

OHRNET

SHABBAT PARSHAT LECH LECHA · FOR THE WEEK ENDING 13 CHESHVAN 5760 · OCT. 23, 1999 · VOL. 7 NO. 3

PARSHA INSIGHTS

AN HISTORICAL BACKWATER

“And it was in the days of Amrafel, king of Shinar...” (14:1)

In the middle of this week’s Parsha, the Torah seems to make a detour into the backwaters of Canaanite political history. For an entire chapter of 25 verses the Torah describes a war between the four kings and the five kings. Ostensibly, these events have little to do with the story of Avraham and the genesis of the Jewish People.

Or maybe there is more here than meets the eye...

The four kings and the five kings represent two inimical world views. The four kings represent a world-view where everything in creation is subsumed under the “forces of nature.” This view holds that there is nothing else in this world — except this world. Four always denotes this-worldliness. There are four points of the compass. We speak of the “four winds.” The world is composed of four elements: Earth, wind, fire, and water. The letter *dalet* which has the numerical value of four consists of two lines at right angles to each other, suggesting the four points of the compass.

You can look at this world as being no more than what can be contained within it — the four directions, the four winds, and the four elements.

Or you can look deeper and see that this world is focused on an Existence beyond itself. This is the world-view represented by the five kings.

Five in Hebrew is represented by the letter *heh*. If you look at the letter *heh*,

you will see that it is composed of the letter *dalet* (which stands for four) plus the letter *yud*. *Yud* is a unique letter. It is the only letter which doesn’t touch the line on which you write. It is no more than the smallest dot floating above the line. The letter *heh* is a pictogram of this world focused and revolving around that which is above this world — the *dalet* (the “four” of this world) with the *yud* at its axis.

Avraham fought on behalf of the five kings against the four kings. Avraham was the first person to look at this world and see an Existence beyond. If there was a manor, there had to be a “Lord of the manor.”

After “Avram” fought the war against the four kings, G-d added a letter to his name. Not surprisingly, that letter was the letter *heh*. For Avraham represents all that the *heh* represents — that this world revolves around a Higher Existence.

It was also after the war against the four kings that G-d made a covenant with Avraham, the covenant of *brit mila*. *Brit mila* represents the sublimation of the physical to the metaphysical. It signifies that the human body is only complete when we dedicate it to its Maker.

The natural cycle of this world is seven. There are seven days in the week, seven notes in the scale, seven colors in the rainbow. *Brit mila* is performed on the eighth day because it symbolizes the dedication of the physical to that which is above the physical.

Just a little war between four kings and five kings. Just a little backwater historical chapter in the Canaanite history books...

WOMEN’S LIB

“And there was a quarreling between the herdsman of Avram’s livestock and the herdsmen of Lot’s livestock.” (13:7)

There’s an interesting difference between the Greek and the Hebrew word for “womb.” In Greek the “womb” is *hysteros*. The English word *hysterical* derives directly from *hysteros*. Generations of Western attitudes to women are revealed in this psycho-linguistic slip.

In Hebrew the word for womb — “*rechem*” — is directly related to the Hebrew word for mercy — *rachamim*. In the Jewish world-view, the defining quality of Woman is mercy.

“And there was a quarreling (riv) between the herdsman of Avram’s livestock and the herdsmen of Lot’s livestock.” (13:7) The word for “quarreling” here is the masculine noun — *riv*. In the very next verse, the Torah uses a word from the same root — *merivah* — but in the feminine: *“So Avram said to Lot: ‘Please let there be no strife (merivah) between me and you.’” (13:8)*

Why does the first verse use a masculine form and the second, a feminine?

Fruitfulness is female. Avram was suggesting to Lot that they separate before what was only a *riv* — a limited problem — proliferate into full-scale hostilities.

Sources:

An Historical Backwater - Rabbi Eliezer Breitowitz in the name of The Maharal of Prague as heard from Rabbi CZ Senter
Women’s Lib - Shelah Hakadosh

YESHAYAHU 40:27 - 41:16

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 caused him to be victorious. The biggest miracle was not that Avraham won the battle, but that he won the war. By remaining a peace loving ser-

vant of G-d, he won the war against the prevailing mentality of war and destruction.

