

OHRNET

THE OHR SOMAYACH TORAH MAGAZINE ON THE INTERNET

PARSHA INSIGHTS

LEADING FROM BEHIND

“And Hashem appeared to him in the plains of Mamre” (18:1)

There are two ways you can lead an army. You can sit in a blockhouse buried hundreds of feet underground, 50 miles behind the lines and direct your troops, or you can be the first man over the top, leading your men into battle at the front.

When Hashem commanded Avraham to circumcise all his household, Avraham went to Avner and Eshcol to ask what he should do about those members of his household who didn't want to be circumcised. They didn't know what to answer him. Avraham then went to Mamre who told him that he should first circumcise himself and Yishmael. When the others would see this, they would allow themselves to be circumcised too.

And that is what Avraham did. First the Torah writes “*On that very day was Avraham circumcised with Yishmael, his son,*” and only then does the Torah write “*and all the people of his household.*”

Ostensibly, Mamre's advice was unusual. Wouldn't it have been better for Avraham to preserve his strength and been circumcised last? In that way, he could have used his tremendously strong influence to persuade them. For it was Avraham's strength of speech alone that had brought so many under the wings of the Divine Presence. It was through the power of Avraham's persuasion, the power of the spoken word, that so many had converted.

Actions speak louder than words.

It would be well to remember that behaving like a *mensh* can bring someone close to the Torah more than thousands of words of intellectual

proof.

If you want people to *follow*, you have to go first.

TURNING OVER

“And He (Hashem) overturned these cities and all the plain and all the dwellers of the cities and the vegetation of the earth.” (19:25)

When we look at the situation today, it's easy to despair.

The strident metallic clang of materialism and selfishness seem to swamp out the message of the Torah and its

“...behaving like a *mensh* can bring someone close to the Torah more than thousands of words of intellectual proof.”

People. The sensuous siren call of the media surrounds us all with a world whose reality is merely virtual.

Society at large seems almost deaf to morality, to modesty, to the values that are rooted in the Torah. The motto of the time is “Let it all hang out.” In a world where there is nothing to be ashamed of, nothing brings shame, and thus anything is possible. And what is possible... happens.

Those who stand for the eternal values of our people are despised as fundamentalists and violent barbarians. Everything has been turned upside down.

There is a strange thread of history that runs from this week's *Parsha* down through the ages and climaxes in the end of history: Lot was rescued from the *overturning* of Sodom. Why specifically was it necessary to overturn Sodom? Why couldn't Sodom have just been destroyed with fire and brimstone. Wouldn't that be cataclysmic enough? What are we supposed to learn from the fact that Sodom was *overturned*?

After the destruction of Sodom, Lot's daughters thought that they were the only human survivors of what must have looked like a global nuclear holocaust. They surmised that the only way to perpetuate the human species was to cohabit with their father. The Torah, however, ascribes no blame to their actions as their motivation was pure.

From this incestuous union came a people called Moav — literally “from father.” From Moav comes the prototypical convert, Ruth. From Ruth comes King David, and from King David comes the Mashiach. *So it turns out that the foundation of Mashiach is ultimately in Sodom.*

There are two ways that society's spiritual landscape can be changed. One way is by improving the situation bit by bit until the world is perfected. The other is that things get so bad that *they cannot get any worse*. At that point, everything reverses in an instant from the nadir to the zenith.

The prophets speak about the coming of *Mashiach* in terms of childbirth.

Someone ignorant of the process of childbirth who sees for the first time a

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Three days after performing *bris mila* on himself, Avraham Avinu 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 give birth to 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 men in Sodom, He will not destroy it. Avraham manages to “bargain” Hashem down to ten righteous men. 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 Amora. 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 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. At Hashem’s command, on the eighth day after the birth, Avraham circumcises him. Avraham makes a feast the day Yitzchak is weaned. Sarah tells Avraham to banish Hagar and her 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, 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 Parsha ends with genealogy and the birth of Rivka.

HAFTORAH: MELACHIM II 3:1-37

RIGHTS AND DUTIES

It was not so long ago that the Torah was the only system in which a creditor has absolutely no rights over the physical person of a debtor. The spirit of the Torah insures a poor debtor against the unfeeling or inconsiderate use of a lien on the debtor’s chattels. And even where the protection of the creditor stops, his obligation to love his fellow Jew — the debtor — begins. For we are all the children of Avraham and Sarah. Such is the *tzedaka* of Avraham, in con-

trast to the Sodomite insistence on the very last penny which can be wrung out through litigation.

