic writings. This essay closely examines these two words and their respective etymologies to shed more light on how the terms for “word” might actually not be complete synonyms.

Rabbi Eliyahu HaBachur (1469-1549), also known as Elias Levita, writes that many people think that there is no difference between the words in question. However, in his works *Mesorat HaMesoret* and *Sefer Tishbi*, HaBachur disagrees with this assumption, instead arguing that *milah* refers to a “spoken word,” while *teivah* refers to a “written word.” Interestingly, Rabbi Yosef Teomim (1727-1792) slightly differs with HaBachur, maintaining that *milah* can refer to either a written or verbalized word, while *teivah* refers exclusively to a written word.

Rabbi Shlomo Zalman of Hanau (1687-1746) cites HaBachur’s way of differentiating between *milah* and *teivah*, and adds that the word *milah* is derived from the trilateral root MEM-LAMMED-LAMMED (“speech”). This root appears in Sarah’s poetic response to the birth of Isaac: “Who had spoken (*millel*) to Abraham, ‘Sarah will nurse children? Because I have given birth for his old age’ (Gen. 21:7). King David uses a similar word when discussing G-d’s superlative greatness: “Who will

say (*yimallel*) G-d’s feats? Who will make all His praises be heard?” (Ps. 106:2)

Indeed, *millel* is the typical Targumic rendering of the Hebrew *amirah* (“saying”) and its cognates. Moreover, the Babylonian Talmud (*Megillah* 18a) cites a popular aphorism from the Holy Land: “A *milah* is worth a *sela* (a form of currency), and silence is worth two *sela*.” This also implies that *milah* refers to speech, because in this aphorism its antonym is *shtika* (“silence”).

Thus, if *milah* is derived from a root that is related to “speaking,” it makes sense that it would refer specifically to a word that is “said.” In other words, *milah* refers to the smallest unit of speech that can have its own meaning. Phonemes or syllables, of which words are typically comprised, do not necessarily have any meaning on their own. By the way, this is similar to the Greek term *lego* (“to speak”), which serves as the etymon of the words *lexis* and *logos* (“word”).

If *milah/millel* is just another term for “saying/speaking,” then how does it differ from such words as *amirah*, *dibbur*, *sichah*, *ne’um*, *yichaveh*, and *yabia*, which also refer to that concept?

Peirush HaRokeach and *Siddur HaRokeach* explain that *millel* specifically denotes speaking in an elaborate and verbose fashion. To back this position, they point to the opening words of Bildad’s response to Job that reflects such usage, “Until when will you speak (*timallel*) these [words]?” (Job 8:2). Fascinatingly, Rabbeinu Efrayaim (to Gen. 21:7) writes that unlike other terms for “speech,” *millel* refers specifically to speaking the truth. Rabbi Yehuda Leib Shapira-Frankfurter (1743-1826) makes a similar point, noting that *millel* refers to “speaking” as a means of explaining something in the most clear and accurate way possible. They adduce the following verse to support this understanding: “The

knowledge of my lips—clarity, do they speak (*millelu*)” (Iyov 33:3).

Rabbi Pappenheim actually takes a slightly different approach to understanding *milah*. He traces the word to the biliteral root MEM-LAMMED, whose core meaning is “edge” or “extremity.” The word *milah* as in *brit milah* (“covenant of circumcision”) refers to “cutting off” the edge or extremity of a male member’s foreskin. In a similar vein, *milah* as “word” actually refers to a word as an independent unit divorced, or “cut off,” from the rest of a sentence.

HaBachur adduces support for his assertion that *teivah* refers specifically to a “written word” from the Talmud (*Yevamot* 13b), which says: “Any word (*teivah*) that needs a LAMMED at its beginning [as a prefix that denotes “to”], the Scripture [can instead] places a HEY at its end [as a suffix that denotes “to”].” HaBachur understands that this mainly refers to how the word is written. He also mentions the expression *roshei teivos* (literally, “the heads of the words”) used for written acronyms/abbreviations.

On the other hand, Rabbi Shlomo Zalman of Hanau writes that the word *teivah* means “box, chest” and refers to the written word because books that contain written words are stored in a *teivah*.

