

OHRNET

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PARSHA INSIGHTS

Bereshet

MAKING THE TRAINS RUN ON TIME

“G-d blessed the seventh day and sanctified it because on it He abstained from all His work, which G-d created to make.” (2:3)

Taking a taxi home we turned a corner and came upon what seemed like the mother of all Jerusalem traffic jams. Nothing moved. Not an inch. What was it? A burst water main? A demonstration? A visiting dignitary?

I climbed out of the cab and peered into the distance. What was that thing? It looked like something out of a fifties sci-fi movie: *“It Came From Denton High!”*

There, swirling in mists of dry ice was the strangest vehicle you could imagine. Underneath it all was something that looked suspiciously like a Ford Transit, but from every angle possible could be seen flashing colored lights and projectors, twirling silver globes catching the multicolored lights, and atop the whole caboodle a huge golden crown about two and a half meters wide. The music that was blaring from this thing had enough high-end frequencies to part your hair at ten feet.

This beast was no fugitive float from a New Orleans Mardi Gras procession. It was the way we Jews greet a newly completed Torah scroll on its way to its new home.

And what a homecoming! The streets were full of people dancing around the Torah scroll underneath a *chupa* (wedding canopy). In front of the float were about 50 Jerusalem

children, each with a flaming torch in his hand. (Try getting that one past the NY Fire Dept.!)

I gazed at this wonderful sight and thought to myself “Only in Israel...”

Apparently it was said of Benito Mussolini, the ruthless dictator of Italy in the thirties and forties, “at least he made the trains run on time.” Whether it was ever said of Mussolini or not is moot; the fact is that the remark reveals a fundamental facet of Fascism — efficiency as an end in itself.

In a world where there is no belief in G-d, and thus bereft of a higher purpose, in a world where ultimately there is nowhere to go, all that is left is to get there as efficiently as possible.

In direct contradiction to this worldview stands Shabbat.

Shabbat is our weekly testimony that the world is going somewhere; that things are important and efficiency is never an end in itself.

In Jerusalem, the buses can be very far from on time; the traffic can be held up for half an hour; and it’s all to demonstrate that there is something in this world more than efficiency. It’s called purpose.

Noach

WE HAVE THE TECHNOLOGY

“They said to one another, ‘Come, let us make bricks and burn them in fire.’ And the brick served them as stone, and the lime served them as mortar.” (11:3)

Technology is the conceit of the modern world. The GPS system in our car allows us to receive satellite signals locating our position to within six feet anywhere on the planet. Behind the helm of our trusty gleaming V-8, we are the kings of the road. Previous generations pale into technological primitives.

We have the technology.

With a cellular phone we can call from the desert, from the top of a mountain, from the middle of nowhere, and communicate to virtually anywhere in the world. And what are those deathless words that we wish to communicate across the tens of thousands of miles?

“Hi! Guess where I am?”

Now that’s what I call progress.

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Bereishet

In the beginning, G-d creates the entire universe, including time itself, out of nothingness. This process of creation continues for six days. On the seventh day, G-d rests, bringing into existence the spiritual universe of Shabbat, which returns to us every seven days. Adam and Chava — the human pair — are placed in the Garden of Eden. Chava is enticed by the serpent to eat from the forbidden fruit of the “Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil,” and in turn gives the fruit to Adam. By absorbing “sin,” Adam and Chava render themselves incapable of remaining in the spiritual paradise of Eden and are banished. Death and hard work (both physical and spiritual) now enter the world, together with pain bearing and raising children. Now begins the struggle to correct the sin of Adam and Chava, which will be the main subject of world history. Cain and Hevel, the first two children of Adam and Chava, bring offerings to G-d. Hevel gives the finest of his flock and his offering is accepted, but Cain gives inferior produce and his offering is rejected. In the ensuing quarrel, Cain kills Hevel and is condemned to wander the earth. The Torah traces the genealogy of the other children of Adam and Chava, and the descendants of Cain until the birth of Noach. After the death of Sheith, mankind descends into evil, and G-d decides that He will blot out man in a flood which will deluge the world. However, one man, Noach, finds favor with G-d.

