

THE COMMUNITY Parasha Sheet



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RABBI JONATHAN TAWIL

DIRECTOR
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PARASHA INSIGHTS

A couple came in for counselling. The husband was a football 'fanatic'. The wife spoke of how every night he would rush to the TV and ensure to watch the game.

The therapist assured her it was actually quite the norm amongst men.

He turned towards the husband and asked him to explain what his issues were with his wife.

"She is so materialistic, all she wants to watch are the evening sitcoms and serials!" came the reply.

The therapist now took the lead. "I see that your interests in televised entertainment are quite polarized. But I think there is a simple solution."

"I understand that you are an affluent couple, why not buy an additional TV set, and each of you watches your desires in different rooms!"

This was bad news for the couple and together they shrieked. "DIFFERENT ROOMS??"

"How can we watch in different rooms? That's the time we spend **together!**"

We live in a generation that is consumed within itself. People have become so busy that it is difficult if not impossible to spend quality time together without being interrupted by bleeps, texts, phone calls, emails etc.

Spending time is tough but it is the key to a quality relationship.

The Midrash commenting on Noach's generation says, "Had Iyov only come to explain the incident of the Flood that would have been sufficient."

According to our Sages there are many verses in the book of Job that refer to the sins of the generation of the Flood.

For example, the verse in Iyov [24:18] says, "He is light upon the face of the water, their portion in the earth is cursed, he does not turn by way of the vineyards." The Midrash relates this verse to the sin of the generation of the flood: They were cursed that they should perish in water. Why? The Midrash tells us that they were cursed because they lived with their wives not for procreation or for their wives' sake, but only for their own pleasure.

The Midrash in fact already alludes to this in Bereishit. "The custom of that generation was to take two wives, one for having children and one for pleasure. The one taken for having children would sit ugly and neglected like a living widow; the one taken for pleasure would be sterilized and would sit by him, made up with cosmetics like a harlot."

One of the reasons Hashem sent the Mabul was because of the lack of morality and respect even towards 'spouses' in that generation.

Looking to Avraham and Sarah we see a different picture altogether.

Avraham lived over three thousand eight hundred years ago. Imagine what kind of society existed then. One would have expected a male dominated society, without much respect to their spouses.

Avraham was told to go to the land of Canaan.

"Hashem told Avram to go to the Land of Canaan. Avram travelled to the Land of Canaan, and pitched his tent. The Torah narrates: "From there he relocated to the east of Beth-el and pitched his tent (*spelt Ohelah - meaning her tent*), with Beth-el on the west and Ai on the east; and he built there an altar to Hashem and invoked Hashem by Name" [Bereishit 12:8].

What would you have anticipated 3800 years ago from a man and women travelling? Perhaps he would have commanded her to set up base while he rested?

Rashi comments that in fact with Avraham the opposite was true. The special spelling of the word (pronounced Ahola but written Ohela with a 'heh' at the end) hints that Avraham was particular to pitch his wife's tent first!



12th Cheshvan

SHABBAT BEGINS: 4:23 PM

SHABBAT ENDS: 5:24 PM



THE WEEKLY QUOTE

"Our heart is a place to draw true happiness."

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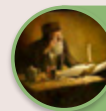
P1



DVAR TORAH

Parasha Insights
AHARON GABAY

P2



OUR CHACHAMIM

RABBEINU ELIYAHU OF VILNA

P3



HALACHOT

May One Person Recite Birkat HaGomel
For Many...? RABBI ELI MANSOUR

P3



Q&A & CARTOON

P4

This newsletter contains Divrei Torah and may contain Sheimot - Please dispose of accordingly

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Why did he do that? According to some commentators, Avraham was simply fulfilling the sages' directive, "Respect your wife more than yourself." Since women are more sensitive to privacy, he made sure to set up her living space before his own.

According to others (Levush) Avraham first pitched Sarah's tent to help her fulfil "Kol K'vudah Bat Melech P'nimah" - "The honour of a princess is within." She needed her tent in order to be Tzanua - modest.

What is respect?

Respecting other people involves respecting their needs, regardless of whether one can relate to those needs or not. Respecting your wife more than yourself means putting her needs before your own.

Is buying flowers on Friday afternoon a sign of respect? How about buying expensive jewellery? They might be. But what if stopping to buy flowers means the husband won't be home in time to help bathe the kids, which the wife would prefer? And what if she would appreciate his company far more than new jewellery?

