

א שטיקל תורה A LITTLE SLICE OF TORAH

פון פרשת דער וואָך FROM THE WEEKLY PORTION

November 01, 2025



“Fostering diverse modes of attention to textual details cultivates correlative forms of attention to the world and divine reality”

Michael Fishbane (1943-), *Sacred Attunement: A Jewish Theology*

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מִלֶּךְ הָעוֹלָם,
אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, וְצִוָּנוּ לַעֲסוֹק בְּדִבְרֵי תוֹרָה:

“Tachometer Torah”



...read down to the red line

Parashat-haShavu'a Stats

Weekly Portion: Leich L'cha

Consists of: Genesis 12:1-17:27

Sequence—

in annual Torah cycle: 3rd of 54

in Genesis: 3rd of 12



A Salient Selection from the Portion -

Genesis 12:10-20

Context: Genesis, first of the Five Books of the Torah, is an outline of the Creation of the physical universe; a description of the origin of the human family by their respective nations; and an account of Abraham's and Sarah's lineage through their grandson Jacob as the foundation of the Israelite people.

Content: Avram (who is still going by his Aramaic name from Ur, and will not change it to Hebrew until chapter 17) has followed God's invitation to depart his ancestral homeland and go forth to found a dynasty in Canaan. Yet it develops that the rainy seasons in The Promised Land can be fickle— so, during a time of local drought and resultant famine, the would-be Patriarch pulls up stakes and goes off to the more reliable food supply of the Nile Valley... where he does not exactly cover himself with glory.

12:10] - Now there was a famine in the land.
So Avram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land.

וַיְהִי רָעָב בְּאֶרֶץ וִיכָד אַבְרָם
מִצְרַיִם לָגוּר שָׁם כִּי כָבֵד הָרָעָב
בְּאֶרֶץ

12:11] - As he was about to enter Egypt, he said to his wife Sarai: “Look, I know what a beautiful woman you are.

וַיְהִי כַּאֲשֶׁר הִקְרִיב לָבוֹא מִצְרַיִם
וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל שָׂרִי אִשְׁתּוֹ הִנֵּה נָא
יִדְעֵתִי כִּי אִשָּׁה יִפְתַּ מְרָאָה אֶתְּ



Sarai in the market of Mari (detail)

by Tom Lovell, 1966

- more over

12:12] - “If the Egyptians see you, and think ‘She is his wife,’ they will kill me and let you live. [12:13] - **Say, instead, I pray, that you are my sister, that it may go well with me on your account,** and that I may remain alive because of you.”

12:14] - So it is that, when Avram entered Egypt, the Egyptians saw how very beautiful the woman was. [12:15] - Pharaoh’s courtiers, seeing her, praised her to Pharaoh, so the woman was taken into Pharaoh’s palace.

12:16] - **He richly endowed Avram, on her account,** giving him sheep; oxen; male and female donkeys; slave men and women; and camels.

[12:17] - But The Eternal One **afflicted** Pharaoh and his household with mighty **plagues** on account of Sarai, the wife of Avram.

12:18] - So Pharaoh summoned Avram and demanded of him: “What is this you have done to me! Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? [12:19a] - **Why did you say, ‘She is my sister,’** so that I took her as my woman?

12:19b] - “Now— here is your **wife**; take her and begone!” [12:20] - At which **Pharaoh instructed men regarding him, to release him,** together with his wife and all that he possessed.

וְהָיָה כִּי יֵרְאוּ אֹתָךְ הַמִּצְרִים
וְאָמְרוּ אִשְׁתּוֹ זֹאת וְהָרְגוּ אֹתִי
וְאֶתָּךְ יַחֲיוּ אָמְרִי נָא אֲחֹתִי אָתָּה
לְמַעַן יִיטֵב לִי בְּעִבְרֹךָ וְחִיתָה נַפְשִׁי
בְּגִלְלָךְ

וַיְהִי כִּבּוּא אַבְרָם מִצְרִימָה וַיֵּרְאוּ
הַמִּצְרִים אֶת הָאִשָּׁה כִּי יָפָה הִוא
מְאֹד וַיֵּרְאוּ אֹתָהּ שְׂרֵי פֶרְעָה
וַיְהַלְלוּ אֹתָהּ אֶל פֶּרְעָה וַתִּקַּח
הָאִשָּׁה בֵּית פֶּרְעָה

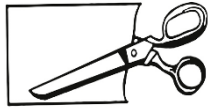
וּלְאַבְרָם הֵיטִיב בְּעִבְרֹה וַיְהִי לוֹ
צֹאן וּבָקָר וַחֲמֹרִים וְעֲבָדִים
וּשְׁפָחוֹת וְאֶתְנַת וּגְמִלִים

