

A LESSON FROM THE PARASHA

Seeing Stars

Many years ago on Shabbos *Parshas Devarim*, I was sitting in Golf Manor Synagogue and began thinking about a question that Rashi quotes from the *Sifri*—a *halachic midrash* written over 1,700 years ago. The *passuk* quotes Moshe *Rabbeinu* as telling the Jewish that you are as numerous as the stars. The *Sifri* asks, “Were they as numerous as the stars? They were only 600,000!” The *Sifri* offers an answer, but I was perplexed by the question.

The *Sifri* was clearly making a very significant assumption. It considered it to be a given that there are many more stars than 600,000. The *Sifri* made this assumption over 1,000 years before Galileo began using a telescope to examine the stars. I was pretty certain that from Earth, the unaided eye could not detect more than the existence of a few thousand stars. Before the end of davening, I asked Dr. Herb Halpern, former Chair of University of Cincinnati’s math department, who confirmed my assumption that only a few thousand stars are visible from Earth no matter how dark and clear the night. Indeed, further research informed me that only about 5,000 stars are visible from Earth.

Just after davening I brought the issue to Rabbi Minster. He said, “Why are you so surprised? According to the *gemara* in *Brachos* there are quadrillions of stars!” Sure enough, the *gemara* on 32b states, “The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to Israel: ‘My daughter, I created twelve constellations in the firmament, and for each and every constellation I have created thirty armies, and for each and every army I have created thirty legions [*ligyon*], and for each and every legion I have created thirty infantry division leaders [*rahaton*], and for each and every infantry division leader I have created thirty military camp leaders [*karton*], and for each and every military camp leader

I have created thirty leaders of forts [*gastera*], and on each and every leader of a fort I have hung three hundred and sixty-five thousand stars corresponding to the days of the solar year. And all of them I have created only for your sake . . .”

I then turned to Rabbi Boruch Berger (*kiddush* was already in progress by then!) who pointed out that vast amounts of stars must have been a given, even in Avraham *Avinu’s* times. Otherwise, why would Hashem promise Avraham that his offspring would be as numerous as the stars? And if you want to suggest that when Hashem promised him, He also added something along the lines of, “and by the way, there are many more stars than you think,” that would be a very odd way to make a promise.

However, the answer does seem to lie with the promise to Avraham. Initially (*Bereishis* 13:16), Hashem had promised Avraham that his children will be as numerous as the dust of the earth. Then, only after Avraham’s successful war against the four kings, just as Hashem tells him that his offspring will be as numerous as the stars, the *passuk* says, “He took him outside and said ‘Look to the heavens and count the stars.’”

Rashi, quoting the *midrash*, gives three different explanations for what it means that “He took him outside.” The first is simply that He took him out of his tent to look at the stars. The second is that He metaphorically told him to go outside of his preconceived notions that were based on Avraham’s astrological understanding that he would remain barren. The third explanation is truly mind boggling. Hashem took Avraham outside of the universe and told him to look down upon the heavens and count the stars.

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A TIMELY HALACHA

RABBI CHAIM HEINEMANN


Let us continue with some of the issues that arise when a Torah observant Jew travels and ends up in a hotel, especially pertaining to Shabbos.

Electronic Doors. When walking into or out of the hotel, one should use manual non-electronic doors. Service or staff doors are likely to be non-electronic, and may be available to guests with special authorization. If there are no manual doors, one should wait until a non-Jew opens the electric-eye door with his movement and then proceed through the doorway. Because of the difficulty of coordinating one’s movements with those of another person, caution should be taken to avoid unwittingly activating the door (R’ Moshe Heinemann).

Electronic Locks. Although electronic door locks have become commonplace, certain hotels, especially near large Orthodox communities, still have a few rooms set aside that use a key and it is worthwhile to attempt to find these. Although electronic card keys may not be used and are *muktza* on Shabbos, guests may leave them at

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A RIDDLE FOR YOU

Which *mitzvah* has sitting as a prerequisite for fulfilling it? 

See reverse side for the answer

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A TIMELY HALACHA

CONTINUED

the front desk before Shabbos, and then on Shabbos ask non-Jewish staff members to open their door. The logic is as follows: activating the lock mechanism is an *issur d'rabonon*. Consequently, this is a *sh'vus d'sh'vus b'makom mitzvah* or *oneg* Shabbos.