INSPIRATION, THE BREATH OF LIFE

Just as in the *Parsha* where the angels promise Sarah that she will conceive and give birth to a child, in the Haftorah the prophet Elisha promises a barren Shunamite woman that she will give birth.

The child dies in his youth, and is resurrected by Elisha who revives him by placing himself on the lifeless child, implanting his own soul into the boy.

This is a lesson for all teachers: One has to in-spire — to breathe one’s own life into one’s pupils, to give over of one’s own soul. Nothing less than this will do.

WOMEN OF KINDNESS

Just as Avraham and Sarah were both old and yet Hashem gave them a child, similarly in this week’s Haftorah, Hashem grants the Shunamite woman and her husband a child.

Why then does the Haftorah begin with an entirely different miracle, that of the miraculous oil that filled pitcher after pitcher until the penniless widow of the prophet Ovadia became rich? What is the connection between these three women?

The answer is that they all excelled in *chesed* — in kindness to others. To this day, Sarah is a role-model of the Jewish woman. Her life was an unceasing labor of welcoming guests and teaching them about Hashem. Ovadia’s widow was also a heroine of *chesed* as depicted in the Haftorah, and the same was true of the Shunamite woman. All three cast the mold, the archetype of the Jewish woman for all generations.

• Adapted from Rabbi Shimshon Rafael Hirsch and *The Midrash Says*

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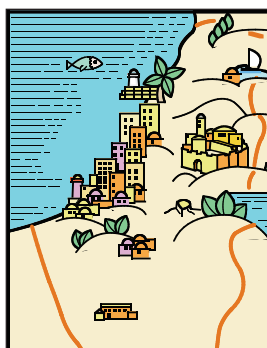
* If you have a question about Judaism, you can submit it to Ask The Rabbi. Just send your question using E-Mail to "ohr@virtual.co.il" and set the subject to "Ask The Rabbi". We can't include all questions submitted in the column, but we do try to respond to everyone personally.

LOVE OF THE LAND

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

WHERE THE GOOD GOLD IS

One of the rivers flowing out of the Garden of Eden is described as encircling Eretz Yisrael “where there is gold and the gold of that land is good.” (Bereishis 2:11-12) The gold here refers to are the words of Torah



which are more precious than gold itself. “The gold of that land is good” teaches us that there is no Torah like the Torah of Eretz Yisrael and no wisdom like the wisdom of Eretz Yisrael.

• Bereishis Rabbah 16:4

PARSHA Q&A ?

1. Why did Hashem appear to Avraham after the *bris 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 Yishmael to prepare the food for the guests?
6. The angels asked Avraham where Sarah was. Why?
7. When Hashem related Sarah's thoughts to Avraham, He did not relate them precisely. Why?
8. What "cry" from Sodom came before Hashem?
9. How many angels went to Sodom?
10. Why was Lot sitting at the gate of Sodom?
11. Lot served the angels *matzos*. 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 Hashem 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 Hashem listen to the prayer of Yishmael and not to that of Hagar?
20. Who accompanied Avraham and Yitzchak to the *Akeidah* (binding)?

BONUS QUESTION?

Rashi never 'just' comments; something in the text always impels him to do so. Rashi's comments are answers to unspoken questions and difficulties arising from a thoughtful reading of the Torah. Therefore, anyone who wants a true understanding of Rashi's classic Torah commentary must always ask "What's bothering Rashi?"

[Avraham]...." Rashi comments: *To visit the sick. Rabbi Hama, son of Chanina, said: It was the third day after his circumcision and the Holy One, Blessed be He, came and inquired after his health.*

What's bothering Rashi? What prompted Rashi to cite the Midrash of Rabbi Hama?

The verse [18:1] says "And [Hashem] appeared to him

answer on page six

I DIDN'T KNOW THAT!

Eliezar, Avraham's servant, was once in Sodom when some local people attacked and wounded him. The case came before a Sodomite judge who said, "You must pay the people who attacked you. They performed 'blood-letting' upon you, a valuable medical service, and therefore you owe them money." Hearing that, Eliezar attacked the judge and wounded him. "Now" said Eliezar to the judge, "you owe me money for the medical service I've performed for you. So the money you owe me for wounding you, why don't you pay to the people who wounded me!"

