

# OHRNET

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## PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

### The Centrifuge Of Prayer

“Would You destroy the entire city because of the five?” (18:28)

I always approach the prayers of Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur with some trepidation. Why are they so long and repetitive? How many times do we have to say we're sorry to Hashem? On Yom Kippur we confess 10 times. We say the *Yud Gimmel Middot*, the ‘thirteen traits of mercy’ over and over again. Towards the end of Yom Kippur it seems like a race to squeeze in one more *Yud Gimmel Middot* before sunset brings the curtain down on the day. Why this seemingly endless repetition?

Building a nuclear weapon is a extremely difficult thing to do. Weapons-grade uranium is a highly unstable form of Uranium that makes up just 0.7 percent of the of uranium ore that is dug up. The United States nuclear weapons project - the Manhattan Project - employed more than 130,000 people and cost the equivalent of about \$23 billion today to build three atom bombs. Some 240 square miles of land were requisitioned by the US government. The Hanford atomic complex ran a fleet of 900 hundred buses for its 51,000 employees - more than the city of Chicago.

To extract the radioactive isotope U235 with the centrifuge method, it was estimated that producing a mere to 2.2 lbs of uranium-235 per day would require up to 50,000 centrifuges.

Rav Moshe Shapiro, zt”l, one of the great Rabbis of our generation, would start saying *selichot*, the penitential prayers leading up to Rosh Hashana, at the beginning of Elul with a Sefardi minyan, even though his native Ashekanzi tradition was to start a few days before Rosh

Hashana. And when the time came for the Ashkenazi *selichot* to begin, he would continue to say *selichot* with the Sefardim as well. When asked why he did this, he replied, “*Yud Gimmel Middot*.”

The refining of the soul is like extracting Uranium 235 from Uranium ore. Like a centrifuge of the soul spinning and spinning, every repetition of the *Yud Gimmel Middot*, every *vidui*, every confession refines us and brings us closer to the critical mass of *teshuva*.

In this week’s Torah portion, Avraham prays again and again to Hashem to spare the cities of Sodom and Gemorra and the other cities of the plain. First, he beseeches Hashem to save the cities if there are a total forty-five righteous people in all five cities, and Hashem would, so to speak, complete the required quorum of ten in each place. Rashi explains that Avraham then pleaded that even if there were not forty five as a total of all the cities, each city should be looked at separately and a group of ten even in one city would suffice even if that would not save the other cities. He then pleaded that even if forty righteous people were to be found, and then again if thirty are to be found, and then twenty, and then ten. The Ramban learns this to means that even ten spread out across all the cities would save them all.

Avraham kept praying and praying and praying. His every prayer was a hope to refine the *middah* of forgiveness in this world to its maximum.

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# Q & A

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## Questions

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

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

## Answers

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

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# WHAT'S IN A WORD?

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by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

## Prime Property

The Hebrew word *rechush* (“property”) and its variants appear seven times in *Lech Lecha*, making it the Torah portion with the highest concentration of such instances. It appears when relating that Abraham took his “property” with him on his journey to the Holy Land (Gen. 12:5); when the abundance of “property” caused Abraham’s herdsmen to have a falling out with Lot’s herdsmen (Gen. 13:6); when the “property” of the Sodomites were captured (Gen. 14:11), along with Lot and his “property” (Gen. 14:12) and were later returned (Gen. 14:16); when Abraham allows the King of Sodom to take the “property” he won in the war (Gen. 14:21); and when Hashem promises Abraham that after his descendants will be enslaved, they will exit the land of their enslavement with much “property” (Gen. 15:15). But the word *rechush* is not the only word for “property” in the Bible – the words *mikneh* and *nechasim* also refer to “property.” In this essay, we will study the three Hebrew words for “property,” examine their etymologies, and show how they are not simply synonyms.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (to Gen. 12:5) – as well as Solomon Rabinowitz (d. 1943) – argues that *rechush* (with a final SHIN) is related to the word *reches* (with a final SIN), which refers to “tying/attaching” (see Rashi to Ex. 28:28). According to this, the term *rechush* alludes to the pursuit of wealth and riches, whereby one seeks to accrue as much as possible and add them to his repertoire. By doing so, one seeks to “tie” all these assets together to collectively add them to one’s net worth.