Carrying. An *eruv chatzeiros* (refers to matza or bread set aside to allow carrying between different areas inside) is not necessary to permit carrying within the hotel premises (e.g. from a room to an enclosed hallway) on Shabbos according to R' Moshe Feinstein (O.C. 1:141). A motel usually comprises rooms that open up to the outdoors. Since there is no proper enclosure, one may not carry outside of his room.

Davening. A man should try to arrange his hotel stay in an area where he will be able to attend a *minyan*. If there is a *minyan* within 18 minutes of his hotel, then he is obligated to attend that *minyan*. If he does *daven* by himself, he should daven *Shemona Esrei* at the same time as the local *minyan* (*Halichos Shlomo* 5:18). One should face towards Jerusalem. If he cannot determine the proper direction, then he should mentally gear his thoughts towards Jerusalem. One

GREAT ACTS OF ORDINARY PEOPLE

The twelfth grade was very excited. Each boy in the class was going to be getting a chance to prepare an in-depth piece on the section of Talmud they were studying and present it to the class. Parents of the presenter were going to be invited as well. When it was Moshe's turn, the rebbi, Rabbi Speigel, told him to go let his father, who was another rebbi in the yeshiva, know that he was going to be speaking now. When Moshe returned very quickly without his father, Rabbi Speigel was puzzled. "Did you go tell your father?" Rabbi Speigel asked. "He couldn't come right now," Moshe answered uneasily. He walked to the front of the classroom and delivered his presentation. Still thinking about why Moshe's father wouldn't have been able to hear his son's excellent presentation, Rabbi Speigel heard Dovid, who would be presenting the next day, asking what time his mother would want to come and everything suddenly became

should not *daven* facing a mirror or painting. According to some authorities, if there is a Gideon Bible in the room, it should be placed in a drawer prior to *davening* (*Derech Pikudecha, Lo Sa'aseh* #11: *Hagah, Shaylos U'teshuvos B'tzel Hachochma* 2:84). 🕒



Please note: Revised Date Kollel 25th Anniversary Event Sunday evening September 6th

clear. Dovid's parents were divorced and he was estranged from his father. Everyone else had expected to at least have a father listen to their presentation. "Until today," thought Rabbi Speigel. "Now that Moshe's father did not come, Dovid won't be the odd man out." Rabbi Speigel went back to his teaching for a new appreciation of his student Moshe who, besides for his academic excellence, was a class act as well. 🕒

RIDDLE ANSWER

The time of standing for an elder. 🕒

A LESSON FROM THE PARASHA - CONTINUED

According to this, Avraham was being shown the true vastness of the universe and the enormous number of stars contained within it.

For millennia, mankind has gazed at the heavens in wonder and seems to have known from very early on that there are a vast number of stars, well beyond the ability of the human senses to perceive. It would seem likely that Avraham's experience is the true source of mankind's assumption, even in antiquity, of the vast number of stars that are truly out there. If you know of any other source of how this fact may have been known, perhaps through some ancient scientific method please let me know. 🕒

BEYOND ELLIS ISLAND

THE TRAILBLAZERS, TRIALS, & TRIUMPHS OF AMERICAN JEWRY

RABBI MOSHE TZVI CRYSTAL

A Jewish Hospital in New York had already been needed for years, but even as the Jewish population of New York hit 16,000 by the year 1850, a hospital still did not exist. Different benevolent societies had been attempting to get a project off the ground and had not made headway. This changed when a wealthy man name Sampson Simson got involved. Despite the protests of the societies who considered this their purview, Simson himself organized a board, held a fundraiser, donated property, and in a year's time had started the building that would eventually be known as Mt. Sinai Hospital. Sampson Simson was a second-generation American who was already in his seventies by the time Jews' Hospital was established. Whereas his father and uncle had been successful merchants, Sampson was a lawyer who had studied law under Aaron Burr (the U.S. vice president remembered mostly for killing Alexander Hamilton in a duel). He was possibly the first Jew to graduate from Columbia University, and actually gave his graduation address in Hebrew. After an incident where he was attacked on the street in 1813, he moved to an estate in Yonkers and became somewhat reclusive, never marrying and gaining a reputation as an eccentric. He was a lifetime member of the Shearith Israel Congregation of New York and was said to be *mitzvah* observant, even baking matza on his property. Another project that he spearheaded was the North American Relief Society to help the poor of Jerusalem. It was said that visitors raising funds for the Jews in Israel were always welcome guests to his estate. 🕒

SOURCE: Levine, Dr. Yitzchak. "Sampson Simson Eccentric Orthodox Philanthropist." *The Jewish Press*. 2011.

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