



# Ohr Yerushalayim News

9th November 2024 - Volume 17 - Issue 14

## News This Week

### מזל טוב

Mazel Tov to David and Eunice Wolfson on the Bar Mitzva this week of their grandson, Yechiel Wacks, in Gateshead.

### Kiddush

There will be a Kiddush following Davening in honour of the Mesaymim of SCP

### Chaim Aruchim

We regret to inform of the Petira of Hilary Krebs, mother of Mike. He is sitting Shiva until Wednesday morning.

Davening at Dalehurst, 4 Ringley Road, Whitefield, Manchester M45 7LB - Shacharis 8am, Mincha 1pm, Maariv 7.30pm

He will be sitting at his home, 4 Kersal Gardens, Bury New Road (next to the Sem) between 2.30 - 5

We wish Chaim Aruchim to Dani Epstein for the Yahrtzeit of his father on Tues, 11th Cheshvan

### Ovos uBonim/Bonois

The new season of Motzei Shabbos Ovos uVonim/Bonois starts this week one hour after Motzei Shabbos. Treats for the kids and weekly raffle

## The Philosophy Of The Kiln

Dani Epstein

"Sarai, it appears we have some guests for dinner."

"Oh, who did you invite?"

"Some people I met in the market. They asked me some questions and wanted more answers, so I decided that a longer conversation over dinner made more sense."

"Well, I'm sure we will have another riveting discussion."

The couple bustled around for the next few hours, cooking and preparing the upcoming meal. Just when they thought they would never finish on time, they heard voices in the courtyard.

"Quick, Avrom, place the flowers in the centre. I will bring in the wine – then do be a dear and greet the guests."

After the welcomes were over and the guests settled into place, the small group fell into light chatter. As the dinner wore on, the conversation turned to more serious matters.

Ur-Nammu, the tallest of the guests, cleared his throat and then posed a question.

"So, we asked you about your religion, yet you failed to answer us. Can you tell us which gods you follow?"

Avrom steeped his hands and then looked across the table.

"You assume I believe in the gods, or some subset of the gods. This, surely more than anything else, is the crux of the issue."

"Are you saying you do not believe the gods are real? But what of Enlil - does he not give us rain? How does the produce grow, and the grass and the trees, if not at Dagon's command?" Asked Ur-Nammu.

"This is an excellent question. But let me put this to you: you believe that Enlil controls the rain, yet the Akkadians believe it is Hadad who does so, the Canaanite believe it is Baal and the Hurrians claim it is Teshub. So, now we have four gods for rain – which of them actually controls the rain?" Replied Avrom.

Ur-Nammu looked puzzled for a moment, then replied.

"Perhaps it is all four, and they fight each other for control. That probably explains storms, thunder and lightning. All these phenomena are caused by their occasional battles."

Avrom smiled, and paused briefly.

"Then why does it rain during these battles? Surely we should only have thunder and lightning, but not rain, when they make battle. After all, they are fighting over controlling the rain."

The guests looked thoughtful as they digested Avrom's riposte. He continued.

"How come none of these gods have died in battle, if they fight so often? You might claim they are immortal, yet Tammuz supposedly dies after summer and come back to life after winter."

Avrom took a sip of wine.

"Which god is the most powerful? Anu is the father of the gods of Sumer, Marduk is the chief god of Babylon. So, who is more powerful, Anu or Marduk? Is a god who controls the sun more powerful than one who controls the wind, the rain and the clouds?"

Ninkasi, Ur-Nammu's wife, looked thoughtful and posed a question of her own.

"Are you saying we misunderstand the gods, or is there something else you are getting at?"

Avrom smiled at Sarai.

"Ninkasi, you are almost as wise as my wife. Yes, I am trying to make quite a different point. These ideas about gods – where do you get them from? Who tells you about their powers and so on?"

"It is the priests, of course." Replied Ninkasi.

"Good. Now, these priests, do they speak to the gods?"

"They must do, or perhaps the gods speak to them. How else could they know?"

"Fine. When the harvest is poor, what do they say to you? Bring more sacrifices because the gods are angry. When you bring sacrifices, the next harvest is still poor. As the sacrifices increase from year to year, the people become poorer and suffer more. Then finally a great harvest comes along."

The guests all nodded, having experienced this cycle many times.

Avrom continued.

