

# OHRNET

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## PARSHA INSIGHTS

### THE HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE TO ETERNITY

*"Go for yourself..."*

**M**any years ago in a more naive and somewhat safer world, I once hitchhiked from Amsterdam to Pisa in Italy.

Only the young and the reckless (and I was both) would climb aboard the rear seat of a BMW 900 motorcycle on a night of driving rain with a 50 pound pack strapped to one's back (This placed my center of gravity somewhere past the outer extremity of the rear wheel.) Every time the rider accelerated, the backpack dragged me backwards off the bike. The autobahn was a sea of rain. It was King David who taught us that G-d "protects fools." And that night I certainly qualified for protection.

However, hitchhiking taught me something other than G-d protects the foolish; hitchhiking taught me what is called in Hebrew "*menuchat hanefesh*", literally the "repose of the spirit."

We live in a world where stress can literally eat us up if we let it. How do we combat this killer?

There's an old lady who sits in a nursing home in New York City and every day she says the following:

*"Yesterday is history. Tomorrow is a mystery. Today is a gift from G-d — that's why we call it the present."*

When you stand by the side of the road waiting for a ride, you have no idea whether someone will pick you up in a minute, an hour, or next week.

You are not in control. It's wonderfully relaxing.

No one in his right mind hitchhikes to an important business meeting or to catch an airplane. The very act of hitchhiking says, "*I'm prepared to be where I am. I don't need to be anywhere else.*"

A hitchhiker feels the presence of *hashgacha* (Divine supervision). My life is not in my control. All I have is the present. And therefore I must live in this moment and be here now.

That's why hitchhiking is a great calmer. (No, I don't mean *karma*.)

A Jew's job is to live in the present, but not *for* the present. Much of our lives are spent thinking about what might happen, or what might not happen, or where I could be/should be now, or what went wrong or what went right. What a waste! This moment is unique. It will never be here again. Sometimes, I just close my eyes and think, "I'm alive!"

The little agenda pilot that lives in our head can steal our lives away without us even noticing, unless we heed our little hitchhiker's guide to eternity saying, "G-d gave you this moment; live it to the full!"

At the beginning of this week's parsha, G-d said to Avraham, "*Go for yourself...*" Actually, the Hebrew translation is "*Go to yourself...*"

Avraham is the personification of kindness in the world. The essence of kindness is giving, and only a person who is totally at one with where he is can give fully of himself. Avraham had the ability to "*go to himself*", to connect every G-d given second in his life to eternity.

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## PARSHA OVERVIEW

Ten generations have passed since Noach. Man has descended spiritually. In the year 1948 from Creation, Avram is born. By observing the world, Avram comes to the inescapable Truth of G-d's existence, and thus merits that G-d appear to him. At the beginning of this week's *Parsha*, G-d tells Avram to leave his land, his relatives and his father's house and travel to an unknown land where G-d will make him into a great nation. Avram leaves, taking with him his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, their servants and those whom they converted to faith in G-d. When they reach the land of Canaan, G-d appears to Avram and tells him that this is the land that He will give to his descendants. A famine ensues and Avram is forced to relocate to Egypt to find food. Realizing that his wife's beauty 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 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.

## ISRAEL Forever

### THE HIDDEN POTENTIAL

Why, it is frequently asked, is *Eretz Yisrael* the place where young people from all over the world discover their hidden potential to become fully committed Jews?

Perhaps the answer lies in the mystery that unfolds in the very first passages of the weekly Torah portion that will be read in synagogues this Shabbat.

Avraham is commanded by G-d to abandon his land, his birthplace and his father's home and travel to a land that G-d will show him. Although no indication was given as to the identity of that land, Avraham heads in the direction of the

Land of Canaan. Why?

In his commentary, Ramban suggests that Avraham intuitively knew that the Land of Canaan was the special province of G-d and that this would be the Land that would be given to him.