So too, says the Prophet Yeshayahu, 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" (Yeshayahu 41:6,7)

When the hammer strikes the anvil it appears that the purpose is to shape and form the anvil. In reality, 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" (to give). The more a person gives, the more he notices the development of love and other positive character traits within himself.

LOVE OF THE LAND

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

MOUNT TAVOR

When the Prophetess Devorah called upon Barak ben Avinoam in the name of Hashem to gather the thousand soldiers from the tribes of Naftali and Zevulun in order to free Israel from the yoke of Canaanite oppression, she directed him to confront the mighty forces led by Sisra at Mount

Tavor. It was on this lofty mountain in the north of Eretz Yisrael that Hashem granted the outnumbered and outarmed Israelite forces a miraculous victory over their enemies. (Shoftim 4:6-15)

Because it was destined to be the scene of such a great miracle, Mount Tavor asked that the Torah be given to Israel upon it. Its claim was rejected, says the Midrash (Bereishet Rabbah 89:1), because idols had been worshipped upon it. In the end of days, however, it will regain its glory, for Hashem will bring Mount Tavor together with Mount Sinai and Mount Carmel and build the Beit Hamikdash upon them. (Midrash Tanchuma 36:6)



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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

לרפואה שלמה ולזרעא חייא וקיימא
 ליעל ברכה בת שרה ריזא

INHERITING THE PENALTY

In several situations, the Sages penalized someone who violated Torah or Rabbinic law by forbidding the use of the product of that violation. One such situation appears in our *mishna* — the person who intentionally postpones work until the Intermediate Days of Pesach or Succot, work which he could have done earlier. Any gain he acquires from such an effort is forbidden to be enjoyed.

What happens if the violator dies; may his heirs benefit from the result of his forbidden work? Was the penalty directed towards the offender, or to the *product* of his offense?

In posing this question Rabbi Yirmiyahu stated that even if we posit that in the case of other rabbinical penalties they apply to the heirs as well, this may not be true here. If one intentionally cuts off a bit of the ear of a first-born animal in an attempt to make it ineligible for a sacrifice and thus permissible for use, it may be that his heirs too will be penalized by being forbidden use of that animal because maiming a sacred animal is a Torah prohibition. If someone sells a slave to a non-Jew, it may be that the penalty requiring him to free that slave (if the slave flees his new owner and returns) applies to his heirs as well, because selling him to a non-Jew is a serious offense in that it renders the slave incapable of performing the *mitzvot* incumbent on him. Neither of these considerations is present in the case of one who violated the law concerning scheduling work for the Intermediate Days.

In his response to this question, Rabbi Zeira compares this situation to the penalty imposed on one who violated the rabbinical law of the *shemita* (seventh) year, prohibiting fertilization of his field. Just as in that case the penalty applies to him but not to his heirs, so too in our case, the violation of the rabbinical law concerning the Intermediate Days applies only to the offender and not to his heirs.

Why, asks the great eighteenth century scholar Rabbi Yechezkel Landau of Prague (*Responsa Noda B'Yehuda Vol. 1, Orach Chaim Responsa 20*), does the *gemara* not mention the penalty which the Sages imposed on one who retained possession of his *chametz* on Pesach, and discuss whether this penalty applies here as well? His explanation is that in all the cases cited by the *gemara* the Sages never declared the *object* involved in the offense forbidden to all. It was the *offender* who was thus proscribed, and there is therefore the logical possibility that even his heirs who inherit the property of the offender may not be affected. In the case of *chametz*, however, it is prohibited for every Jew to derive any benefit from *chametz* owned by a Jew during Pesach, and once it became thus prohibited, its status cannot change. It was therefore obvious to the *gemara* that it would remain forbidden to all even after the death of the offender.

• *Mo'ed Katan 12b-13a*

THE REWARD FOR OUTREACH

The greatness of a *tzaddik* is described by one of the Sages, on the basis of a passage in the Book of Shmuel (II 23:3), in terms of his ability to have Hashem annul a decree that He has issued.

In his footnotes, Rabbi Yeshayahu Pik Berlin of Breslau refers us to a *gemara* (*Bava Metzia 85a*) with a similar idea. There we find the very same sage, Rabbi Shmuel bar Nachmeini, quoting Rabbi Yonatan, that one who teaches Torah to the son of an ignorant Jew also has the power to have Divine decrees annulled.

