

A LESSON FROM THE PARASHA

Shield of Avraham



RABBI
MOSHE TZVI
CRYSTAL

The story goes that a student came to request entrance to a Yeshiva. The Rosh Yeshiva (Head of the Yeshiva) told him that they did not have room for another student. The student pulled what he thought was his trump card: "But we're *kroivim* (relatives)!" "How?" asked the Rosh Yeshiva. The student explained that he had an aunt from his mother's side who had a friend who lived down the block from the Rosh Yeshiva's third cousin in Pinsk (or something to that effect). "*Vaiter kroivim!*" (distant relatives) exclaimed the Rosh Yeshiva and waved the student on.

The student left, feeling down but not out. He waited out the day in town and, when it came time for *mincha*, followed the Rosh Yeshiva to the synagogue. When the *chazzan* began the repetition of the *Amidah*, the student moved up behind the Rosh Yeshiva. When the three *Avos* – G-d of Avraham, G-d of Yitzchak, G-d of Yaakov— were mentioned, the student called out "*Vaiter kroivim, vaiter kroivim!*" (distant relatives, distant relatives). After the prayers were over, the Rosh Yeshiva found the student and told him, "I see your point, I will find a place for you in Yeshiva."

What the student and the Rosh Yeshiva understood was that we invoke our forefathers Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov every day in order to arouse the mercy of G-d for their distant descendants. Our sages expound that Avraham was informed in the beginning of

this week's *parasha* of this merit that he and his son and grandson would have forever. "And I will make you into a great nation – the Jewish people will say 'G-d of Avraham.' And I will bless you – they will say 'G-d of Yitzchak.' And I will make your name great – they will say 'G-d of Yaakov.'" This exegesis concludes in an interesting way. The next words are, "And I will make you a blessing – One might think, then, that we should conclude the blessing invoking the name of all three; on this the Torah says only YOU will be the one invoked in the ending of the blessing and not them." Meaning, the ultimate source of our forefathers' merit for the Jewish people will be Avraham. Why?

I would like to suggest an answer based upon the words of Rabbi Moshe Kordovero, 16th century scholar and kabbalist from Tzfat. In his work, *Tomer Devorah*, Rav Kordovero explains that G-d desires acts of kindness to such a degree that, even if the Jewish people deserve to be completely destroyed because of their disregard for the *mitzvos* of the Torah, the merit of their acts of kindness saves them from destruction. Our forefather Avraham is the paragon of kindness. Therefore, when we conclude the first blessing of the *Amidah*, we conclude with Avraham. When the Jewish people most desperately need merits to protect them, Avraham, who embodied kindness like no other, can be their ultimate source of mercy. 🕊



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THE RABBI WAS ASKED ON THE PARASHA

THIS WEEK WITH RABBI MEIR MINSTER

Last *parasha*:

Q: Why did Noach need to check if the land was dry or not if he had to wait for Hashem's directive to leave the *Teiva*?

A: Rashi says that Noach was showing *derech erez*. If they entered with G-d's permission, then they should only leave with G-d's permission. Without knowing that it was indeed possible to leave, but choosing to wait, they could not demonstrate this respect for G-d's authority.

Another possibility is that prayer is supposed to be as specific as possible. Perhaps Noach wished to know if he should still be praying for an end to the flood, or for permission to leave the *Teiva*.

This week's *parasha*:

Q: Rashi says when Avraham did a *bris* he did not worry about the scoffers of the generation. Why did the scoffers have to know anything? Rashi also says that there could have been people who would have said "If we would have seen him do it, we would have prevented it." Why would anyone care?

A: The word *bris* is related to the word *briah* – creation. A *bris* is more than an agreement or a connection, it is a change in the parties involved; they become different. G-d created man, but now Avraham was being recreated into something else, something on another

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THE RABBI WAS ASKED ON THE PARASHA

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level of existence. Avraham, and his descendants, were now becoming partners with G-d in the building of this world and the affairs of mankind. (G-d, of course, is unchanging, but how He relates to man and appears to us changed.)

Ask any lawyer in a big law-firm what happens when a colleague makes partner and others do not. Everyone knows about it, and nobody likes it. At the root of it, this is perhaps the underlying cause of anti-Semitism.

The scoffers were saying, essentially, a man is a man and nothing you do to the body is going to change that. Man is not capable of being godly or having that kind of relationship with G-d. Others were not so sure; instead, they would try to sabotage the process. Deep down they all knew that something was changing, and that they had lost an opportunity. The greatness of Avraham was that even after his *bris*, his transformation, he remained committed to the rest of mankind, continuing to develop his relationship with them, to help them to become better and closer to G-d.