Noach

It is ten generations since the creation of the first human. Adam’s descendants have corrupted the world with immorality, idolatry and robbery, and G-d resolves to bring a flood which will destroy all the earth’s inhabitants except for the

righteous Noach, his family and sufficient animals to re-populate the earth. G-d instructs Noach to build an ark. After forty days and nights, the flood covers even the tops of the highest mountains. After 150 days the water starts to recede. On the 17th day of the 7th month, the ark comes to rest on Mount Ararat. Noach sends out a raven and then a dove to ascertain if the waters have abated. The dove returns. A week later Noach again sends the dove, which returns the same evening with an olive leaf in its beak. After another seven days Noach sends the dove once more; the dove does not return. G-d tells Noach and his family to leave the ark. Noach brings offerings to G-d from the animals which were carried in the ark for this purpose. G-d vows never again to flood the entire world and designates the rainbow as a sign of this covenant. Noach and his descendants are now permitted to slaughter and eat meat, unlike Adam. G-d commands the Seven Universal Laws: The prohibition against idolatry, adultery, theft, blasphemy, murder, eating meat torn from a live animal, and the obligation to set up a legal system. The world’s climate is established as we know it today. Noach plants a vineyard and becomes intoxicated from its produce. Ham, one of Noach’s sons, delights in seeing his father drunk and uncovered. Shem and Yafet, however, manage to cover their father without looking at his nakedness, by walking backwards. For this incident, Canaan is cursed to be a slave. The Torah lists the offspring of Noach’s three sons from whom the seventy nations of the world are descended. The Torah records the incident of the Tower of Babel, which results in G-d fragmenting communication into many languages and the dispersal of the nations throughout the world. The Parsha concludes with the genealogy of Noach to Avram.

END OF EVIL EMPIRES

The great deluge that destroyed all of civilization except for the survivors in Noach’s ark was intended to serve as a lesson for all time that evil empires will inevitably perish.

“Never give up hope that evil will be punished,” advised the Sage Netai the Arbalite (*Pirkei Avot* 11:7). His counsel is reinforced by the observation made elsewhere (*Avot* 5:2) that there were ten generations of sinners from Adam to Noach but the long suffering attribute of G-d postponed the

great deluge to wipe out a corrupt world for 1656 years.

Throughout history evil empires have risen and fallen, the most recent examples being the demise of the Third Reich and the disappearance of Tsarist and Communist regimes in Russia.

There are evil empires today that threaten not only Israel but also the entire world. This week’s Torah portion reminds us that they too will disappear and spare Israel forever.

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PARSHA Q&A ?

BEREISHET

1. Why does the Torah start with the account of Creation?
2. What happened to the light that was created on the first day?
3. Why isn't the word "good" associated with the second day?
4. How were the trees supposed to taste?
5. On which day were the sun and moon created?
6. G-d blessed the birds to be fruitful and to multiply. Why did He not do so with the beasts?
7. In whose likeness was man fashioned?
8. What kind of food did Adam eat?
9. Why is "the sixth day" written with the definite article?
10. At the end of the sixth day what was the world still lacking?
11. Why was man made from dust gathered from the entire earth?
12. How is man superior to the animals?
13. Why was it not good that man be alone?
14. Where do we learn that one must not add to a commandment from G-d?
15. What does it mean that Adam and Chava "knew that they were naked"?
16. Why did Hevel choose to be a shepherd?
17. What was the marital practice of the generation who lived before the flood?
18. What did Tuval-Cain invent?
19. Why did Chanoch die at a young age?
20. What was the sign that Shem was born with great propensity for righteousness?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to Bereshet's Questions!

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary unless otherwise stated.