What the first explanation may be teaching us is that Avraham Avinu prioritized his wife's needs above his own. If it meant pitching her tent, he did it, just because it was what was important to her right then, even if it didn't give him as much satisfaction as buying her a new bracelet (or camel?).

The second explanation may be teaching us the importance of a husband's support and involvement in his wife's servitude of G-d and modesty. Avraham understood this. He realized Sarah needed his help to fulfil "Kol K'vudah Bat Melech P'nimah" and he made sure to be there for her.

This may also explain why the Torah uses only one word to describe both her tent and his. Even in her domain, she needed his support. So when he built her 'tent,' he was actually building his own as well.

Rashi (24:67) states that as long as Sarah was alive, a candle burned in her tent from one Shabbat eve to the next, her dough was blessed and a cloud hung over her tent.

Sarah was essentially the Mother of the Jewish people. She invested her life in teaching and inspiring others, but her focus was on her husband and son Yitschak.

She was blessed with a special blessing – Shabbat!

Shabbat is the Mekor Haberacha – the epicentre of blessing. It is a time when we re-connect with Hashem and recognise Him as Creator of the world.

The seeds of the blessing of Shabbat to our people were already sewn through Avraham's respect for Sarah, and her enthusiasm and tireless efforts in building a Jewish future; it is then that we see for the first time a clear blessing of Shabbat through the candles, dough and cloud of honour.

Fast forward 3800 years and here we are in an every busy society. Let's not lose those values, respect our spouses, build the future, reconnect to Hashem on a weekly basis and together celebrate Shabbat!

■ Shabbat Shalom

AHARON GABAY - KOLLEL ZICHRON CHANA VERACHEL



THE SKY'S THE LIMIT

The parashah tells of a famous dialogue between Avraham Avinu and Hakadosh Baruch Hu: Avraham is troubled that he will not have children, Hashem takes Avraham outside to show him the stars and says your children will be many just like the stars. Rashi explains that the simple way of understanding the conversation is that hashem was showing him the abundance of stars to show Avraham that he will have an abundance of children. However, continues rashi, the deeper understanding is that Avraham looked at the stars and saw that astrologically he will not bear children. Hashem told Avraham that leave your views of astronomy and ignore what they say.

The Gemara in sotah (12b) says that the goyim possess certain powers and prophecy through astrology. However,

they have very limited understanding of these powers. The Gemara brings an example: when the Jews were enslaved by the Egyptians pharaoh's sourcerers saw that the saviour of Israel (Moshe) will die by water so they decreed to throw all the babies in the river, little did they know that the water that Moshe would be killed by was a complete different event.

We say 3 times a day in 'Alenu Leshabeach' -

“שהם משתחוים...אל אל לו יושיע,
ואנחנו כורעים ומשתחוים
לפני מלך מלכי המלכים הקדוש
ברוך הוא שהוא נוטה שמים ויסד ארץ”

- “the other nations of the world serve other gods...and they (the gods) don't give them salvation, but we serve hashem who places the heavens and establishes the land”. The phrase doesn't say that hashem does give us salvation as opposed to the other gods, rather it says that he places the heavens and establishes the earth. This is because the powers of the other nations are limited to a great extent, Hashem, on the other hand, he

created the world he has no limits and he is the God that we serve.

A servant of Hashem's potential can be likened to the beam of a laser, when you shine it at the wall it seems like that is the end of the laser, however, as you move the beam to a point much further, the laser will reach there as well. A Jew is capable of so much, Be it physically, emotionally or spiritually.

We can see this idea personified in our leaders. A person only has a small time in this world, only for a chunk of one's life are they a fully grown human being. But if we look at the works of Rav Ovadia Yosef z"tl he has produced sefarim which seem to exceed the time he had in his life. We may not be Rav ovadia, but we surely have access to what he had access to. We can use this to expand on our own knowledge and attributes. May we merit to use these strengths to help ourselves grow both spiritually and physically.

■ Shabbat Shalom

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OUR CHACHAMIM

RABBEINU ELIYAHU OF VILNA – THE VILNA GAON

Our Sages have said, “If the Rav is like an angel of G-d, then seek Torah from his mouth. And if not, then do not seek Torah from him.” Rabbi Eliyahu, the Vilna Gaon, was one of those rare figures that all people, from the smallest to the greatest – all those who had the merit of seeing his majestic face and all who heard him speak – considered him like an angel of G-d. It was in this way that he appeared to his contemporaries, and for us he has remained like this up to our days.