"Now when the harvest is finally good, the priests tell you we have to sacrifice yet more in thanks to the gods. But do they ever suffer along with the population? Do you see priests in ragged clothes, begging for alms? They claim to be servants of the gods, yet they live like princes. Now, have they ever predicted that the next harvest will be great? Of course they have, many times. Many times they get it wrong, but on the odd occasion they strike it lucky, the people forget about all the times the priests were incorrect, and only remember the times they were correct. This is a confirmation bias, and is completely illogical."

## Davening Times

זמן שבת & Candle Lighting	4.07pm
Mincha & Kabbolas Shabbos	4.12pm
15 Minute Parsha Shiur	Following
Shacharis	7.25am / 9.15am
סוף זמן ק"ש	9.38am
Mincha	1.30pm / 3.54pm
Seuda Shlishis	Following Mincha
Motzei Shabbos	5.14pm
Ovos uBonim/Bonos	6.14pm
Sun	7.15am / 8.20am / 9.30am
Mon / Thurs	6.45am / 7.10am / 8.00am
Tues / Wed / Fri	6.45am / 7.20am / 8.00am
Mincha & Maariv	4.05pm
Late Maariv	8.00pm

Sarai paused the conversation briefly in order to serve some delicacies.

"Now, what you need to ask yourselves is: just how rational is all this belief in gods who control this and gods who control that. If it simply a matter of faith, then one can believe anything. Surely pure faith without a shred of evidence is a very poor intellectual position indeed?"

The conversation continued for quite a while, but eventually the guests left looking quite overwhelmed by the discussions.

"So, my husband. Do you think they will consider what you have told them or turn back to the barbarism of the gods."

"Sarai, I have no idea. Time will tell. I can but share my thoughts and hope they finally wake up one day."

The next day at the market, as Avrom prepared his market stall, a group of people walked over to him. One of the men stepped forward and raised his hand in greeting.

"I heard from Ur-Nammu that you are a man of great wisdom." He gestured with a sweeping arm to his group.

"We seek wisdom. True wisdom. Perhaps you could teach us?"

Avrom smiled and replied.

"True wisdom? How can one know if the wisdom offered is true or not?"

The man looked a bit startled.

"I don't know. Perhaps then you can first teach us how to discern true wisdom?"

"Well," said Avrom. "I am no teacher. Perhaps I am more philosopher than anything else. I will tell you what. I have a few hours I need to trade here in the market, then we can perhaps have a discussion."

Some hours later the group were sitting around Avrom in a semi-circle just outside of the marketplace, debating his ideas.

"So you do not believe in any of the gods at all?"

"That is correct. The notions of gods simply do not satisfy the observations we can make with our own eyes. If we see something is inherently flawed, we must reject it. And the belief in all these gods is simply flawed. Deeply flawed."

"So what should we believe in?"

"Believe in what you can observe, since that is evidentiary knowledge. Believe in ideas you can evaluate logically. Believe in inherent goodness, which granted is largely illogical, but the results of goodness are easily observed, hence it is logical to be good. We not require gods for all that."

Over the next few years, Avrom spoke to thousands of people in hundreds of discussions. Slowly but surely, masses of people started following his guidance and his philosophies.

One day Sarai approached him in their home.

"My dear, when was the last time you have traded in the market?"

"Sarai, I have not traded in the market for quite a while. These days I am more of dealer than anything else. This is how we can afford our lifestyle, which you might have noticed has improved somewhat."

Sarai smiled.

"Of course I noticed. I was just wondering how you managed to afford all these luxuries."

"Well, as it happens business has increased quite nicely for me. I'm dealing mainly in high value items, such as this one." And with a twinkle in his eyes, he pulled out a pair of heavy gold bangles from under his robes and slipped them on to Sarai's wrists.

She gasped.

"How on earth could you afford these? They are so heavy. Are they really gold?"

"Yes, they are solid gold. I'm glad you like them. And there will be more where this came from. Your husband is quite the businessman these days."

It was no exaggeration. As the years flew by, Avrom went from being a market trader to being the owner of a small business empire. Gold, silver, rare spices and expensive cloths from faraway lands filled his warehouses, and both he and Sarai strutted around in princely garments.

One evening, as guests of a local potentate, he was grilled by the company over his beliefs.

"You are well known for your charity and kindness. Surely a powerful man like yourself should not be engaging in helping the poor? You

should be building an army or something."

Avrom thought for a moment before replying.

"Everything I do is based on what I have perceived to be the truth, from observation and contemplation. I have seen that evil begets evil, and that evil eventually perishes. But good begets good, and the good persist and prevails. Even if I were a hard-hearted man, surely logic would dictate that being good is better for myself, inasmuch as it benefits others.