1. 1:1 - So that when the nations accuse us of stealing *Eretz Canaan* from the Canaanites, we can respond that G-d, as Creator, has the right to give the land to whomever He sees fit, and He gave *Eretz Canaan* to us.
2. 1:4 - G-d saw that the wicked would be unworthy of it so He hid it for the righteous.
3. 1:7 - Because the work with the water wasn't completed until the third day. Anything that is incomplete is not "good."
4. 1:11 - The wood was to have the taste of the fruit.
5. 1:14 - They were created on the first day and suspended in the firmament on the fourth day.
6. 1:22 - He did not want the serpent, who was to be cursed, to receive a blessing.
7. 1:26 - In the likeness of the angels.
8. 1:30 - Vegetation.
9. 1:31 - "The" in Hebrew is the letter *hey*, which has a numerical value of five. G-d created the world on the condition that it will endure only if the Jewish People accept the Five Books of the Torah.
10. 2:2 - Rest.
11. 2:7 - So that wherever he might die, the earth would receive his body.
12. 2:7 - He was given understanding and speech.
13. 2:18 - If he were alone, he would appear to be a god. The creation of woman emphasized man's dependence.
14. 3:3 - From Chava. G-d commanded not to eat from the tree but she added not to touch it. Because she added to the command she eventually came to transgress it.
15. 3:7 - They had been given one commandment and they had stripped themselves of it.
16. 4:2 - Since the ground had been cursed he refrained from cultivating it.
17. 4:19 - They married two wives, one with whom to have children. The other one was given a potion which prevented her from bearing children.
18. 4:22 - Murder weapons.
19. 5:22 - Though he was righteous, he was easily influenced. Therefore G-d took him before his time to protect him from sinning.
20. 5:32 - He was born already circumcised.

PARSHA Q&A ?

NOACH

1. Which particular sin sealed the fate of the flood generation?
2. Why did G-d tell Noach to build an ark, as opposed to saving him via some other method?
3. The ark had three levels. What function did each level serve?
4. What indication do we have that Noach was familiar with the Torah?
5. Why did G-d postpone bringing the flood for seven days?
6. Why did the first water of the flood come down as light rain?
7. What did people say that threatened Noach, and what did G-d do to protect him?
8. What grouping of creatures escaped the punishment of the flood?
9. How deeply was the ark submerged in the water?
10. What did the olive branch symbolize?
11. How long did the punishment of the flood last?
12. A solar year is how many days longer than a lunar year?
13. When did humans receive permission to eat meat?
14. What prohibition was given along with the permission to eat meat?
15. Why does the command to “be fruitful and multiply” directly follow the prohibition of murder?
16. Name two generations in which the rainbow never appeared.
17. Why did Noach curse Canaan specifically? Give two reasons.
18. Why does the Torah call Nimrod a mighty hunter?
19. The sin of the generation of the dispersion was greater than the sin of the generation of the flood. Why was the punishment of the former less severe?
20. Why was Sarah also called Yiscah?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to Noach's Questions!

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary unless otherwise stated.

1. 6:13 - Robbery.
2. 6:14 - So that people would see Noach building the ark and ask him what he was doing. When Noach would answer, “G-d is bringing a flood,” it might encourage some people to repent.
3. 6:16 - The top level housed the people, the middle level housed the animals, and the bottom level, the refuse.
4. 7:2 - G-d told him to take into the ark seven of each kosher-type animal, and two of each non-kosher type. “Kosher” and “non-kosher” are Torah concepts.
5. 7:4 - To allow seven days to mourn the death of Mesushelach.
6. 7:12 - To give the generation a chance to repent.
7. 7:13,15 - People said, “If we see him going into the ark, we’ll smash it!” G-d surrounded it with bears and lions to kill any attackers.
8. 7:22 - The fish.
9. 8:4 - Eleven amot.
10. 8:11 - Nothing. It was a leaf, not a branch. (The olive leaf symbolized that it’s better to eat food “bitter like an olive” but which comes directly from G-d, rather than sweet food provided by humans.)
11. 8:14 - A full solar year.
12. 8:14 - Eleven days.
13. 9:3 - After the flood.
14. 9:4 - The prohibition of eating a limb cut from a living animal.
15. 9:7 - To equate one who purposely abstains from having children to one who commits murder.
16. 9:12 - The generation of King Chizkiyahu and the generation of Shimon bar Yochai.
17. 9:22,24 - Because Canaan is the one who revealed Noach’s disgrace to Ham. And because Ham stopped Noach from fathering a fourth son. Thus, Noach cursed Ham’s fourth son, Canaan.
18. 10:9 - He used words to ensnare the minds of people, persuading them to rebel against G-d.
19. 11:9 - They lived together peacefully.
20. 11:29 - The word “Yiscah” is related to the Hebrew word “to see.” Sarah was called Yiscah because she could “see” the future via prophecy. Also, because of her beauty, everyone would gaze at her.