וַיִּנְגַע וַיְהִי אֶת פֶּרְעָה נִגְעִים גְּדֹלִים
וְאֶת בֵּיתוֹ עַל דְּבַר שְׂרֵי אִשְׁת
אַבְרָם

וַיִּקְרָא פֶּרְעָה לְאַבְרָם וַיֹּאמֶר מַה
זֹאת עָשִׂיתָ לִּי לָמָּה לֹא הִגַּדְתָּ לִּי כִּי
אִשְׁתְּךָ הִוא לָמָּה אָמַרְתָּ אֲחֹתִי
הִוא וְאָקַח אֹתָהּ לִי לְאִשָּׁה

וַעֲתָה הִנֵּה אִשְׁתְּךָ קַח וְלֵךְ וִיצֹ
עָלֶיךָ פֶּרְעָה אֲנָשִׁים וַיִּשְׁלַחוּ אֹתוֹ
וְאֶת אִשְׁתּוֹ וְאֶת כָּל אֲשֶׁר לוֹ





TORAH Snippet as a warm-up

וַיִּצוּ עָלָיו פַּרְעֹה אֲנָשִׁים וַיִּשְׁלַח אֹתוֹ

12:20 - Pharaoh instructed men regarding him, to **release** him

וישלח

ישלח

I / קל / simple active -

“dispatch; send [away]”

ישלח

III / פעיל / intensive active -

“**release**; let go”

A) Exodus 6:11 -

בֹּא דָבָר אֶל פַּרְעֹה
מֶלֶךְ מִצְרָיִם
וַיִּשְׁלַח אֹתוֹ
יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֶרֶצוֹ

Go in to Pharaoh, Ruler
of Egypt, [and tell him
that] **he is to release** the
Israelites from his land.

B) Exodus 7:26 -

כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה שְׁלַח
אֶת עַמִּי וַיַּעֲבֹדֵנִי

Thus says The Eternal
One: “**Release** My
People, that they may
offer service to Me.”

C) Exodus 13:17 -

וַיְהִי בִּשְׁלַח פַּרְעֹה
אֶת הָעָם

Now it happened, when
Pharaoh **had released**
the people

וַיִּנָּגַע יְהוָה אֶת פַּרְעֹה בְּנִגְעִים גְּדֹלִים

12:17 - The Eternal One **afflicted** Pharaoh with mighty **plagues**

- Vocabulary of The Ten Plagues Narrative (Exodus 7-11) -

an **affliction**

verb נ-ג-ע “touch”

נָגַע

the Hand of God

יַד יְהוָה

the Finger of God

אֶצְבַּע אֱלֹהִים

My plagues

מִגִּפְתֵּי

- Subsequent Significant Adumbration in Genesis -

וַיִּרְדֹּף

וַיִּשָּׁיג

Genesis 31:23 -

Lavan **pursues** Jacob, to recover his
daughters and flocks



Genesis 31:25 -

Lavan and his sons **overtake** Jacob in the
region east of the Jordan

Genesis 44:4 -

The steward **pursues** Joseph’s brothers, to
recover the “stolen” goblet



Genesis 44:6 -

The steward **overtakes** Joseph’s brothers,
and accuses them of the theft

Exodus 14:8 -

Pharaoh **pursues** the Israelites, to bring
them back to servitude



Exodus 14:9 -

Pharaoh’s chariotry **overtakes** Israel at the
shores of the Sea.

- more over



אֲמַרְי נָא אֲחוֹתִי אֶתְּ

12:13 - Say, instead, I pray, that you are my sister,

לְמַעַן יֵיטֵב לִי בְּעִבְרִיךָ

that it may go well with me on your account

D) Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808-1888), *T'rumat Tz'vi* on Genesis 12:13 - Could it be true that Abraham was afraid only for himself— and that therefore, in order to save himself, he was ready to compromise his wife's honor? In view of all the incidents of this sort that took place in ancient Egypt and Phoenicia, **we have reason to conclude** (and this may not be without analogy in European countries of our own day) **that in the climate of immorality which prevailed in those lands, maidens were safer than married women, especially if the maiden was also a foreigner.**

E) Toby Wilkinson (1969-),
*The Rise and Fall
of Ancient Egypt* -

The per-khener, or royal harem, comprising the households of the King's female relatives and minor wives, **was an important institution** in its own right.

It owned land and operated workshops, notably for textile manufacture, and was thus **a potential power space** for an ambitious rival to the reigning king. Throughout ancient Egyptian history, palace intrigue and attempted coups would often originate inside the harem.

