

A PARASHA THOUGHT

Walking on Both Paths



RABBI
BINYAMIN
KANOWITZ

In this week's *parasha*, Hashem tells Avraham to leave Charan and reassures him by saying "Ve'escha l'goy gadol, ve'avurechecha, ve'agadluh es shimecha, ve'ye bracha - And I will make you into a great nation, I will bless you, I will make your name great, and you shall be a blessing." (Bereishis 12:2).

Rashi quotes the Gemara (*Pesachim*/117b) which explains that this *pasuk* corresponds to the first *bracha* of *Shemoneh Esrei*. The words "I will make you into a great nation" refer to the words "Elokei Avraham." "I will bless you" corresponds to the next words of the *bracha*, "Elokei Yitzchok." The end of the *pasuk*, "I will make your name great," refers to "Elokei Yaakov."

The Gemara continues to explain that instead of concluding the *bracha* with a mention of all three *Avos*, we end by saying "Magen Avraham," which

corresponds to the words at the end of the *pasuk*, "and you shall be a blessing." Rav Shimon Schwab expounds on this Gemara by saying that there are two aspects to *Avodas Hashem* (service of G-d). One is recognizing that we are links in a chain, continuing to act in accordance with the message we absorbed from our parents, and them from their parents, all the way back to *Har Sinai*.

The second aspect of *Avodas Hashem* is knowing that each individual has his own tailor-made challenges given to him by Hashem. Hashem gives these challenges along with the tools to overcome them.

Rav Schwab explains that both aspects of *Avodas Hashem* can be seen in the first *bracha* of *Shemoneh Esrei*. The beginning of the *bracha*, "Elokei Avraham, Elokei Yitzchok, Elokei Yaakov," shows that we are a link in the chain. The end of the *bracha*, "Magen Avraham," corresponds to that second aspect of how to serve Hashem - using our unique abilities. Avraham is a prime example of this. He was the first person to recognize Hashem, completely at odds with the rest of his society. It is for this reason we refer to Avraham as being an *Ivri*, meaning "on the other side." Avraham was on one side and the whole world was on the other. Both of these ideas are integral to our service to Hashem. We need to know that we are part of a *mesorah*, and to use what has been passed down from our fathers and Rebbeim to help us serve Hashem properly. At the same time, we need to realize that we all have our own tailor-made challenges and strengths created to help us chart our own personal path in *Avodas Hashem*. 🕍

LEARNING WITH THE KOLLEL
(CHOSHEN MISHPAT)

WITH
RABBI MEIR MINSTER

Avraham is famously tested ten times, giving him the opportunity to demonstrate his subservience to Hashem and, in the case of at least some of them, his level of *bitachon* (trust). The *Klei Yakar* uses the idea of a "test of *bitachon*" to explain one of the fundamental distinctions found within the laws of *ribbis* (interest). The Torah is clear that the prohibitions of lending with interest apply only to loans between two Jews. A Jew may borrow from or lend to a non-Jew with interest.

The *Klei Yakar* posits that this is because in the eyes of the Torah a loan to a Jew is virtually risk-free. He will certainly honor his obligation to pay the loan back. If a Jew earns an income from such loans, he may feel that his *parnasah* (livelihood) is guaranteed. How, then, can he demonstrate his *bitachon* in Hashem's providence and belief that *parnasah* is in G-d's hands? Loans to non-Jews, on the other hand, carry with them a higher risk of default, and earning a *parnasah* in that way is not a sure thing, allowing the lender to feel the need to rely on Hashem.

Other explanations are also offered

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LEARNING WITH THE KOLLEL (CHOSHEN MISHPHAT)

CONTINUED

for this distinction. The Ramban, for example, takes a different approach. He views the granting of interest-free loans as an act of *chessed*, something that Jews should be engaged in with each other. It is an expression of brotherhood that is reserved for Jews with other Jews. It is understandable then, he explains, why the Torah promises *beracha* for one who makes loans without interest. *Chessed* and *shalom* are the greatest catalyst for bringing *beracha* into our lives.