- Differences between a Hebrew male slave and a girl minor sold into bondage by her father
- When a Jew is sold into slavery for lack of funds to compensate the victim of his thievery
- Limitations on father's ability to sell daughter
- Marriage of Hebrew maid to her master
- Treatment of a Hebrew slave and method of redemption
- How one violation leads to selling himself to idol worshipper
- Rules regarding redemption of slave and of property
- Piercing of the ear of slave who insists on remaining in bondage after six years
- Some laws concerning the female captive of war taken for marriage
- When the slave cannot stay in bondage beyond six years
- The master's obligation to support the slave's family
- Why the ear and doorpost were chosen
- How a heathen slave is acquired and how he becomes free
- The ability of such a slave to acquire funds
- Freedom for such a slave as a result of his master causing him to lose an eye, tooth or limb

THE ERRANT EAR

“Why is it that the ear of all parts of the body is pierced when a Hebrew slave chooses to remain in bondage after his six-year period of servitude has ended?”

In answer to this question Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai provides a fascinating insight:

“The ear that heard My voice at Mount Sinai declare ‘The children of Israel are my servants’ (*Vayikra* 25:55) — and not the servants of servants — and went and sold himself as a slave to another deserves to be pierced.”

Although this explains only the case of the Jew who voluntarily sold himself into slavery, the same applies to the thief sold by the court into bondage in order to compensate the victim of his crime. Rashi (*Shmot* 21:16) quotes the *Mechilta*,

which states that the ear is pierced in this case because it ignored what it heard at Sinai that it is forbidden to steal.

The significance of the ear in regard to slavery takes on a special dimension when we reflect on what the *gemara* (*Bava Kama* 85b) rules in regard to payment for physical damages. Such compensation is always based on how much the value of the victim theoretically on the slave market has been reduced by the damage caused. If he caused the victim to become deaf the damager is obligated to pay the total amount. This is so because a deaf slave will fetch no buyer at all since it is virtually impossible for him to receive orders from his employer.

It then follows that the sin of ignoring the instructions of the Ultimate Master and the consequences of hearing the instructions of a mortal one all revolve around the ear to be pierced.

• *Kiddushin* 22b

What the SAGES Say

“A person who sins and repeats his sin no longer considers such an act as sinful.”

• *Rabbi Huna - Kiddushin* 20a

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- What is considered a visible part of the body whose damage grants freedom to a heathen slave
- How large and small animals are acquired
- How real estate and chattel are acquired separately or together
- Rabban Gamliel's tithing during sea voyage
- One oath in court pulling along another
- Trading animals and other forms of *chalipin*
- The special acquisition power of the Sanctuary
- A father's obligations towards his son and the limits of a woman's responsibilities
- When there is only enough money for one of two *mitzvot* or for support of Torah learning of father or son
- The proper age for marriage
- Teaching Torah to a grandson
- Dividing up time for different kinds of Torah study
- Torah as an antidote to the evil inclination
- A child's obligations towards parents
- The non-Jew's exceptional honoring of his father
- The special behavior of some Sages towards their parents

HOW MUCH TO SPEND

A father has an obligation to redeem his first-born son by giving a *kohen* five *selaim*. If one was not thus redeemed by his father he has an obligation to later redeem himself. What if one has the obligation to both redeem himself and his son but has only five *selaim* — who takes priority?

Rabbi Yirmiyah makes it clear that there is a consensus that the father's redemption of himself comes first because this is a *mitzvah* relating to himself rather than one that he must do for his son.

The question arises, however, why a Jew in such a difficult financial situation is obligated to even redeem himself. The

gemara (*Bava Kama* 9b) clearly indicates that it is not required of a person to spend everything he has in order to fulfill a positive commandment (as opposed to his obligation to spend everything he owns to avoid transgressing a negative commandment). Why then should a man with only five *selaim* to his name be required to fulfill the *mitzvah* of redemption of the first-born?