Something always bugged you about the upcoming parasha (or last week's)? Ask! If you would like to submit a question on the parasha, please email it to parasha@cincynkollel.org. Questions will be selected to address at the discretion of the Rabbi who is answering that week. Questions may be edited for brevity/clarity. 


A SHINING EXAMPLE

Rabbi Avraham Fishman, late father of Rabbi Tzvi Fishman, then principal of Mosdos Ohr HaTorah in Cleveland, was on his way to the adventure of a lifetime. He was only praying that he would return safely. His destination was the other side of the Iron Curtain. His goal was to teach Torah to those holy souls who risked everything they had to learn about their heritage. His cover was to play the role of the typical America tourist. Needless to say, the hat and jacket he normally wore were left behind and his garb was quite different than the usual. The adventure began right away as two intimidating men pulled him over in the airport and interrogated him as to what business he had in the Soviet Union. He tried to assure the men he meant nothing other than to tour their country but he could see they weren't convinced. They let him go with a warning that they would be monitoring what he did. Rabbi Fishman spent the rest of the week sneaking to meetings with his fellow Jews while trying his best to look like a tourist by visiting the major landmarks. However, he could not rid himself of the feeling he was being watched and was constantly looking over his shoulder. On Shabbos he joined two young men for a very simple meal of Matzah, potato, and an orange for dessert. The discussions they had about Shabbos, though, made up for the lack of food as these men drank in everything he had to say about Shabbos or the *parasha*. Rabbi Fishman also taught them a simple tune

A BA'AL HATURIM FOR YOU

G-d tells Avraham that "Those that curse you will be cursed." Those words in Hebrew, "*M'kallelcha A'or*" have the numerical value of 428 which is the same as the words "*Bilaam habo l'kallel bonecha*," "Bilaam that will come to curse your children," hinting to the story of the sorcerer Bilaam who was hired to curse the Jewish people in the desert.

Yaakov ben Asher, known as the *Ba'al Haturim*, was a scholar and biblical commentator who lived most of his life in Spain from approximately 1275 to approximately 1340. His classic commentary is printed in many editions of the *Chumash*. 

to the words of Rabbi Nachman of Breslov. "*Kol ha'olam kulo gesher tzar me'od v'ha'ikar lo l'fached k'lal*" – "The world is a narrow bridge but the main thing is not to fear at all." As these two men learned the song they began to sing louder and louder. Rabbi Fishman began to fear they would be heard and was increasingly nervous as they sang louder and louder "*lo l'fached k'lal* – not to fear at all." Rabbi Fishman was in awe of these two men who lived under such oppression but had such reserves of strength to defy the danger they were in. When Rabbi Fishman left, the same two men he had seen in the airport met him, detailed everywhere he had been that week and informed he was being deported. The adventure was over, but the courage of the men and women he had met was burning ever brighter. 

THE FALSE MESSIAHS OF JEWISH HISTORY

RABBI NOSSON WIGGINS

YEISHU HANOTZREI – THE FALSE PROPHET OF G-D (PART III)

Recap: The Gemara in Sotah indicates that Yeishu lived during the Second Temple era and was a student of Yehoshua ben Prachya, while the Gemara in Gittin and Berachos imply that he lived after the destruction of the Second Beis Hamikdash during the times of Rabbi Akiva.

There are numerous ways in which Jewish scholars over the centuries have resolved this conflict between the two accounts of Yeishu in the Talmud, three of which are presented here. The approach of Rabbeinu Tam (a 12th century Tosafist and grandson of Rashi) is that Yeishu was in fact a student of Yehoshua ben Prachya during the Second Temple era. The account of ben Sadita in *Gittin* must be referring to another wayward Jew who involved himself in idolatry and witchcraft.

A seemingly simpler solution is that there were two different people named Papus ben Yehudah; one who lived after the destruction of the Second Beis Hamikdash and sat in jail with Rabbi Akiva (the account in *Berachos*) and another who lived 200 years earlier in the times of Yehoshua ben Prachya (the account in *Gittin*). Accordingly, Yeishu was in fact a disciple of Yehoshua ben Prachya. This is the conclusion of a 14th century Algerian Talmudist, Rabbi Shimon ben Tzemach Duran, commonly known as *Rashbatz*.

A final approach is based on a different version of the Talmudic text which appeared in some printings of the Talmud. According to this version, the original Gemara in *Sotah* reads: Yeishu, the student of Rabbi Akiva instead of Yeishu, the student of Yehoshua ben Prachya. This is the opinion of Arugas Habosem, a German Rabbi in the 13th century. 