Avraham felt what history has proven to be true. The Land given to Avraham's posterity has a special spiritual quality that enables those who come here to discover their own spiritual potential. We can therefore hope that this quality will soon have the same effect on those born here and thus secure Israel forever.

לע"נ

מרת יוטא רחל בת ר' יעקב יהודה ע"ה

ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

## 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 - 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.

- Status of eggs found in a slaughtered chicken
- The cohabitation and birth pattern of chickens
- The amount of *chametz* eaten or possessed for which one is punished
- Slaughtering and covering the blood with ashes on Yom Tov
- When positive and negative commandments clash
- Moving a ladder on Yom Tov and the problem of *marit ayin*
- The position of Beit Hillel and Beit Shammai re *simchat Yom Tov*
- Designating which birds will be used tomorrow on Yom Tov
- The mystery of finding other birds in place of the designated ones
- Using a grinding board for meat cutting on Yom Tov and handling animal skins
- Booth fronts serving as counters – removing and returning them on Yom Tov
- What may be carried out to the public domain on Yom Tov
- Taking *challah* or other priestly gifts to the *kohen* on Yom Tov
- Certain forms of removing vegetable shells for consumption on Yom Tov
- When certain foods achieve the status of *tevel*
- The Levite who took his *ma'aser* tithe before the *kohen* received his *terumah*

## WHAT ELSE IS A LULAV GOOD FOR?

A lulav and the other species that make up the *arba minim* that we are required to take up on Succot may be carried from the private to the public domain on Yom Tov itself. The reason why such carrying is permitted despite the ban on performing creative labor on Shabbat and holidays is thus explained:

Since the Torah explicitly permitted carrying on Yom Tov from the private to public domain for the purpose of preparing food for the holiday, our Sages interpreted this as extending to carrying for other purposes as well. The only condition is that there must be some need for the object on Yom Tov itself even if it is not for the purpose of food preparation.

The three such examples in *mishna* are a baby, a lulav and a Sefer Torah. Tosefot explains that the baby can be carried in order to circumcise him, the Sefer Torah to read from it, and the lulav in order to fulfill the mitzvah of the *arba minim*.

In his commentary, Rabbi Zvi Hirsh Chayos suggests that the lulav to which the *mishna* refers is not necessarily one used for a mitzvah on Succot but a palm branch one wishes

to carry on another holiday. As possible uses for such a lulav that would justify its being carried he refers us to the commentary of Rashi in *Mesechta Succah* (40a) which states that the prime use of a lulav is to sweep the home. The Talmud Yerushalmi also mentions that one can use a lulav to fan air to comfort an ill person.

These possible uses of a lulav, he concludes, would therefore justify carrying a lulav on any Yom Tov when there is no mitzvah of *arba minim*. The question arises, however, as to why a lulav on the Shabbat of Succot may not be handled since the inability to perform the mitzvah on that day leaves it in the status of an ordinary tree branch which is considered *muktzeh*. (*Shulchan Aruch Orech Chaim* 658:1). Why is this so when a lulav can be used as a broom or a fan?

The answer is that since the lulav on Succot has been specifically designated for the use of the mitzvah, it cannot be utilized for sweeping. In regard to the use of a lulav as an “air conditioner” mentioned in the Talmud Yerushalmi, the Chafetz Chaim in *Mishneh Berurah* (*Orach Chaim*, *ibid. Sha'ar Hatziun* 3) suggests that perhaps the ban on handling *muktzeh* was waived in order to comfort the sick party.

• *Beitzah* 13a

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# LOVE of the LAND

VOLUME ONE - THE GLADSTONE EDITION

## WHEN REPENTANCE IS NOT ENOUGH

From: Andrew Lappin in Glencoe, IL

Dear Rabbi,

It is stated, “repentance was created before the universe itself; that repentance was a pre-condition of Creation”. If so, how is it that G-d is so intensely angered at the Jews for the sin of the golden calf? Or was that just for “show”? Furthermore, how is it that G-d, in response to Moshe’s subsequent impatience with the Jewish people [that led him to strike the stone to get water instead of speaking to the stone as commanded by G-d], forbids him from entering the Land?