There is a significant difference, however, between the two statements. In his commentary on *Ein Yaakov*, Rabbi Yeshayahu Pinto points out that a *tzaddik's* ability to annul a harsh Divine decree is dependent on his appealing to Hashem for such mercy. But regarding one who reaches out and teaches a Jew who grew up in a home where he had no opportunity to study Torah, his reward is so great that there is no *need* for him to even make such an appeal to Hashem, for the merit of his action is so immense that it neutralizes harsh decrees.

This approach leads Rabbi Pinto to an innovative interpretation of the verse which the *gemara* cites as its source for the great reward given for teaching an ignorant man's son: "If you shall extract great value from someone so coarse, you shall be like my mouth." (*Yirmiyahu 15:19*) The simple reading of this passage indicates a Divine promise to grant the teacher power equal to that of Hashem's. But this would not prove that his power is greater in that he can *annul* the Divine decree. Rabbi Pinto, therefore, suggests that the passage be understood as "you shall be like *the* mouth" — a reference to the mouth of a *tzaddik*, which our *gemara* already proves has even the power of annulment. What the Prophet Yirmiyahu is then promising the Jew who reaches out to the unlearned is that the power of their action will be as great as "the mouth of the *tzaddik*," and that even without appealing to Hashem as the *tzaddik* must, they can achieve annulment of Divine decrees.

• *Mo'ed Katan 16b*

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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")

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 S'dom 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!

GOODYEAR

Debbi Gjunik
<gjunik@aol.com>wrote:

Dear Rabbi,
I heard recently that some great Rebbe in Jerusalem said that this year, 5760, will be a difficult, (G-d forbid) hard year for the world in general. Are there — in the gemara or various different sources — opinions to back up this claim? Have you heard of it? Doesn't 5760 stand for "Tehai Shnat Segulot — It should be a year of treasures?"

Dear Debbi Gjunik,

One of today's great Torah Sages, Rabbi Yosef Shalom Eliyashev, in regard to questions such as yours, said the following: "Those who know don't say; those who say don't know." He meant that those who purport to definitively predict the future are only speculating; anyone truly wise enough to know the future is also wise enough to know how much to reveal, when, and to whom.

However, some interesting things have been said about the year 5760:

In Jewish law, the number 5760 represents purity. Thus, one of the kabbalistic writings (Chesed L'Avraham, written around 200 years ago) saw 5760 as the year in which G-d will "remove the spirit of impurity from the land." (*Zechariah* 13:2)

The connection between 5760 and purity is as follows: In Jewish law, ritual purity is achieved by immersing in a pool of naturally gathered waters called a *mikveh*. Now, for a *mikveh* to be valid it must have a certain minimum amount of water. The Oral Torah (the unbroken chain of information going back to Mount Sinai) teaches that this minimal amount is 5760 "egg-volumes." Thus, 5760 symbolizes a *mikveh* and hence the removal of impurity.

(An "egg-volume" is the amount that spills from a totally full cup when you put an egg in it. Ancient *mikvehs* discovered in Israel, such as those at Qumran and Massada, are built precisely to this standard. One *se'ah* = 144 eggs; hence, a minimum 40 *se'ah mikveh* = 40 x 144 egg-volumes, or 5760.)

Another source, the *Yalkut Reuveni*, wrote that 240 years before the year 6000, the world will be engulfed by a flood. But didn't G-d promise Noah never again to flood the entire world with water? What kind of "flood," then, is being referred to?

Earthquakes in Mexico City, Taiwan, Turkey and Peru; deadly storms in Central America; typhoon in Japan; volcano alerts in Ecuador and the Philippines. This flurry of tragedies — prompted CNN to ask "Is There a Link Between Recent Natural Disasters?" Add to this a nuclear meltdown in Japan, the subway tragedy in London and a military coup in nuclear-capable Pakistan; all of these which occurred in the few weeks since the year's beginning on Rosh Hashana. Could these events be the rumblings of a deluge of disaster?

Or will the "millennium bug" bring an ocean of information crashing down around us?