The Maharal stresses this point of brotherhood and expands upon it. Lending money without interest speaks to the brotherhood and sense of unity within the Jewish people. Ultimately, the unity of the Jewish people reflects on our sense and perception of the unity of Hashem. Lending with interest to Jews is therefore akin, in some way, to idol worship.

It is interesting that all these ideals, *bitachon*, *chessed*, and the belief in the unity of Hashem, are values that were demonstrated by our forefather Avraham and instilled in our genetic make-up. 🌍

HAFTORAH HAPPENINGS

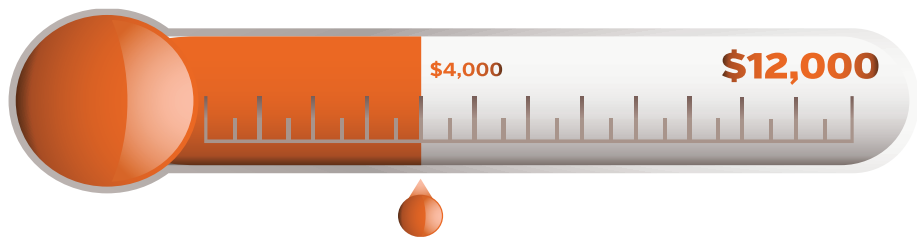
RABBI YAAKOV MARCHUK

One of the issues that many thinking Torah Jews struggle with is the long *galus* (exile) we find ourselves in. Already in his time, the Rambam wrote (*Iggeres Teiman*) that we are experiencing the birth pangs of *Moshiach* – how much more so does this apply many hundreds of years later. This begs the question: Why is it necessary for the exile to be so long? In the opening of this week's Haftorah (based on Rashi's explanation), Yeshaya *Hanavi* rhetorically addresses this question (40:27-29) "Why do the Jewish people say my way is hidden from G-d, do you not know? Did you not hear? Hashem is eternal, G-d is the creator of the ends of the earth. He does not weary, and there is no calculating His understanding" (loose translation). Rashi explains that the Jewish people are complaining that G-d has not given us the reward we should receive. The *Navi* answered that G-d is all powerful and all knowing. There is a method to the seeming madness. While we know that G-d has a reason, we need to understand what that reason is.

Ramchal in *Derech Hashem* (part 2, chapter 4) explains that from the time that Adam sinned and was exiled from the Garden of Eden, the goal of humanity has been to return to the level Adam was on before the sin. With no one having fulfilled that goal before Avraham, the job was given to Avraham and his Jewish descendants. Rav Dessler (*Michtav Eliyahu*, v3, p 210) describes that when Adam was in Gan Eden he was clearly aware that spiritual good was the true good. However, once he sinned the *Yetzer Hara* (evil inclination) entered him, and he lost clarity about what is truly important. This, writes Rav Dessler, is the source of our long exile – Hashem is waiting for us to regain that absolute clarity of what is truly important. 🌍

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TRACING OUR MINHAGIM

RABBI MORDECHAI BERINSTEIN

There are many customs related to the mitzvah of *bris milah*, which is introduced in this week's *parasha*:

When the baby is brought in for *milah*, the *mohel* says the words *Baruch Haba!* (Blessed is he who arrives) in a loud voice. The reason for this is that the numerical value of the word "*Haba*" (הבא) is eight, which is the day after birth on which *milah* is performed (Avudraham).

One reason why Ashkenazim outside of Israel don't make the blessing of *Shehecheyanu* on *bris milah* is because of the pain the child experiences (Beis Yosef, YD, 265:7).

The reason why the baby is named at his *bris milah* is due to the fact that Hashem switched Avram's name to Avraham together with the *mitzvah* of *milah* (Pirkei dR' Eliezer).

The custom is for a father to choose a different *sandek* (the one who holds the baby during *milah*) for each of his sons. This is because being the *sandek* is compared to offering the *ketores* (incense service) in the *Beis Hamikdash*. The Gemara tells us that whichever Kohen offered *ketores* became wealthy, and for that reason a new Kohen was chosen for each service. Therefore, each son also has a different *sandek* (Darkei Moshe, YD, 265:11). 🌍