In Biblical Hebrew, *teivah* means “ark” or “closet.” For example, Noah’s Ark is called a *teivah* (Gen. 6–9), as was the basket wherein baby Moses was placed (Ex. 2:3). In Mishnaic Hebrew, *teivah* refers to the Holy Ark of a synagogue which houses the Torah Scrolls, or to the table (also known as *bimah*) upon which the Torah Scrolls are placed while being read. In a previous article (“A Tale of Two Arks,” 2016), I cited Rabbi Aharon Marcus (1843–1916) who argues that the word *teivah* is related to the word *bayit* (“house”) by way of metathesis (both words contain the same letters). This implies that a *teivah*, in some ways, is like a person’s home. Based on this, I would say that *teivah* denotes a “word” as a sort of house for all the letters to come together in that house or box.

When discussing the Biblical Hebrew word *teivah* (“ark/box/chest”), Ibn Janach writes in his *Sefer HaShorashim* that the root of this word is TAV-BET-HEY. Radak, in his *Sefer HaShorashim*,

mentions a possible alternative root, TAV-YOD-BET. Following this latter approach, Rabbi Yosef Teomim suggests that the root of *teivah* is derived from the Aramaic TAV-(YOD)-BET, which equivalent to the Hebrew SHIN-(VAV)-BET, that means “return.” This connection may be justified by the common phenomenon of the letter SHIN in Hebrew morphing into a TAV in Aramaic. Rabbi Teomim explains that when a person stores something in a *teivah*, he intends to later “return” to that container and retrieve whatever it is he had stored there. By contrast, when a person leaves an item on the floor, he does not show that he intends to “return” to retrieve it.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (to Gen. 6:14) similarly suggests that *teivah* is derived from the Aramaic root YOD-TAV-BET, equivalent to the Hebrew root YOD-SHIN-BET (“sitting, dwelling, settling”), and refers to the *teivah*’s place as one’s temporary domicile. Perhaps *teivah* in the sense of “word” refers to a place in which letters are nestled.

Rabbi Shimon Yehuda Leib Goldblit (an early 20th century exegete) parses the word *teivah* as a portmanteau of *ta* (“come/enter,” the Aramaic TAV-ALEPH which equals the Hebrew BET-ALEPH) and *bah* (“into it” in Hebrew).

Dr. Alexander Kohut (1842–1894) reports that some claim that the word *teivah* in the sense of “word” comes from an Arabic root that means “to cut.” Thus, he explains that *teivah* is related to “cutting,” just like *milah* might also be related to the verb for cutting. Alternatively, Kohut notes that others explain the word *teivah* as “word” to be derived from *teivah* as “box” in the way that a “word” is like a sort of box that contains all the letters therein (like I suggested above).

Rabbi Moshe Shapiro (1935–2017) points out that another word for “word” in Hebrew is *davar*. He finds it especially telling that DALET-BET-REISH means both “word/speak” and “thing” in Hebrew, alluding to the metaphysical reality described by *Sefer Yetzirah* that G-d created the world by combining letters from the Hebrew alphabet to form Divine words. As Rabbi Akiva Tatz eloquently puts it, “All things in the world are in fact none other than divine words crystallized into material existence.” Interestingly, Rabbi Shapiro

even points to a Talmudic passage (*Shabbat* 58b) that explicitly links the word *davar* (“thing”) to the concept of “speech” in saying that sound-producing implements (that “speak,” so to speak) have the Halachic status of “things” (i.e., *keilim*, “vessels”) vis-à-vis the laws of ritual impurity. (A similar phenomenon exists in Aramaic, wherein the word *milta* means both “word,” as a cognate of *milah*, and “thing”.)

Interestingly, Rabbi Matiyahu Glazerson proposes that the English word *word* is actually derived from the Hebrew word *davar* by way of metathesis and the interchangeability of the *w*-sound and the *b/v*-sound). If he is right, then the same could be said of the English word’s Germanic siblings *wort* in German and *vort* in Yiddish (with the *d*-sound and the *t*-sound interchanging), as well as the English

word’s Latin cousin *verb* (via labialization, whereby the *d*-consonant after the *r*-consonant in Proto-Indo-European morphs into a *b*-consonant in Latin).

I will conclude with a well-worded musing by Mrs. Faigy Peritzman (*Mishpacha Magazine*, April 1, 2020) about how words are used to box in abstract thoughts and ideas to make them more specific and finite: “We see this concept in the alternate definitions of the various Hebrew words that mean ‘word’: *davar*, *milah*, and *teivah*. *Davar* also means a thing, because a word concretizes abstract thoughts into things. *Milah* also means to cut, to incise, because a word cuts down your limitless thoughts into something tangible and real. *Teivah* also means a box, because a word is our attempt to squeeze our infinite thoughts into a finite casing.”