Rabbeinu Eliyahu had many things bequeathed to him by birth. He possessed all the abilities and characteristics that belonged to the Tannaim and Amoraim. He became famous for all generations by the name of “the Gaon,” and when we simply say “the Gaon” everyone understands that the reference is to Rabbeinu Eliyahu of Vilna.

The Gra (as he was also known) was born on the first day of Passover 5480 (1720). The people of Vilna recounted that the young Eliyahu was a very beautiful child, a pure soul in a pure body. He was gifted with extraordinary intelligence that had no equal for the centuries that preceded or followed him. From his earliest childhood, at the age of three, he astounded the great men of Vilna by his power of recollection, his absolute mastery of Tanach, and the speed of his comprehension.

One day he was asked, “Where in the Chumash is there a verse that contains eight words that all end with the letter mem?” And the little Eliyahu, who wasn’t even four years old at the time, instantly answered, “It’s the verse in Parsha Vayishlach: ‘Two hundred she-goats and twenty he-goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams’ [Genesis 32:15].”

Around the age of seven, he gave a discourse at the great synagogue in Vilna that marveled all his listeners.

The Gra studied with a Rav until the age of seven, for after that time nobody was found who could teach him Torah. He then studied alone with great diligence until becoming an expert in all fields of Torah, revealed as well as hidden.

Still very young, his parents married him off to a young girl from the town of Keidan in Lithuania. After getting married, he remained in Keidan, enclosed in his room where he studied Torah day and night in holiness and purity. Even by day he studied by candlelight, his shutters being closed so that the noise from the street wouldn’t bother him. The Gra always said, “The adjective lamdan [scholar] that we apply to a Talmid Chacham is formed in the same way as the word gazlan [thief]. In the same way that we do not call someone a thief because he has the opportunity and knows how to steal (applying it instead only to someone whose occupation is stealing), so too is it impossible to call someone a scholar because he can study. We only apply it to someone whose permanent occupation is study.”

He spoke little, even at home with his family. One day his sister (who he had not seen for years) came to pay a visit. When she entered his room, he greeted her and asked about her family. He then said, “My sister, we will see each other in the World to Come. There is no time here in this world. I have to study Torah.”

While he was still young, he took it upon himself to go into exile, and went roaming about for years in the towns of Poland and Germany. Even though disguised as a poor man, he couldn’t manage to hide his spiritual loftiness and piety from people. Everyone recognized his grandeur, and he became known the world over as a Gaon and Tzaddik. On returning from his exile he settled in Vilna, where he once again began to diligently study Torah day and night. He didn’t want to become a Rav or Rosh Yeshiva, but instead remained in the shadow of his tent, enveloped in his Tallit and wearing his Tefillin, with words of Torah constantly in his mouth.

The extent of his diligence was indescribable. His son gives us the following account: “For 50 years, my father did not sleep more than half an hour at a time, and not more than two hours during an entire day. So as not to fall asleep during the long winter nights, he studied in a house that was not heated, with his feet immersed in cold water. He never went two yards without Torah and Tefillin, and he never had a useless conversation in his entire life. Before his death, while crying abundantly, he confessed to having sinned in losing four minutes of Torah study.”

His Torah knowledge was phenomenal. He reviewed his entire studies every 30 days, and the whole Torah was permanently engraved on his heart. He knew how many times the name of each Tanna and each Amora appeared in every tractate, and all his books were covered over with notes. His commentaries were published under the title Hagaot HaGra [Notes of the Gra]. He also wrote books on grammar, astronomy and geometry, and he was knowledgeable in medicine and other sciences. Some thinkers who met him were stunned to see someone who was living in the tent of Torah, yet surpassing them nevertheless in all subjects and secular sciences of their specialty.

His genius demonstrated itself not only in study, but also by his good deeds and sterling character. His student Rabbi Israel of Shklov recounts the following story:

It happened one day that the synagogue official who brought the Gaon funds (which the community allotted him every month) took this money for himself. The Gaon didn’t want to cause problems for this man, for he was poor, and so he didn’t reveal anything to anyone. Feeling that no one was aware of what he had done, the man continued to act in the same way. The Gaon didn’t complain about him, and for two years he never told anyone that he himself and his family were suffering from hunger. In no way was it acceptable to the Gaon that he should humiliate a Jew. It was only when this synagogue official fell ill and confessed to his sin on his deathbed that the matter became known.