F) Dylan Bickerstaffe (1962-),
“Royal Ladies of the New Kingdom”
lecture to Essex Egyptology Group, July 2021 -

The excavated site at Gurob was identified in inscriptions as *Per-Khener n Mi-Wer*, “the Mi-Wer **Women's-House**” (or harem). Associated tombs of harem women featured impressive funerary goods, each body encased in three nested wooden coffins, side-by-side to each other in the burial chamber, embellished with rich golden objects.

Many of the women were identified by **names that suggest a Syrian or Levantine origin**: Men-het, Men-wel, and Mer-ti. Those women were quite possibly “mail-order brides,” for **a great number of the al-Amarna letters** [of Akhenaten, c. 1340 BCE] **consist of a request to “send me women”**— often specifically **asking for the Asiatic correspondent's daughters or sisters**— and the foreign king asking for gold in return.

G) Tamara Cohn Eskanazi (1951-), *The Torah: A Women's Commentary* - This passage finds its counterpart twice more in Genesis [Abraham and Sarah in 20:1-18, and Isaac and Rebekah in 26:1-6]. The deception leads to **an improvement in the trickster's status**, but the deception is uncovered and they are summarily dismissed. They depart, however, **with their newly acquired goods intact.**

The tale portrays Pharaoh as a dupe, and deals with the “us-them” theme in a humorous and thoroughly traditional way.

This passage is **not a tale about unethical behavior**, but a story of marginalized persons who succeed in roundabout, unorthodox ways. In both such stories that involve Abraham and Sarah, **Sarah proves to be the reason for Abraham's increased wealth.**

- continued

אברהם היה עיקר ויקח אברהם את שרי אשתו

H) Midrash Genesis Rabbah 40:4 - Abraham had been the principal party—
“Avram took his wife Sarai” [Genesis 12:5]—

עשה עצמו טפילה אמרי נא אחותי את ונעשה טפילה לה ולאברם היטיב בעבורה

yet **he subordinated himself** [by saying to her:] “Please, say you are my sister [that it may go well with me on your account” - Genesis 12:13]. He thereby became incidental to, and dependent upon, her: “Pharaoh richly endowed Avram, on her account” [Genesis 12:16].

I) Manasseh ben-Israel (Manoel Dias Soiero, 1604-1657), *The Conciliator* #40 -

Genesis 12:13 - Say, instead, I pray, that you are my **sister**.

Genesis 26:5 - Abraham obeyed Me and kept My commandments and My laws.

Avoiding falsehood is one of the 613 precepts of the Torah. **If our Patriarch Abraham made use of falsehood**, in saying of his wife “she is my sister,” **how can this later verse** [from Genesis 26] **say that he “obeyed My commandments and My laws”?**

It is a maxim of our ancient sages that “it is permitted **to prevaricate for the sake of peace**.” That signifies ambiguous words absent of detriment to anyone, reflecting merely the desire to attain just ends for the advantage of a fellow creature. As such, **the most benign kind of falsehood**, which affects none and **is of advantage to someone**, **is permitted in cases of necessity**: like that of Abraham to AviMelech [Genesis 20:2] and to his young men [Genesis 22:5]; the midwives to Pharaoh [Exodus 1:19]; *et cetera*, all of whom avoided danger thereby without injuring anyone or giving offence.

The cause, then, of Abraham acting in this manner is clear, considering the certain evil that awaited him by saying Sarah was his wife. For, she being extremely beautiful, there would not be any shortage of those who would attempt his death to obtain her. Therefore, by saying she was his **sister**, he incurred no danger, but **would acquire great favor from princes**, who (in the hope of his conceding her to them for wife) might bestow their friendship upon him— and so, **by amusing them with false hopes**, he might eventually free himself and quit the city. **But it happened differently to what he thought would be the case**— for the princes who saw her, conceiving themselves unworthy of a jewel of such singular beauty, all concluded she was worthy only of a throne and scepter, and as such she was extolled to Pharaoh.

It is said that by means of Truth did God create the world, which is depicted alike in both the opening and concluding words of the Creation account in Genesis:

“God Created...” **בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת** [Genesis 1:1]

“God Created by making” **בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים לַעֲשׂוֹת** [Genesis 2:3]

The final letters of these respect three words **form the word אֱמֶת “truth”** as the first and final thing that God did create and make. **Truth** is, accordingly, one of the Divine Attributes— even as Jeremiah says, “**יהוה אֱלֹהִים אֱמֶת**, the Eternal One, Who is God, is **Truth**” [10:10]. And it is said that these letters— being the first, middle, and last of the alphabet— constitute, between them,

The Thirteen Divine Attributes

Exodus 34:6-7

**יְהוָה אֵל רַחוּם וְחַנוּן אֶרְךָ
אֲפִים וְרַב חֶסֶד וְאֱמֶת**

The Eternal One is God— compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, **abounding in kindness and truth** . . .