Ohrnet Magazine is a weekly Torah magazine published by Ohr Somayach Institutions,
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The Ohr Somayach Family mourns the passing of a longtime
Torah teacher to countless talmidim.

Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Chaim Zweig ז"ל

May his soul be bound up in the gathering of the living.

COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

THE BLESSINGS OF THE SHEMA (PART 4)

“The most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched
- they must be felt with the heart.”
(Helen Keller)

The second blessing continues: “Our Father, the Merciful Father, Who is ever compassionate, show us compassion, instill in our hearts to understand, to clarify, to listen, to learn, to teach, to safeguard, to perform, and to fulfill all the words of Your Torah’s teachings with love.”

In his seminal work, *Netivot Hakodesh*, Rabbi Avraham Yisrael Solomon of Kharkov (1883-1956) points out that there is no other prayer that uses such emotionally expressive language as here. By introducing the phrase, “Our Father, the Merciful Father, Who is ever compassionate, show us compassion,” the Men of the Great Assembly, who composed the prayer, are teaching us perhaps the most fundamental lesson of all that is found within prayer. It is the lesson that there is nothing more important in this world than delving into the words of the Torah and the performance of the mitzvahs.

Rabbi Yitzchak Isaac Sher (1880-1952), one of the most brilliant Torah scholars of his generation, who headed the famed Slabodka Yeshiva both in Lithuania before the Holocaust and in Bnei Brak afterwards, makes a remarkable correlation between our blessing and the Shema immediately following it. Rabbi Sher writes that each request we make in our blessing corresponds to one of the commandments in the Shema.

In our blessing we ask that G-d grant us the ability “to understand and to clarify,” and in the Shema we are commanded to “teach them [the laws of the

Torah] to your children”. Our Sages instruct us (*Kiddushin* 30a) that *we* should know the laws fluently so that we can answer someone who asks us, without hesitation.

We also ask that we are able “to listen.” The Shema commands us to listen to G-d’s commandments. What exactly is it that we are being commanded to do with the words “to listen”? We are being taught the imperative to listen to the timeless messages and lessons of the Torah.

Next we ask “to learn.” The command that corresponds to it is “And put these words on your hearts.” The Shema is commanding us to become so familiar with the words of the Torah that they become imbedded on our hearts.

Then, “to teach.” The verse in the Shema commands us to teach our children to speak about the laws of the Torah. Rashi explains that the word “children” is not just a reference to biological offspring, but also denotes one’s students (*Bamidbar* 3:1 and *Devarim* 6:7). One of the most beautiful dimensions of Judaism is the perpetual emphasis placed on the future generations, and our obligation to educate them. Not just through classroom instruction, but, perhaps even more importantly, through the way that we live our own lives. Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe (1914-2005), one of the most influential contemporary figures in the Mussar movement, writes in his classic work *Alei Shur*, that children are a very effective means of

identifying the flaws within their parents. Why? Because, very often, the children are simply mimicking them. Therefore, we should be very careful to act and behave in the most exemplary way so that *our* behavior will reflect back through our *children's* behavior.

“To safeguard and to perform” corresponds to the mitzvah of *tzitzit*, as the verse in the third paragraph of the Shema reads, “In order that you should remember and perform all My commandments.”

And, finally, “To fulfill all the words of Your Torah.” The Shema is a declaration of allegiance to G-d. We lovingly accept upon ourselves G-d's Majesty, and we show our devotion and subservience to Him by undertaking to keep all of

His commandments. This precept in the Shema corresponds to the statement in our blessing “to fulfill all the words of Your Torah.”

At first glance it might seem somewhat unnecessary to ask for exactly the same things in the blessing that we are going to mention in the Shema a moment later. However, the Slabodka Rosh Yeshiva explains that this notable list is included directly before we recite the Shema because it is a *request*. We are entreating G-d to help us keep all of the commandments that appear in the Shema successfully, in a way that will please our Father in Heaven.

To be continued...

TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Rosh Hashana 2-8

Charity Clauses

We have learned in beraita, “One who says, ‘I am donating this coin to charity in order that my children will live,’ or says, ‘I am donating this coin to charity in order to merit the World to Come’ is a tzaddik gamur (completely righteous person).”