It is true, I could build an army and conquer lands. But for what end? War brings suffering, and one cannot predict where suffering ends, or who it will ultimately affect."

"But what of your atheism," another guest present asked. "Surely you must realise that you are in a minority. Isn't the majority always correct?"

"First of all, I am not an atheist. I simply do not believe there is this pantheon of capricious gods who one year want to give you a good harvest and the next starve you nearly to death. This is ludicrous. One cannot reason with gods who are unpredictable, in which case why reason with them at all?"

"So what do you believe ultimately controls this world?"

"Well, I have come round to the thought that there must be a maker of one kind or another, a Prime Cause if you will. If you see a cup, you know there is a potter. If you see how our world fits together so well, then reason dictates that there was some thought that went into it. Have you ever seen a chair that came into being from a storm or flood?"

"Well, no, I suppose that's true. But if there is a Prime Cause, as you put it, then perhaps this deity is as capricious as the gods you claim are false?"

"This is certainly possible. Or perhaps this deity, since he controls everything, has some message he is trying to convey to us with these various events. Maybe he is trying to steer us away from the madness of all these sacrifices, the worship of false gods and all the evil they bring with them. Perhaps we ought to suffer more than we do, and he has mercy on us and only punishes us as much as we can take it."

"One could say that for the gods then as well," came the rejoinder.

"This is simply not the case. The gods, as we are told, demand our sacrifices. Our worship. Our adoration. They do not ask us to be good, upright or just. It seems they care nought about evil and barbarism. But a deity who does care will not ask us to engage in all these evils in their name."

The host nodded, and pointed at Avrom.

"You, surely, are the greatest proof of your own words. You have spread goodness, preached and practiced charity, and you are wealthier than our kings. You are more than a prince or king amongst us. I think we have no choice but to concur with what you say."

"Ah, but if you agree with me, then surely you have to practice my philosophies as well."

"How so?"

"Forsake the gods. Do good to other people. Be honest and upright."

"If we are to forsake the gods, then what with Nimrod? Surely he is a god? And he lives amongst us. He is powerful and wealthy. He has many soldiers."

Avrom looked surprised.

"Is Nimrod truly a god? What godly powers does he wield?"

"I don't know, to be honest. Perhaps he controls the sun, as he says. He makes it rise and set every day."

"We can always test that," replied Avrom with a grin. "By killing him, and seeing if the sun rises the next day."

The group laughed uncomfortably.

"I would be careful with the sort of jokes you make," said the host. "Nimrod is unlikely to take them in good cheer."

Avrom waved a hand.

"I have no fear of Nimrod. He is but a man like all of us. If one stabs him, he will bleed."

The evening quickly concluded, and Avrom and Sarai returned home. "Avrom, perhaps you should be more careful about what you say. You might not be afraid of Nimrod, but I am a little worried. He is not exactly the most predictable of men. Who knows what he might plot against you."

"You are, as always, correct. I shall be more circumspect. However,

tomorrow there are hundreds of people coming to listen to what I have to say. I cannot deny them the opportunity of hearing these truths."

As Avrom's followers grew in number, so did his teachings spread. Whilst most people still worshipped the gods, many smashed their idols and spoke of the one god, the Prime Cause. This new idea gripped the populace and spread far and wide in the city of Ur, and the inevitable summons came one day.

A group of soldiers appeared outside his house, and the captain entered and doffed his plumed helmet.

"Your honour, Nimrod demands your presence in the palace."

"Demands my presence, does he?"

"Yes, sir."

"Oh well, I shall have to go."

"Your brother Horon has been summoned as well."

Avrom rode on a pure white horse to the palace in defiance of Nimrod, accompanied by the soldiers sent to bring him. He strode majestically into the throne room and glanced around at the packed crowd that had gathered, and then approached Nimrod's throne.

"Your majesty." He nodded.

Nimrod looked down at him in disdain.

"Avrom. What are we to do with you? You are a troublemaker."

"How so, your majesty?"

"All your preaching against the gods. You are filling people's heads with nonsense."

"Perhaps the gods are the nonsense filling people's heads."

The crowd gasped at this brazen reply.

"The gods are not nonsense," said Nimrod in a quiet and taunted voice. Then he roared.

"The gods are real. The gods are powerful. I am a god, I am real and powerful."

Avrom smiled broadly.

"You are certainly real, your majesty. But how are you powerful? How are you a god? Are you more powerful than the sun god? Can you stop the sun? If you can, they why not do so now and prove that to the people? Why not make it rain? Why not strike me with lightning?"