• *Sanherdrin 109b*

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

1. 18:1 - Avraham was sick, so Hashem came to "visit" him.
2. 18:1 - He was looking for guests.
3. 18:2 - To announce to Sarah that she would give birth, to heal Avraham and to destroy Sodom.
4. 18:4 - He thought they were Arabians 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 *mitzvos*.
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 put to death because she gave food to a poor man.
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 - Since they too really should have been 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.

WEEKLY DAF

BERACHOS 44 - 50

THE TENTH MAN

“A tenth man for a minyan!”

This classical need once confronted even the great sage, Rabbi Eliezer. With no possibility in sight for completing the quorum of ten male, adult Jews which makes it possible for Hashem’s Name to be sanctified in prayer, Rabbi Eliezer emancipated his Canaanite slave and made him eligible for inclusion. Although it is normally forbidden to emancipate such a slave, the importance of the mitzvah involved justified this action.

It has been suggested that proof can be brought from this incident to resolve a halachic question raised by the eighteenth century scholar Rabbi Tzvi Ashkenazi, author of “Responsa of the Chacham Tzvi.” He asks, “Can a man created through mystical powers be counted as a tenth for a minyan?” (See Responsa Number 83)

(Incidentally, to prove that this is not a purely theoretical question, he cites the tradition that his grandfather, Rabbi Eliyahu of Chelm, created such a man. The fact that he fails to mention the famed “golem” allegedly created by Rabbi Yehuda Lowe (*Maharal of Prague*) who lived more than a century earlier,

casts doubt on the credibility of that legend!)

Rabbi Ashkenazi’s conclusion that such a man-made man cannot be included in a minyan is based on an incident mentioned in *Sanhedrin 65b*. The sage Rava created a man through the mystical combination of the letters in the Divine Name and sent his creation to Rabbi Zeira. When the latter saw that this creature could not speak, he ordered it to return to its dust. Had such a creature been capable of providing such a valuable service as completing a minyan, Rabbi Zeira would not have ordered its destruction. Perhaps Rabbi Eliezer’s insistence on violating the ban on freeing a slave in order to complete a minyan rather than create a man, as he was certainly capable of, is an indication as well that such a creature is ineligible for inclusion in a minyan.

• Berachos 47b

“OPEN, WIDE”

“Blessed is He from Whose we have eaten and Who sustains us **with** his goodness.”

This introduction to the *bircas hamazon* which we say after a meal where at least three have eaten together express-

es our appreciation of the limitless kindness of the Creator, and reflects a scholar’s understanding of the nature of the blessing. One who says instead “Who sustains us **from** His goodness” is considered a boor for limiting his praise of the Creator to the minimum necessary for survival.

While there is a need to speak in such broad terms when praising Hashem, a different manner is in order when it comes to asking something of Him. When the request is for material prosperity, it must be in the modest (in the manner of a beggar at the door — Rashi) fashion of King David, who prayed “May Your servant’s household be blessed from Your blessing forever.” (*Shmuel II 7:29*)

But when the request is for success in regard to Torah study, the same King David invites us in the name of Hashem “Open wide your mouth and I shall fill it.” (*Tehillim 81:11*)

This is a powerful incentive for every Jew involved in Torah study — from the full-time Yeshiva student to the businessman and professional with only a limited time to study — to pray to Hashem for unlimited assistance in achieving the most ambitious goals in his learning.

• Berachos 50a

continued from page one

PARSHA INSIGHTS

woman in labor would be convinced that she is about to die. And the closer the actual moment of the birth, the stronger that impression would become.

And then, within a couple of minutes, seeming tragedy has turned into the great joy. A new life has entered the world.

Immediately prior to the coming of *Mashiach* there will be a tremendous confusion in the world. Everything will seem to have gone haywire. The natural order will be turned on its head. Age will bow to youth. Ugliness will be trumpeted as beauty, and what is beautiful will be disparaged as unattractive. Barbarism will be lauded as

culture. And culture will be dismissed as worthless. The hunger of consumerism and the lust for material wealth will grow more and more, and it will find less and less to satisfy its voracity.

Eventually, materialism will grow so rapacious that it will become its own angel of death. It will literally consume itself and regurgitate itself back out.