Although the giver is doing the mitzvah of giving charity for ulterior motives, this does not seem to diminish the lofty magnitude of the act, and the giver does not only fulfill a mitzvah but is also labeled by our Sages as being a completely righteous person.

The commentaries ask a question on this *beraita* from a well-known teaching in Pirkei Avot (1:2). There we are taught: “Antignos of Socho received the transmission of the Torah from Shimon Hatzaddik. He used to say, ‘Do not be as servants who serve their master to receive reward. Rather, be as servants who serve their master not to receive reward. And let the fear of Heaven be upon you.’” Accordingly, being that it is wrong to serve the

Master by doing mitzvahs in order to receive a reward, how can a person who does a mitzvah to receive a reward be called a *tzaddik gamur*?

One answer is offered in several places by the *Ba'alei Tosefot*, who explain our *gemara* as speaking about a giver who willingly gives the *tzedakah* “unconditionally.” This means that even if his specified condition is not fulfilled in the way that wants, *he still wholeheartedly wants* his giving to be a mitzvah-act of charity. He is merely attaching a *personal prayer* to his act of mitzvah. Therefore, he is fulfilling the mitzvah to give *tzedaka* without reservation and is worthy of being called a *tzaddik gamur*. (Likewise, this concept is applicable to the widespread custom of giving *tzedaka l'ilui nishmat* –

in the honor of a dearly deceased relative or friend, especially on the *yahrtzeit*.)

Others offer an answer to this question by pointing out the difference between the conduct of a *tzaddik gamur* and that of a *chassid* (meaning “pious” but not in the modern usage of the term as being Orthodox or being a member of one of the many Chassidic courts). A *tzaddik gamur* is not doing anything wrong or reprehensible. But he is not going beyond the basic “letter of the law” as a *chassid* would do. (See the Rambam in *Hilchot De’ot* for more on this topic.) A person who gives charity in order to receive reward – as in the *beraita* – is doing the act of the mitzvah correctly and is not doing anything bad. He is a *tzaddik gamur* regarding his fulfillment of this mitzvah. However, Antignos Ish Socho is teaching how a *chassid* behaves. He does the will of Hashem not for the sake of any reward. He does it purely because Hashem commanded him to do so, *l’shma*. (See Tosefot Rabbeinu Peretz)

Yet another approach draws a distinction between the mitzvah of *tzedakah*, which is the specific mitzvah mentioned in the *beraita*, and between all other mitzvahs. There is unique aspect of the mitzvah of *tzedakah* that is found in the Book of the Prophet Malachi (3:1): “Bring all of the tithes

into the treasury so that there may be nourishment in My House, and test Me now with this, says Hashem, to see if I will not open for you the skylights of Heaven and pour down for you blessing until there will not be enough room for all of it!” Just as charity provides a pathway of blessing to the recipient to have whatever he needs, in a similar fashion Hashem blesses the giver of charity with the reward that he needs.

Rashi explains this topic in yet a different manner. As the *beraita* teaches, a person who gives *tzedakah* or does any mitzvah, mentioning an expected reward, is certainly fulfilling the mitzvah and is considered a *tzaddik gamur*. (Of course, he may have accrued more demerits than merits due to his overall behavior in his life – and therefore not really even be a *tzaddik* or a *beinoni* as explained in the the Rambam’s Laws of Teshuva – but he is nevertheless a *tzaddik gamur* in this particular act of fulfilling a mitzvah. Antignos, although not arguing with this principle, is teaching an important cautionary lesson. A person might do a mitzvah with expectation of a reward, but, if he does not receive reward as expected, he might become upset with Hashem for failing to “keep His end of the deal.” Therefore, a person’s intent when fulfilling a mitzvah should be purely because it is the right thing to do since Hashem said to do so.

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LETTER AND SPIRIT

Insights based on the writings of Rav S.R. Hirsch by Rabbi Yosef Herschman

Beknown and Beloved

Before Hashem carries out His plan to destroy Sodom on account of the incorrigible wickedness of its citizens, He first discloses to Avraham what is about to occur. Avraham is privy to the workings of Hashem because *Avraham is to become a great and mighty nation, and through it, all the nations of the Earth will be blessed*. More, the reason Avraham will bear this great nation is revealed: *Ki y'daativ: For I have known him, so that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of Hashem, to practice dutiful benevolence, and justice. (Ber. 18:18-19)*. Avraham is chosen not for his own sake, but for the sake of the great nation that he will found and educate. As the father and educator of this nation, Avraham is given insight into Hashem's decisions, in order to charge it with its eternal, noble mission. This knowledge will assist and guide him in a most awesome educational task.