An answer to this is found in *Mishneh Berurah* (*Biyur Halacha* in 656a). The *gemara* in *Bava Kama* concerns a person who lives on his resources and giving them all away, or even a substantial portion of them, may reduce him to poverty. The fellow who has only five *selaim* is obviously someone who supports himself from his work and spending that much money will not affect his financial situation.

• *Kiddushin* 29b

What the SAGES Say

"There are three partners in the creation of a human: G-d, father and mother. When a person honors his father and mother, G-d says that He considers it as though He lived among them and was honored by him."

• *Beraita - Kiddushin* 30b

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CHESED L'AVRAHAM

From: Abraham in L.A.

Dear Rabbi,

I remember that my grandfather, of blessed memory, used to mention Rabbi Meir when he gave tzadakah. I don't know exactly what he was saying, but I think it had something to do with asking G-d to help him give the charity in the name of Rabbi Meir of the gemara. Can you please tell me if there is such a custom and what it might mean? I admired my grandfather, who I was named after, very much and want to continue his ways, but I was told there is no basis for the way he did this. I find this hard to believe since he was a very learned and pious Jew. Thank you for any help you can give me on this question.

Dear Abraham,

The main character trait of Abraham was *chesed* — loving-kindness. You and your grandfather's namesake, Avraham Avinu, would be very proud of you for going in his ways of charity and loving-kindness.

And yes, there is a widespread custom to mention Rabbi Meir while giving charity. In Hebrew the phrase is "*Eloka d'Meir aneini*" which means: "May the G-d of Rabbi Meir answer me".

But what does this mean and what does it have to do with giving charity?

The Talmud (Kiddushin 36a) records a difference of opinion regarding the explanation of the verse, "You are sons to the L-rd your G-d" (Deut 14). Rabbi Yehuda explains, when you go in the ways of G-d, then you are called sons. If you don't go in the ways of G-d, you are not called sons. Rabbi Meir argues and posits, whether you go in the ways of G-d or not, you are still considered sons, as in the verses "foolish sons" and "unfaithful sons" etc.

When giving charity we recall Rabbi Meir as if to say: G-d,

please accept Rabbi Meir's explanation of the verse and view us as your sons even if we aren't worthy. This supplication is pertinent to both the giver of the charity and the recipient.

Regarding the giver, one of the reasons for giving charity (aside from the mitzvah of helping others) is to atone for our shortcomings and ward off harm. This is what's intended in the High Holiday prayer, "*teshuva* (repentance), *tefilla* (prayer) and *tzadaka* (charity) nullify bad decrees". Similarly, the Sages taught, "Charity saves from death". Calling upon the G-d of Rabbi Meir while giving charity, then, implicitly recognizes our shortcomings and expresses our hope that G-d will accept our humble repentance and forgive us "as a father has mercy on his son".

Regarding the recipient, even though we can't truly judge our fellow man, we are still required to try to dispense charity responsibly by giving it to people who really need it and who will use it for good purposes. However, ultimately, whether a person seems deserving or not, we can't really know for sure. Calling upon the G-d of Rabbi Meir when we give is as if to say, "Even if this person is not really deserving in your eyes, accept the position of Rabbi Meir and consider him your son nonetheless".

This is consistent with an analogy made by Rabbi Akiva in a discussion he had with the wicked Roman leader Turnus Rufus. The Roman asked, "If your G-d loves the poor why doesn't He support them?" Rabbi Akiva answered, "In order to give us a venue for atonement and salvation by giving to them". The Roman answered, "On the contrary, by giving you're going against the King's will". Rabbi Akiva replied, "This can be compared to king who was angry with his son. He put him in prison and ordered that his son not be given food or drink. One of the king's servants had mercy on the prince and gave him bread and water. When the king found out, wouldn't he actually be happy with the person who helped his son?"

So Abraham, keep going in the charitable ways of your grandfather Abraham, and may the G-d of Rabbi Meir answer you!

WHAT'S THE RIGHT THING TO DO?

REAL-LIFE QUESTIONS OF SOCIAL AND BUSINESS ETHICS

GETTING A TENTH MAN

Question: In my place of work we try to maintain a daily minyan for the mincha service. Although most of the participants are people from the office in which I work there sometimes arises a need to ask someone from a neighboring office to join us. There is, however, a hesitation to do so without permission from the other fellow's boss. What is the right thing to do?