But from this decay, the line of David will sprout, like vegetation that springs forth from no more than dirt and earth. *For vegetation cannot flourish unless the seed rots.* The second event is predicated on the first.

It’s interesting to note that *Mashiach* is referred to as the “*tzemach tzedek*,” literally the “righteous sprouting.” For his coming is identical to the growth of vegetation. First total decay and only then new life.

This is the way *Mashiach* will come. The worse things become, the more painful the birth-pangs, the nearer is his coming. Until, like a mother who had delivered, all the tears and pain will be forgotten in the great joy of a new life.

Sources:

Leading From The Rear - Chidushei Halev

Turning Over - Ohr Yesharim;

Rabbi Moshe Shapiro

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OVER A BILLION BYTES OF TORAH LITERATURE AND INFORMATION

A MOUNT OF NAMES

Mr. Leo Garfinkel
<CRNN58A@prodigy.com>
wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

What are the seven names of Mount Sinai and what do they mean?

Dear Mr. Leo Garfinkel,

According to the Midrash, *Har Sinai* has seven other names. All together it has eight names, as follows:

- *Har Sinai* — from the word *sneh* — “bush.” This refers to the burning bush on *Har Sinai*. Also, *Sinai* is related to the word *sinah* — “hatred” and “rejection.” By giving the Torah to human beings instead of to the angels, G-d thereby rejected the angels.

- *Har Ha-Elokim* — “G-d’s Mountain,” because G-d revealed His Torah there to the Jewish people. Through the Torah, the Jews become a G-dly people.

- *Beit Imi* — “My Mother’s House.” By accepting the Torah the Jews were born as a nation.

- *Har Chorev*, from the word “*cherev*” — “sword.” The Torah invests special Torah courts, *sanhedrin*, with authority to try capital cases.

- *Har Chemed* — “Desirable Mountain.” G-d desired Mount Sinai as the place from which to give the most desirable of treasures, the Torah.

- *Har Bashan* from the word “*shen*” — “tooth.” Sustenance and blessing come to the world in the merit of Torah study and observance. Just as teeth prepare the food for digestion, so too the Torah brings nourishment to the world.

- *Har Gavnunim*, from the word “*gevina*” — “cheese.” Cheese is a metaphor for purity, probably because it’s made from pure white

milk.

- *Har Moriah* — “Mountain of Teaching,” where G-d taught Moses the Torah.

Sources:

- *Shmot Rabbah* 2
- *Bamidbar Rabbah* 1
- *Shir Hashirim Rabbah* 8

A VERSE TO DEATH

Ricardo

<jkcastro@sao.nutecnet.com.br>
from Brazil wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

I’d like to know if it is true that “*Elo-kim*” means Allah in Arabic (I saw this in a home page). Another question: How could Moshe have written the book of Deuteronomy if there’s a chapter in it that tells about Moshe’s death? Bye and Thanks!

Dear Ricardo,

Allah is Arabic for the Hebrew word “*El*.” “*El*” means the Almighty.

The Talmud (*Bava Batra 15b*) asks your second question: Who wrote the last eight verses of the Torah which describe Moses’s death? The Talmud offers two answers. According to one opinion, Joshua wrote them. According to the other opinion, Moses himself wrote them using tears instead of ink. After Moses died, Joshua traced over the letters with ink.

Some explain the Talmud to mean that Moses wrote the last eight verses not with tears, but rather in a jumbled fashion. In Hebrew, the word for “tears” (*dima*) is spelled the same way as the word “jumbled” (*dema*). That is, Moses wrote the last eight verses with no spaces to differentiate between the end of one word and the beginning of the next. It was left to Joshua to split up the words.

HUNGARIAN BAT-MITZVAH

Laszlo Hunyadi

<hunyadi@llab2.arts.klte.hu>
from Hungary wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

We, from the Orthodox Cong. of Debrecen, Hungary, have a very urgent question. Nine of our girls are going to have their Bat Mitzvah celebration on Sunday, September 28. Since we have not had such a celebration in the past decade or so, we are not quite sure about the way this celebration is supposed to be carried out.