The word *mikneh* (or *miknei* in the construct form) is the most common term for “property” in the Bible, appearing over 75 times therein. The lexicographers trace this term to the root KUF-NUN-(HEY), from which words like *miknah* and *kinyan* (“transaction/acquisition”) are derived. Based on this, Nachmanides (to Gen. 14:18,

34:23) and Radak (in *Sefer HaShorashim*) clarify that *mikneh* is not a general term for all of one’s property; rather, it refers to specifically to one’s “livestock” as that is a person’s chief acquisitions. This was especially true of the ancient world, where the amount of livestock in one’s possession was a measuring stick of how rich one was. In fact, Dr. Gerald Leonard Cohen (from the Missouri University of Science and Technology) notes in his *Comments on Etymology* that the importance of livestock can be seen in the fact that of the first three letters of the Hebrew Alphabet, two letters refer to domesticated animals (ALEPH means “ox” and GIMMEL is related to *gamal*, “camel”).

Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim of Breslau (1740–1814) sees the core meaning of KUF-NUN as “minimal home/domicile.” The most obvious derivative of this root is the word *ken* (or *kan* in the construct form), which refers to a bird’s “nest.” Another derivative is the concept of *kinyan*, which often causes a shift in domicile as an item moves from one party’s domain to another’s. Based on this, Rabbi Pappenheim argues (like Nachmanides) that *mikneh* relates to the central role of livestock in commerce, explaining that domesticated animals can be used for a wide variety of purposes (for its shearings, for its milk, for its fur/skin, for its offspring, for eating, for working the field, etc...), as opposed to produce, which can only be eaten. Alternatively, Rabbi Pappenheim sees *mikneh* in the sense of “livestock” as directly related to the core meaning of KUF-NUN, because such beasts are often kept in minimal living accommodations (like a small barn), as opposed to the more respectable sorts of housing typically granted to people.

The Midrash (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 22:8) assumes that the word *nechasim* is related to the Hebrew word *kisui* (“covered/hidden”), explaining that *nechasim* are called such “because they are hidden from this [person] and revealed to this [person].”

Meaning, the ephemeral nature of material possessions is such that a person only holds onto such belongings temporarily, they do not inherently become an inseparable part of him (unlike physical strength or wisdom, which might be said to become part of one's person).

Rabbi Shmuel de Uçeda (1545-1604) in Midrash Shmuel (to Avot 2:8) sharpens this point by noting that oftentimes man spends much of his life trying

to accrue riches, but then dies – thus allowing others to end up reaping the benefits of his hard work. According to this explanation, *nechasim* relates to *kisui* because although on the surface material possessions seem like attractive prizes,

there is always a “hidden” aspect to materialism, whereby the one who toils and puts in the effort does not always get to enjoy the fruits of his labor. De Uçeda concludes his discussion by cynically commenting, “many people gather up money for the benefit of their wives' future husbands.”

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## COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

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by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

### THE AMIDAH (PART 24) – BLESSING OF THANKSGIVING (Part 3)

**T**he eighteenth blessing concludes: “Everything alive will gratefully acknowledge You, *selah*, and praise Your Name sincerely, O Hashem of our salvation and help, *selah*. Blessed are You, Hashem, Your Name is ‘The Beneficent One’ and to You it is fitting to give thanks.”