Hashem allows Avraham insight into His ways because He *knows* Avraham. *Yadah* – to know – means to perceive by distinguishing characteristics. In the relationship between man and wife, it refers to marital intimacy. In the relationship of Hashem to man, knowledge means Divine Providence, where the knowledge of man is expressed in direct involvement in the happenings of his life.

One who is not a devoted follower of Hashem is under Hashem's general providence. In *Vayikra* we are warned: If one walks with Hashem casually, and only incidentally performs the Divine Will – when it is convenient or coincident – then Hashem will so walk incidentally with him. His fate and fortune will

be left to the vicissitudes of chance. But the righteous, whose sole aim in life is to do Hashem's Will on earth, and thereby make their mission align with the Almighty's, may cast their burdens and all their needs on their Provider, as they are treated with special providence.

As one who tirelessly sought out Hashem's truth, and then made it his life's mission to spread it, Avraham is so known and beloved. He carries this relationship forward to his children, by teaching them *to keep the way of Hashem, to practice tzedakah and justice*. There are two distinct parts to this educational mission: *the way of Hashem* refers to holiness and purity before Hashem (as exemplified by Avraham's circumcision); *to practice tzedakah and justice* refers to uprightness in human relationships (as exemplified by Avraham's *hashnasat orchim*, hospitality).

Although the two appear to be distinct, they form a single phrase. Not “to keep the way of Hashem *and* practice *tzedakah* and justice,” but “to keep the way of Hashem *to* practice *tzedakah* and justice.” Circumcision is the cornerstone of this nation – first the people must learn to sanctify and purify the life of the senses and body with proper limits and boundaries, and *then* it must interact justly and kindly in human relationships. The nation's social future depends on its moral purity.

When Avraham's offspring live these truths, they too are known and beloved, and graced with that special Divine Providence.

■ *Sources: Commentary, Bereishet 18:17-19*

Perek Shira: The Song of Existence

by Rabbi Shmuel Kraines

Vayera

The Song of the Earth

*The Earth says, "To Hashem is the Earth and all that fills it, the Earth and all who inhabit it." (Tehillim 24:1)
And it says, "From the end of the Earth, songs we have heard, splendor for the Righteous One." (Yeshayahu 24:16)*

Man rules the Earth and considers it his own. The Earth sings that, in truth, man belongs to the Earth, and the Earth belongs to Hashem, the ultimate Master of all.

This is expressed by the way in which man was fashioned from the Earth, stands firmly upon it, feeds on it, and is eventually buried within it, empty-handed of his supposed possession. The Earth itself was created by Hashem, and it is He Who suspends it firmly in the cosmos and maintains its inhabitability. The Earth therefore sings that "the Earth and all that fills it" belong to Hashem alone. We, too, are to acknowledge Hashem's ownership of the Earth by blessing Him before benefiting from it, and by willingly sharing His bounty with others.

The Earth sings further that, "From the end of the Earth, songs we have heard, splendor for the Righteous One." The plain meaning of this is that the Earth was formed starting from its principle part, the place of the Beit Hamikdash – "the end of the Earth" – and henceforth the Earth sings through

that gateway to Heaven of "splendor for the Righteous One."

On a deeper level of understanding, "*kenaf*," meaning "end," can also mean "wing". Our Sages teach that the angels have six wings with which they sing to Hashem, using one for each weekday. On the seventh day they say to Hashem, "We have no wing with which to sing!" He tells them that He has another wing, "the wing of the Earth," which sings to Him on Shabbat. Some explain that this refers to the special *kedushah* of *Mussaf*. A wing is an apt symbolism for a source of song. Just like a wing lifts its wielder, our praise of Hashem raises us closer to Him.

- Sources: Targum; Yalkut Shimoni (*Ha'azinu*); Tosafot (*Sanhedrin 37b*); *Aderes Shmuel* (Rabbi Shmuel Salant)

**In loving memory of Harav Zeev Shlomo ben Zecharia Leib*

This issue of the Ohrnet is sponsored by the
Harry H. Beren Foundation