Because of his Torah and uprightness, everyone simply called him “the pious one”. When the Gaon heard this, he was opposed to it and said, “I am not worthy of this name. I only wish to merit saying that I properly adhere to the Shulchan Aruch.”

The Gaon greatly longed to go to Eretz Israel and establish his Beth Midrash there. Later on in life, he left Vilna and set off for the Holy Land. He traveled as far as Koenigsberg, Germany, where he wrote his famous letter (“the letter of the Gra”) to his mother, wife, and family. In that letter his pure soul is reflected in all its beauty. However, he did not merit entering Eretz Israel. There are several legends and popular stories as to why he returned, but no one knows the real reason. Yet if the Gaon was not able to see the land that he yearned for, his desire was fulfilled after his death. During the six years that followed, many of his thousands of disciples went to Eretz Israel and founded the community of Perushim in Sefat and Jerusalem.

In 5557 (1796), the Gaon fell ill and felt that his days were numbered. On the eve of the last Yom Kippur before his death, he called all his descendants and, crying abundantly (contrary to his normal practice), he blessed them. On the third day of Chol HaMoed Sukkot (Tishri 19, 5558), he asked to be given an etrog and lulav. He then got up, recited the blessing on the lulav, and didn’t let go of it until his death. A few moments before passing away, he took his Tzitzit in his hand and said, “How it is difficult to leave this world of action, where by a mitzvah as simple as this, which costs but a few pennies, one can merit seeing the face of the Shechinah!” ■



HALACHOT

RABBI ELI MANSOUR

MAY ONE PERSON RECITE BIRKAT HAGOMEL FOR MANY IN THE SYNAGOGUE?

The Talmud (Berachot 54b) teaches us that four people must say the HaGomel blessing, i.e., those who travel through the desert, those who travels overseas, those who are released from prison, and those who were sick and feel better.

Sometime, on Shabbat, there are many people who need to say HaGomel. Can one person say HaGomel for the other people in the congregation? Does each person need to make his own blessing?

R. Ovadia Yosef, in Hilchot Tu Bishvat (Hazon Ovadia, Hilchot TuBishvat page 354) cites the Hatam Sofer (OH 51) who explains that the Birkat HaGomel does not follow the Korban Todah, i.e. the thanksgiving korban. Had it been modeled after the Korban Todah, each and every person would have to say the blessing. However, since it is not based upon the Korban Todah, one person may say the blessing for the entire congregation, even if they have different reasons from say the HaGomel blessing.

Summary: One person, who is himself obligated to say the Birkat HaGomel, may say it for the entire congregation, regardless of their reasons for saying the blessing. ■

KidsTime



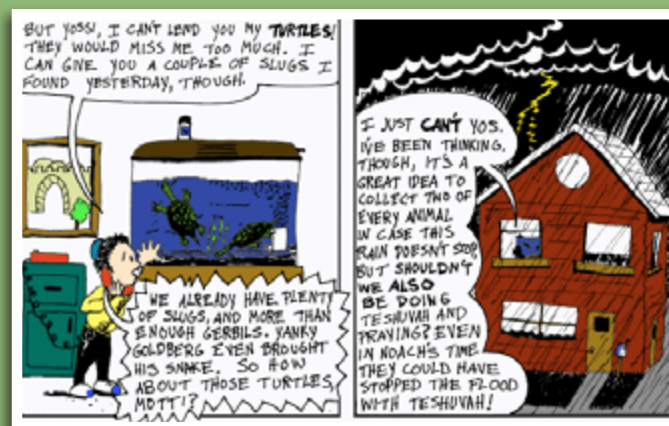
TEST YOURSELF - Q&A

- ❶ What benefits did Hashem promise Avraham if he would leave his home?
- ❷ "And all the families of the earth will be blessed through you." What does this mean?
- ❸ Who were the souls that Avraham and Sarah "made"?
- ❹ What were the Canaanites doing in the Land of Canaan when Avraham arrived?
- ❺ Why did Avraham build an altar at Ai?

Answer

❶ 12:1 - He would become a great nation, his excellence would become known to the world, and he would be blessed with wealth. ❷ 12:3 - A person will say to his child, "You should be like Avraham." ❸ 12:5 - People they converted to the worship of Hashem. ❹ 12:6 - They were in the process of conquering the land from the descendants of Shem. ❺ 12:8 - He foresaw the Jewish People's defeat there in the days of Yehoshua due to Avraham's sin. He built an altar to pray for them.

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Week 3 Sunday 1st November

Week 4 Sunday 8th November
Week 5 Sunday 15th November