- more over

the seal of The First Cause, Who is the Beginning, Middle, and End and as such knows the past; present; and future. He himself is therefore **Truth**, for His Being is alone true, and not dependent on any other cause. For this reason truth is a moral virtue that ought to be esteemed, since— as Don Isaac Abravanel observes on Zechariah 3— it includes every active precept and theological value.

But **when unavoidable**, and no one is injured thereby, the **benignant** prevarication may be **used** in the way stated.

ויראה מפשט הכתובים כי שרה לא קבלה עליה לאמר כן אבל המצרים היו רעים וחטאים מאד וכאשר ראו אותה ויהללו אותה אל פרעה לוקחה אל ביתו ולא שאלו בהם כלל אם אשתו היא או אם אחותו היא והיא שתקה ולא הגידה כי אשתו

J) RaMBaN (Bonastruc da Porta, 1194-1270) on Genesis 12:11 and 12:10 - ["Say, instead, I pray, that you are my **sister**" -] The straightforward reading of the Scriptural text is that **Sarah never undertook it upon herself to say this**, but rather that it was the Egyptians— who are exceedingly wicked and licentious— who, when they saw her and praised her to Pharaoh, he inducted her into his household. They never asked at all if she was his wife or his **sister**, while **she remained silent and never told them that she was his wife**.

ואברהם ספר מעצמו כי אחותו היא ולכך הטיבו לו בעבורה . . . האשים אותו על אמרו אחרי כן לשרים ולבית פרעה כי אחותו היא ולא האשים את האשה כלל כי אין ראוי שתכחיש היא את בעלה והראוי לה שתשתוק

Abraham himself declared that she was his **sister**, and accordingly "[Pharaoh] richly endowed him, on her account" [12:16]. [Pharaoh] subsequently accused him, in the presence of the nobility and of the whole imperial court, for having declared that she was his **sister**— **but he made no accusation against the wife, at all**; since it would be unseemly for her to contradict her husband, it was appropriate for her to have remained silent[— even at her own cost].

ודע כי אברהם אבינו חטא גדול בשגגה שהביא אשתו הצדקת במכשול עון מפני פחדו פן יהרגוהו

You must know that our Patriarch Abraham committed a very great sin, even inadvertently, **when he brought his virtuous wife to the stumbling-block of sin** out of his own fear lest they might kill him.

והיה לו לבטוח בשם שיציל אותו ואת אשתו ואת כל אשר לו כי יש באלהים כח לעזור ולהציל

He should have trusted in The Ineffable One, Who would save him and his wife and all he had— for God surely has the power to help and to save.

גם יציאתו מן הארץ שנצטווה עליה בתחילה מפני הרעב עון אשר חטא כי האלהים ברעב יפדנו ממות

Moreover, his departure from the Promised Land on account of the famine was **another transgression of which he was guilty**— for in time of famine God would have saved him from death.

ועל המעשה הזה נגזר על זרעו הגלות בארץ מצרים ביד פרעה במקום המשפט שמה הרשע והחטא

It was because of his doing this, that it was decreed his descendants would endure exile in the land of Egypt under Pharaoh's power. "In place of justice, there is wickedness and sin" [Ecclesiastes 3:16].

K) Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808-1888),
T'rumat Tz'vi on Genesis 12:13 -

The Torah does not attempt to hide from us the faults, errors, and weaknesses of our great men, **and precisely thereby it places the stamp of credibility** upon the happenings it relates.

Had they all been portrayed to us as models of perfection, we would have believed that they had been endowed with a higher nature not given us to attain. Had they been presented to us free of human passions in inner conflicts, their nature would seem to us merely the results of a loftier predisposition— not a product of their personal merit— and **certainly no model we could ever hope to emulate.**

L) Avigdor Shinan (1946-), "Honestly, He Made a Mistake," in *The Jerusalem Report* – November 05, 2001 -

The Torah, the Talmud, the Midrash, and our medieval commentators all refused to suspend judgment of Abraham; all find faults in his behavior. That is **the greatness of Jewish tradition: it does not glorify human beings, even the greatest among them.** Even Abraham can err, and there is no reason to obscure that fact.

The opposite is true: pointing out what is less than perfect in him and in other biblical figures **makes them into living, breathing human beings, with whom it is possible to identify.** . . . Our ancestors did not venerate their own predecessors blindly, but rather aspired to reach their level— and to do so, had to describe them as flesh and blood.



Pharaoh returns Sarah, and Expels Abraham
by Isaac Isaacs, c. 1635