Our blessing continues with the words, “Everything alive will gratefully acknowledge You, *selah*.” Everything alive implies that even those who suffer will praise Hashem. Rabbi Yosef Karo (Orach Chaim 222:3) writes that a person who accepts the difficulties and the tribulations of life with love because they have been given to them by Hashem is actually serving Hashem with true joy. Such a person never feels abandoned by Hashem. Even when the situation is critical, this person is not alone because they are able to recognize Hashem’s involvement in their life. But perhaps there is a deeper dimension as well. Our Sages teach (Brachot 5a) that suffering in this world cleanses a person of all their sins. Rabbi Yaakov Yehoshua Falk (Pnei Yehoshua) explains that suffering purifies the soul, which then allows it to enter the World to Come in a pristine state. It transpires that what may seem to us to be an impossible situation is actually something that is beneficial for us. Rabbi Shlomo Kluger (1783-1869) was the leading authority in Jewish Law in Brody, Galicia. He was considered to be one of the most brilliant, incisive and prolific spiritual leaders of his generation. In his commentary on the Torah (Imrei Shefer) he writes that although we must endeavor to accept our own suffering with joy, this is not an appropriate response when we see someone else suffering. When Aharon’s two sons died, Hashem commanded Aharon not to show any of the classic signs of mourning. Aharon accepted Hashem’s decree wholeheartedly. However, the rest of the Jewish people were commanded to grieve: “Your brethren, the entire house of Israel, will cry over the conflagration” (Vayikra 10:6). So, too, when we

see others in distress we must empathize with them and do whatever we can to help try and alleviate their suffering.

The Jewish calendar is created in such a way that every year Tisha b'Av – the most dismal day of the year, which commemorates the destruction of both the Holy Temples – always falls on the same day of the week as the first day Pesach, one of the most joyful days in celebration of our liberation from slavery and our emerging into the nation that would receive the Torah. Our Rabbis explain that this is not coincidental. Rather, it is part of Hashem's Divine plan. It is beyond our comprehension as to why we have had to experience so much suffering throughout the generations. But with the onset of the Final Redemption, all will become clear. And, most importantly, we will finally understand that Hashem's love for us was always consistent throughout. It was never wavering even in the darkest moments.

The word “*selah*” is somewhat enigmatic. The Talmud (Eruvin 54a) teaches that whenever the word *selah* appears in the Torah, it always refers to something that forever continues without interruption. Hence the Aramaic translation for *selah* is *L'almin*, meaning “forever.” The Ibn Ezra translates *selah* slightly differently as “truth” or “so it is” (Tehillim 3:3). In this way we declare that we will acknowledge all the good and the kindness that Hashem has done for us constantly.

Rabbi Chaim Vital (1543-1620) was the foremost disciple of the Ari Zal. He transcribed most of the Ari Zal's thoughts and teachings, including some of the most essential and esoteric Kabbalistic works, such as “Eitz Chaim” and “Sha'ar Hagilgulim.” He also authored several works of his own that are considered to be fundamental to understanding Kabbalah. One of his compositions is “Olat Tamid,” which explores the intent and the meanings behind the prayers according to the Ari Zal's interpretations. He points out that the word “sincerely” in the phrase “And praise Your Name sincerely” teaches us that we should not be thanking Hashem in the hope that He will give us more. Rather, we are thanking Hashem in all sincerity for all that He has given us. More than that, although we have every intention of asking Hashem for more of His bountiful goodness, we are doing so not just because we have an unlimited appetite to be the recipients of His abundance, but also because Hashem desires that we ask Him for our needs.

Hashem is then referred to as the “Hashem of our salvation.” Only after a person has experienced suffering and anguish are they able to identify and appreciate the light and the salvation in their life.

Our blessing concludes with the words, “Blessed are You, Hashem, Your Name is ‘The Beneficent One’ and to You it is fitting to give thanks.” The Eitz Yosef points out that our Sages teach (Erchin 16a with Rashi) that one should be very careful when praising another because there is a chance that those listening will disparage the person being spoken about. The Eitz Yosef explains that this idea is not applicable, however, when praising Hashem, because regardless of how much we praise Him, it will be negligible compared to the truth.

*To be continued...*

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# TALMUD TIPS

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by Rabbi Moshe Newman

## The Good Oaths

### Nedarim 2-8

*Rav Gidel said in the name of Rav, "From where do we learn that one may make an oath to fulfill a mitzvah? From the verse, 'I took an oath and I will keep it, to guard the judgments of Your righteousness' (Tehillim 119:106)."*

The apparent meaning of this teaching is that one may make an oath to fulfill a mitzvah, and the oath that he makes is binding. However, the *gemara* asks, "But isn't he *already* under oath to fulfill all of the mitzvahs from the time of the giving of the Torah at Sinai?" At that time, the entire Jewish People promised, "We will do and we will hear" (the Torah and commandments). How can a person make himself *more* under oath and more obligated than he already is?