Some people suggest that the girls make an oath rather than a vow saying that they will be loyal to the Jewish People and the Torah. We do not yet know where this oath will take place, in front of the Torah or in a separate room. We have doubt about the halachic propriety of this oath. Since we have no acting rabbi at this moment, we hope to receive the proper answer from you. Thank you very much,

Sincerely,

Laszlo Hunyadi, one of the parents
and Nathan and Kati Asmoucha,
shlichim from Jerusalem

Dear Laszlo Hunyadi and Nathan and Kati Asmoucha,

First, a heartfelt Mazel Tov on your daughter’s Bat Mitzva! May she and her friends continue to be sources of pride for the entire Jewish People!

Having sought advice from distinguished Rabbis here in Jerusalem, I recommend that you hold the celebration in a hall, and that one of the community members say something appropriate on behalf of the congregation, and

one, some or all the girls deliver a short speech about the Torah, its commandments and ideals.

In general we refrain from making any vow or oath, because making a vow or oath is considered an extremely serious matter. Therefore, I don't think either a vow or an oath is appropriate here.

Laszlo Hunyadi replied:

Dear Rabbi,
Thank you so much for your thorough investigation and

the advice you have given. We will be pleased to consider it in our preparations for our girls' Bat Mitzva. Toda raba!

"Ask the Rabbi" receives and responds to about 500 questions each week. We respond to all queries personally and directly, usually within 48 hours. We edit and publish a select few of these responses in our weekly "Ask the Rabbi" column.

New Feature!

PUBLIC DOMAIN

Comments, quibbles and reactions concerning previous "Ask-the-Rabbi" features.

I am writing in response to the man who asked about *shalom bayit* versus Torah observance, since his wife didn't want to observe as much as he did. I don't know where he lives but there are several places that offer counseling with an orthodox counselor who would have more understanding about these issues. He said they went to counseling but it didn't help, perhaps counseling with an orthodox counselor who understands the issues might be more helpful. In New York there is a clinic called the Marpeh Clinic that has orthodox counselors, on Long Island there is a clinic also, and in most major cities one may be able to find an orthodox counselor. I am an orthodox psychiatrist in Philadelphia, and I know that here if one were to call a rabbi they would be able to give the person my number or someone else's. Hope this is of some help to the person who wrote.

• Deborah <Deb546750@aol.com>

Regarding the man who is evidently on a different path from his wife with respect to level of Jewish observance: I happen to be very sensitive to this and when I

saw your response that seemed so general — "consult an authority that both spouses can respect" — I was very upset. On reflection, my real concern is that I hope that a more extensive response had been issued to them directly than that which was posted.

• Name and email withheld

Ohrnet Responds: Due to editorial considerations the answers published in "Ask the Rabbi" differ somewhat from the answers that are sent directly to the people who asked the questions. The following is an excerpt from our reply to the question concerning *shalom bayit*, which was sent directly to the person before the column was published:

"...It is precisely because of the gravity and the far reaching consequences of Shalom Bayit, that for me to try and address your problem through the impersonal medium of email would be irresponsible. I have too much respect for both the sanctity of marriage in general and your particular relationship to try and offer you advice as to the correct approach for you to try and save your marriage, without being able to listen to both you and your wife in a personal setting. From your message, it is clear that you are very much in need of advice and direction; if I knew which area you lived in I would be able to recommend that you contact a specific person who would be able to offer you the kind of personal attention that you need...."

YIDDLE RIDDLE

How is water from the sea
like atonement like a cow?
(Say these clues in Hebrew
And then you'll know just how!)

How's an onion in the shade
like three that he kneaded?
(These clues, too, are much clearer,
When in Hebrew they're repeated.)

Riddle courtesy of:
Kol Simcha English Radio, 103.5 FM
Friday mornings 9:30am - 1:00pm
Answer next week...

BONUS ANSWER!

continued from page three

Answer: The verse tells us that Hashem appeared to Avraham, but it doesn't tell us what Hashem said to him. This is unusual! Usually, every case of the appearance of G-d is followed by a Divine utterance. Therefore, Rashi needs to explain the purpose of this visitation.

• Adapted from Dr. Avigdor Bonchek's new book "What's Bothering Rashi?"
Feldheim Publishers

RECOMMENDED READING LIST

RAMBAN

18:7 The Love of Kindness
18:13 For the Sake of Peace
18:15 Sarah's Laughter
19:8 Lot's Disgrace
22:1 The Meaning of a Trial
22:16 The Promise of Eternity

SFORNO

18:2 The Love of Kindness
18:22 Persistence
19:8 Lot's Reasoning
19:11 The Nature of the Wicked
19:37-8 Meaning Well