Answer: Your hesitation is right on mark. Our Sages give special dispensations in regard to prayers and blessings to

employees in order to avoid their depriving their employer from the time for which they are being paid.

If you cannot get the boss himself to join your minyan, at least make sure that he consents to his employee's temporary absence from his desk. It has even been suggested in the case of an uncooperative boss to offer him payment for the time lost. Even if you don't actually end up paying such a relatively small sum of money the offer itself may succeed in gaining the approval needed.

NEEDLE IN HAYSTACK – KEY IN SEA

Countless stories are told about Jews who miraculously recovered lost items as a result of making a pledge to give charity. One such story publicized by a charity organization called “Kupat Ha’ihr Bnei Brak” tells of a Jerusalem family that took a trip to the beach in Ashdod.

In order to save time on a Friday afternoon the head of the family decided to avoid public transportation and instead made an arrangement with a friend who owned a large van. When they reached the beach he suggested to the driver to lock up the van and join them in the refreshing water.

Everyone enjoyed the outing; adults swimming and the youngsters building castles in the sand. When it came to

make the trip back to Jerusalem in time to prepare for Shabbat, the driver suddenly realized that the key to the van that he wore around his neck upon entering the water had been lost in the sea. Despair descended on the family but the father dramatically announced that he would make a donation to the Kupat Ha’ihr if the key was found. His hope of finding a key in the sea struck everyone as remote as finding a needle in a haystack. One of the youngsters took the initiative of asking the lifeguard on duty whether someone had brought him a lost key. He said that one minute before he had gotten to the lifeguard’s station a swimmer had brought the key from the sea.

PARSHA INSIGHTS

continued from page one

We may know where our car is better than ever before, but when it comes to knowing where we ourselves are — that’s a different story.

If we had developed in any real sense over the last couple of thousand years would we still find anything of value in Shakespeare? If the human spirit had undergone a comparable degree of progress to technology, the poetry and art of those who died hundreds of years ago should seem impossibly quaint to the modern eye. If we were really more advanced, no one should be the slightest bit interested in John Donne, Cervantes, Sophocles, Pascal, Mozart or Boticelli — except for historians. And yet we recognize that our generation is hard put to come anywhere close to these artists.

Technology is an apology for our feelings of inferiority when we compare ourselves to our forebears. Our axiom is, ‘We may have less to say, but we can say it from the middle of nowhere.’ Cold comfort is better than none.

At the end of this week’s *parsha* the Torah describes the attempt of the Generation of Dispersion (*Dor Hapalaga*) to build a tower that reached into the sky.

“They said to one another, ‘Come, let us make bricks and burn them in fire.’ And the brick served them as stone, and the

lime served them as mortar.”

Rashi comments: *In Babylon there were no stones...* — Because there were no rocks in Babylon they were forced to apply technology and invent the brick. Immediately following this verse they say “Come, let us build a city and a tower with its top in the heavens.” They wanted to make a tower to challenge G-d.

This is a seeming non sequitur. What does the lack of stones in Babylon have to do with building a city and a tower to challenge G-d?

Why is making bricks a harbinger of incipient rebellion?

That generation was intoxicated with technology. Bricks were the Babylonian equivalent of a Saturn V rocket. Take some mud, bake it and voila! Genius. If man can take mud and turn it into towers and spires and palaces, what can he not do? Is there a limit to his power?

From this kind of thinking there is a very small step for mankind to think that they can dispense with G-d completely.

“Let us build and make for us a name.”

We have the technology.

• Sources: Rabbi Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld; Rabbi Yissocher Frand

LOVE OF THE LAND - THE PLACES

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

EVEN SHATIYAH – WHERE IT ALL BEGAN

In the Holy of Holies in the Beit Hamikdash there was a stone called *Even Shatiyah* (Foundation Stone) on which rested the Holy Ark. Even after the Ark was removed, the stone was the surface upon which



incense was offered on Yom Kippur.

Rabbi Yossi explains the name given to this stone:

“It was from this stone that the universe was founded.”