The answer offered in the *sugya* is that the person may make an oath in order to be more inspired and invigorated to fulfill the mitzvah properly. The Maharsha explains that this oath is in fact not binding, but is permitted nevertheless (and is not considered "taking Hashem's Name in vain" – see Rabbenu Asher). The *Rishonim* discuss and express differences as to whether this oath is binding, and, if so, to what extent – see Rabbenu Nissim, Tosefot, Ramban and others.

The Maharsha also explains why the *gemara* asks about the "redundancy" of the oath specifically on the teaching of Rav Gidel in the name of Rav, but did not pose this question directly on the verse that is the basis for the Sages' teaching. From the verse, says the Maharsha, I might think that the oath mentioned is the one made by the entire Jewish People to keep all mitzvahs when they received the Torah at Mount Sinai, and King David is "reaffirming" in the verse that he will fulfill the oath made at Mount Sinai. Only after Rav Gidel in the

name of Rav explains the verse to be teaching about making a *new* oath to fulfill a mitzvah, the *gemara* can challenge this teaching by saying: "But he already made this oath at Sinai!"

*Rav Gidel said in the name of Rav, "One who says 'I will get up early and learn a certain chapter or a certain tractate' has made a great vow to the G-d of the Jewish People."*

Although this promise that the person makes does not contain the Name of Hashem, it nevertheless has the status and strength of an oath since the person is making a statement of commitment to do a mitzvah. Just as when a person who states that he will give charity is considered to have made a binding commitment, likewise a person who declares intent to learn Torah (beyond the minimum) is bound by his statement as "a great vow to the G-d of the Jewish People." Although he did not mention the Name of

Hashem, we do not suspect that he intends to learn Torah for his own personal honor and self-aggrandizement to be called "Rabbi." Rather, it is assumed that his aim is to learn Torah "for the sake of Heaven". (Maharsha)

▪ *Nedarim 8a*



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# PARSHA OVERVIEW

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

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

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

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

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## PEREK SHIRA: The Song of Existence

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by Rabbi Shmuel Kraines

### THE SONG OF THE TURTLEDOVE

*The turtledove says: "Comfort, comfort My nation," says your G-d (Yeshayahu 40:1).*

**T**urtledove pairs are firmly bound to each other. If one dies, the other will mourn it forever and not seek another mate.

Similarly, since the Jewish people were sent away from their mate, Hashem, they mourn inconsolably, refusing to join other nations and religions. Hashem treats us the same way. He says to the prophets, "Comfort, comfort My nation." Comfort the Jewish people, telling them that they are still "My nation," and that I will yet return to them. Hashem repeats

the word "comfort," urging the prophets to comfort His exiled people. In the subsequent verses He tells them to describe the great magnitude of the future redemption so that the Jewish people can feel solace already now.

Therefore, with its soothing coo the turtledove sings that our relationship with Hashem is inseverable, that our exile is temporary and that He will yet return to us.

\*Notes: In our elucidation of this song, we have translated “retzifi” as “turtledove” based on Rabbeinu Chananel’s commentary to *Shabbat* 81a in which he identifies it as a species of turtledove (cited in *Perek B’Shir*, by Rav Chaim Kanievsky). In all likelihood this refers to the laughing turtledove, which is common in Eretz Yisrael today (see *Mesores Ha’of*). Although our suggested interpretation of the song

applies to all turtledoves, perhaps it is ascribed specifically to the laughing turtledove since its so-called “laughing” coo may be perceived as a soothing consolation, or because this species does not migrate and therefore symbolizes Hashem’s remaining with us throughout the winter-like exile.