Dear Andrew,

You are raising a very good question: If repentance is so important as to precede Creation, and if it is so essential that it was actually a pre-condition for Creation, why does it seem not to have helped in the cases you quote?

True, our Sages taught that repentance was one of the seven creations created pre-Creation (Pesachim 54a). And as you mention, one explanation for this is that G-d foresaw that mankind would sin, calling into the question the very justification of Creation. He therefore made an entity called *teshuvah* — repentance — to ensure the perpetuation of Existence. This is the meaning of the teaching of our Sages: “The rabbis asked Wisdom, What is the punishment due to a sinner? Wisdom replied, he should be pursued by evil. The rabbis then asked G-d [the same question.] He replied, let him repent and he’ll be forgiven” (J.T., Maccot 2:6).

Still, when pondering the power of repentance, it is important to consider the severity of the transgression as well. Clearly, relatively minor offences can be more easily mitigated by regret than severe ones. Yet, regarding some acts, no amount of repentance can rectify the ramifications of the wrong, and punishment is required despite the repentance.

This was the case regarding the sin of the golden calf. Up until that event, the Jewish people had witnessed such fantastic and open miracles at the hand of G-d such as the plagues, the splitting of the sea and the events at Mount Sinai that it was an abomination in the eyes of G-d that they should lapse into worshipping the calf, which itself is a transgression liable of the death penalty, made all the worse considering what they had witnessed. For this reason, 3,000 people were killed for actively worshipping the calf despite being warned and observed by witnesses.

Furthermore, the sin of the calf is compared to adultery — another of the cardinal sins subject to capital punishment. Thus Moshe broke the Tablets, compared to a *ketuba* between G-d and the Jewish people, before they were given, in order to diminish the infidelity of His faithless bride. Similarly, Rashi explains that the reason Moses ground the

calf, mixed it with water and gave the Jews to drink the potion was in order that, in the absence of witnesses, the Jews would be tested much as a woman suspected of faithlessness was tested with *sotah* water.

Given the idolatrous and adulterous nature of the sin of the golden calf and its resultant desecration of G-d’s name, it is clear why G-d was so angry, and why, even though the Jewish people repented (Avoda Zara 4b), their sin was not fully erased. This can be further understood when considering the third cardinal sin — murder. No matter how much a person would repent such an act, *teshuvah* wouldn’t forestall punishment to exempt him from the death penalty. On the contrary, *teshuvah* only assures that the death will atone — but the penalty is still administered.

Perhaps this can help us understand your question regarding Moshe. Relative to Moshe’s extremely lofty spiritual position, his becoming angry with the Jewish people, calling them “rebels” and deviating from G-d’s command to speak to the rock by hitting it instead, was tantamount to disbelief in G-d and to *chillul Hashem* — a desecration of G-d’s name. This is implied in the verse, “Because you did not believe in me, to sanctify me in the eyes of Israel, therefore you shall not bring them into the Land” (Num. 20:12). In fact, *chillul Hashem* is considered one of the gravest offences, and is so described by Rambam in his Laws of Teshuva. Even though Moshe surely did the highest form of *teshuvah m’ahava* — repentance out of love for G-d, not fear of punishment — this apparently was not enough to fully atone for the (relative) severity of his act, and perhaps the decree that he be barred from entering the Land of Israel was needed for a complete atonement.