The possibilities are endless. Let's pray for another possibility, that a flood of love and kindness will engulf the globe, and that "the earth will be full of G-dly knowledge, just as the waters cover the ocean." (*Isaiah* 11:9)

HERE COMES BABY!

Name@Withheld
from Chicago, Illinois wrote:

Dear Rabbi,
To my continual joy and miraculous wonder, I am pregnant with our first child. Is there anything I should or can be doing during this exciting

time to help prepare, spiritually, for the incredible job of parenthood & motherhood? Thank you for your consideration and for the weekly dose of humor and wisdom!

Dear Name@Withheld,

Judaism teaches that the influences surrounding the baby in the womb have a profound effect.

So avoid negative influences, like those on television and in movies. You don't want your developing baby's first sensations to be ones of violence and immorality. Instead, listen to inspiring music, study about Judaism, talk to positive people, etc.

The Talmud relates that one expectant mother used to go to the houses of Torah Study and ask the scholars to pray that her unborn baby should one day become a Torah scholar. And when her baby was born, she brought him in his crib to the Torah academies so that his ears should absorb sounds of Torah study. He grew up to be one of the great Sages of the Talmud, Rabbi Yehoshua.

And remember, your baby is made from the food you eat. So, make sure your baby is kosher! Kosher food has a positive spiritual effect on the developing fetus, and non-kosher food has the opposite effect.

Someone once asked a Rabbi, "When do you Jews start educating your children?" The Rabbi answered, "Twenty years before they're born!" More than anything else, the example set by the parents is the greatest influence on a child's life. Begin now a renewal of your own commitment to the study and practice of Judaism.

May Hashem bless you with an easy pregnancy and birth, and with children who are a constant source of joy to you and your family!

Sources:

- Avot 2:5 and Commentaries
- Rabbeinu Bechaya, *Vayikra* 11:43
- *Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deah* 81:7

PUBLIC DOMAIN

Comments, quibbles and reactions concerning previous "Ohrnet" features

Re: Shaving With an Electric Shaver During Chol Hamo'ed (Ohrnet Succot 5760):

I would like to point out that Rav Moshe Feinstein, *zatzal*, (*Orach Chaim 1*, page 288) wrote: "It is therefore clear, in my humble opinion, that in our time and in our country that people regularly shave their beards each day, or even every second day, or even every third day, there is no prohibition (to continue to do so on *Chol Hamo'ed*). However, in any event, I am not accustomed to permit it except if there is great need or great discomfort. And if someone wishes to rely on this only for reasons of looking good, he should not be chastised, as the basic law is that it is permitted." Rav Y.

B. Soloveitchik, *zatzal*, went even further (*Nefesh Harav*, Rav Tzvi Shechter, page 189); he reasoned that it is permitted to shave in this instance, similar to other instances of "o'neis;" [not under his control] since this stubble was not in existence before *Yom Tov*, it could not have been shaved. Since it is permitted, he reasoned, it is a *mitzvah* and an obligation for people who shave daily to also shave during *Chol Hamo'ed* so as not to be unbecoming during *Chol Hamo'ed* and before the last day/days of *Yom Tov*.

• Yehoshua Seidenfeld, Efrat, Israel
<gseiden@pangaea.co.il>

YIDDLE RIDDLE

Where in *davening* (liturgy) do you say 24 words in a row that end with the letter "chaf?"

Answer next week...

• Riddle Submitted by Shlomo Zev Friedman <geno@netvision.net.il>

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE STORY

Giving People the Benefit of the Doubt

Before telling others to wash their hands, you may have to

WASH YOUR BRAIN

An older woman works as a teacher's aide at the school where I am a teacher. Every day at the ten o'clock snack break, she would pull a cheese sandwich out of her purse and eat it in the classroom while she and I supervised the children. I was very surprised by this behavior, because I assumed that she was Torah observant. She wore a *sheitel* (wig worn by Orthodox Jews) and was always mod-

estly dressed; so why was she eating bread without first washing her hands as required by *halacha*?

Finally, near the end of the school year, she mentioned in the course of a conversation that she washes her hands and eats a little piece of bread before leaving for work in the morning, having in mind that she will continue her meal during the snack break, because it would be impossible to leave the children while she went and washed at school. I felt terrible for having been so quick to misjudge her.

• Submitted by an Ohrnet reader via the Internet

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