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- Sources: *Aruch* (“yetzifi”/“tzala”); *Ramban* (*Vayikra* 1:14); *Radak* (*Yeshayahu* 40:1); *Perek B’Shir*

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

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# LETTER AND SPIRIT

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

## Be My Guest

The patriarch Abraham is often praised for his superlative dedication to the ideal of *Hachnasat Orchim* (literally, “bringing in guests”). In this essay we discuss several different terms for “guests” in Hebrew, including the Biblical Hebrew word *oreach* and the later words *ushpiz* and *achsana*.

The word *oreach* (“guest/wayfarer”) appears four times in the Bible (Judges 19:17, II Shmuel 12:4, Yirmiyahu 9:1, 14:8). According to Hebrew lexicographers Menachem Ibn Saruk (920-970), Yonah Ibn Janach (990-1050), and the Radak (1160-1235), *oreach* derives from the trilateral root ALEPH-REISH-CHET. The most common derivative of that root in the Bible is the word *orach* (“road/way/path”), which appears approximately 60 times. Another related term is *orcha* (“caravan”), which appears twice (Gen. 37:25, Yishayahu 21:13). Ibn Janach and Radak explain that an *oreach* is called so because he travels on an *orach* and is hosted somewhere while en route. Ibn Janach explicitly translates the Hebrew *oreach* into the Rabbinic term *achsana*.

Another word derived from the trilateral root in question is *aruchah* (“meal”), which appears several times in the Bible (Yirmiyahu 40:3, 52:34, Prov. 15:17, II Kings 25:30). Ibn Saruk in his *Machberet Menachem* categorizes the *arucha* derivative of ALEPH-REISH-CHET as a separate meaning from the *orach/oreach* words. On the other hand, Radak clearly writes that this word is also related to the idea of *orach* and *oreach*, but does not quite spell out the connection. Perhaps the term *arucha* originally referred to food provisions that a sojourner would take with him on his travels.

Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim of Breslau (1740-1814) traces the words *oreach*, *orach*, *orcha*, and *aruchah* to the biliteral root REISH-CHET (whose core meaning he sees as “air/space”). Other common words derived

from this root according to Rabbi Pappenheim’s classification system include *revach* (“open space/area”), *ruach* (“wind,” a movement of air), *reyach* (“smell” because olfactory sensations travel in the air), *yareyach* (“moon,” whose movements somehow control the tides and winds), and *memareach* (“smoothing/spreading,” an act which squeezes out the air). In line with this, Rabbi Pappenheim explains that *orach* relates to this two-letter root because it denotes a wide road/path that has much *revach*. Similar to Radak and the others cited above, he explains that an *oreach* is called so because he travels on an *orach*, adding that an *arucha* is a special meal served or hosted in honor of an *oreach*.

Let’s turn to the word *ushpiz*. In Talmudic Aramaic, *ushpiz* typically refers to a “host,” while in Zoharic Aramaic, *ushpiz* usually refers to a “guest.” Most notably, the Zohar (Emor 103b) refers to seven Ushpizin (“guests”), whose presence grace our sukkah on the holiday of Sukkot. Rabbi Eliyahu HaBachur (1469-1549) in *Sefer Tishbi* writes that the word *ushpiz* (which he vocalizes as *ashpaz*) derives from the Latin *hospes* (which is the etymon of such English words as hospitality, hospice, hospital, hospitaller). According to modern linguists this Latin word apparently derives from the proto-Italic *hospitpotis* (“the master of the guest”). It is also said to be related to the Latin word *hostis* (“stranger/enemy”), which is the antecedent of the English hostile and hostage. Others, including Rabbi Shmuel Krauss, argue that *ushpaz* is not derived from Latin, but from Old Persian, where the word *aspanj* means “inn.” Either way, HaBachur notes that the word *ushpiz* refers to both a “hotel” and also to a “guest” who uses such temporary lodgings. (In Modern Hebrew, *ish)uz* means “hospitalization.”)

\*To read the rest of this article, please visit us online at: [https://ohr.edu/this\\_week/whats\\_in\\_a\\_word/](https://ohr.edu/this_week/whats_in_a_word/)