That being said, the words of Midrash Yalkut Shimoni (Parshat V’etchanan) are very illuminating. In discussing Moshe’s 515 prayers to repeal the decree, the Midrash portrays in great detail the dialogue between Moshe and G-d in the prophet’s plea to enter the Land. After hearing Moshe’s very compelling arguments, G-d finally replies that either he’ll have to die outside the land or the Jewish people will have to die. This enigmatic response may be explained as follows:

If Moshe and Aharon would enter the Land, the Temple they would build would be eternal. However, G-d saw that the Jewish people would eventually greatly sin and be liable for destruction. The destruction of the Temple was thus necessary as a means of arousing Jews to repent. Had it not been vulnerable to destruction, harsher measures against Jewry would have been required. For this reason Moshe was prevented from entering the Land.

According to this, Moshe’s *teshuvah* effected complete atonement for himself. Still, he was barred from entering Israel for the ultimate good of the Jewish people. When Moshe understood this, he made the ultimate sacrifice for the people he so loved and prayed no more to repeal the decree.

## ANOTHER DIMENSION OF HOSPITALITY

**Question:** When I conclude a visit to the home of a friend, my host escorts me outside for a short distance. My protests that here is no need to bother are brushed aside with a statement about concern for my safety. I don't quite understand such concern in a municipal setting and wonder whether I should act in the same fashion towards my own guests. What is the right thing to do?

**Answer:** Your question is raised by the commentaries on the Talmud's statement (*Mesechta Sotah* 45b) that one who escorts another even four cubits provides him with protection for the rest of the way. Why this applies even when the

journey begins in a safe place like a home in the city is explained by Maharsha in this fashion:

The security provided by this brief escorting is supernatural. Since the escorter's desire is to provide his guest with protection, his good intention is carried to a successful conclusion in the spirit of "G-d fulfills the wishes of those who fear Him." (*Tehillim* 145:19) Another perspective is that the angels created by the escorter's token performance of the mitzvah of escorting watch over his guest and bring him safely home.

In conclusion, you have learned a valuable lesson from your friend. Now apply it!

## THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY \_\_\_\_\_

### A "CHANCE" MEETING

It isn't every day that a Jew who asks a question from a rabbi thousands of miles away on the Internet gets a chance to meet that rabbi face to face. But that is exactly what happened some years ago to Rabbi Mordechai Becher who had spent considerable time answering questions presented to Ohr Somayach's "Ask the Rabbi" e-mail service. On a lecture tour in South Africa, Becher took some time to enjoy a barbecue picnic together with the late Rabbi Gavriel Klitzko of Ohr Somayach's Johannesburg branch. Passing by

their picnic site was a group of college-age trekkers who were invited to join the feast.

"My only connection to my Jewish faith," confided one of the young men, "was the question I occasionally asked a rabbi on the Internet." When they both realized that the rabbi he had turned to was standing right in front of him, a bond was formed. The young backpacker eventually became observant, and Rabbi Becher, today a world famous lecturer for "Gateways", attended his wedding.

## LOVE OF THE LAND - THE WISDOM

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

### "G-D OF MEIR, ANSWER ME"

When the great Sage Rabbi Meir went to redeem his sister-in-law from her forced confinement to a Roman house of ill repute, the bribed guard on duty expressed reluctance to cooperate for fear that he would be executed by the authorities who had placed her there.

"Whenever you are in danger," Rabbi Meir assured him, "just utter the prayer 'G-d of Meir, answer me.' And you will immediately be saved."

To prove the potency of the prayer Rabbi Meir incited some nearby man-eating dogs to attack him. As they approached he cried out "G-d of Meir, answer me" and the

dangerous dogs retreated.

The guard then released the young lady but was eventually discovered and sentenced to death by hanging. As he mounted the gallows he recalled Rabbi Meir's promise and uttered the prayer "G-d of Meir, answer me". In miraculous fashion he was released by his executioners. (*Mesechta Avodah Zara* 18a)

Rabbi Meir's tomb is assumed to be located in Tiveria and is one of the more popular places for prayer. His name lives on not only in his countless statements in the Talmud but also in the many charities which bear the name Rabbi Meir Baal haNess – Rabbi Meir the Miracle Worker.