"You are treading on dangerous ground here. What you are saying will anger the gods, and we will all suffer. I would rather you suffer than us."

"Ah, but will you suffer? Only if the gods are real. Show me they are real, and I will cease to preach. Prove your beliefs are in fact true."

Nimrod turned aside for a moment, with his head resting one on of his hands, thinking. Then he sat up on his throne.

"Well, what then of your god? You believe in some kind of power? What do you call it - the Prime Cause? How are you different than me?"

"I'm not asking anyone to sacrifice anything to anyone, for starters. I do not tell people to believe anything specific. I merely encourage to think for themselves. If they come to believe what I do, it is through logic and analysis, not by being sold foolish ideas."

"And you think everyone is capable of thinking properly? People can be fools! There is a reason we have kings and gods."

"Are all kings therefore wise?" Asked Avrom. "Have we seen no foolish kings and princes? You know perfectly well we have. And who are we to tell people to be wise or foolish, anyway? Let them decide for themselves."

"I am their king, and it is for me to decide what is wise and what is foolish," growled Nimrod.

"You are not my king," replied Avrom. "And I am my own master. And you are well aware that outside the palace there have now gathered thousands who believe as I do."

"I know," said Nimrod. "That was quite devious of you, to being your supporters."

"Or wise," replied Avrom.

"Listen here, man, your philosophical musings are all very well and good, but they are all garbage. They are dangerous thoughts, and they are riling up the people. Enough with this Prime Cause business, these philosophies. Right now, here, today, I command you to subjugate yourself to the gods."

Avrom raised his eyebrows.

"What, all of them? Why would I subjugate myself to all the gods?"

Surely I would be wiser to worship the most powerful of the gods?"

Nimrod banged his fist on the arm of the throne in frustration.

"Fine. Then pick one god. Any god."

"Ah, but which one? Should I pick Nanna, god of the moon?"

"That's as good a choice as any," retorted Nimrod.

"But Shamash is the god of the sun, and surely the sun is more powerful than the moon?"

"So pick Shamash then," shouted Nimrod in growing frustration.

"But is Shamash the most powerful? Enlil can hide the sun with his storm clouds. And Tiamat swallows up the rain that Enlil showers down. Perhaps Tiamat is the most powerful? I'm sure you can see where this is going."

Nimrod roared in anger.

"You have to pick something. Anything. I do not care for your philosophical musings. You will worship the gods, or I will hurl you into a fiery kiln."

"You will do nothing of the kind," replied Avrom quietly. "True, you have many soldiers, but I have far more followers. I am far wealthier than you are, and can call upon those kings and their armies who owe me favours."

Avrom drew himself up to his full height, which was quite a sight.

"Perhaps you wish to fight me in single combat?"

Very quiet but quite distinct giggles were heard from the crowd. Nimrod was an impressive-looking man, but Avrom was significantly larger and well known for his fighting prowess in both armed and unarmed combat. Nimrod would have stood little chance in a fair fight. Again, Nimrod pounded his throne in frustration.

"Listen, you little upstart. There is no room in this kingdom for two men as powerful as ourselves. One of us has to go, and it certainly won't be me. If you want war, war you shall have. Otherwise, leave Ur Casdim and take your ridiculous ideas with you."

Avrom frowned, then replied.

"Fine. I will consider your offer. But what with my brother Horon? Why have you brought him here?"

Nimrod shook his head and sneered.

"Your brother has to decide too. He's been helping you with your 'philosophies' and he needs to declare whose side he is on. If he respects the gods, he can stay. Otherwise, he has to leave as well."

Horon looked at Avrom in despair, and held out his hands.

"Avrom, I cannot leave. I have everything here - my family, my business, my home. Please don't make me leave."

"You know the gods are false, Horon" replied Avrom. "And mere baubles and trinkets are what keep you here? Are you not a man?"

"Avrom, my beloved brother, you cannot ask this of me."

"Well, then. Perhaps you would have been better off in Nimrod's kiln. If you cannot stand for what you believe in, who knows what you might do later to save your skin?"

Avrom hung his head in sadness.

"You are my brother in flesh and blood, but in spirit you are Nimrod's." With that, Avrom made an about turn and strode out with his head held high.

When he arrived home, Sarai greeted him with a pale face.

"I heard what happened in the palace. What were you thinking of? Could you really have depended on your followers to rescue you?"

"Well, to be honest I was caught off guard. The people came out of curiosity, but I doubt they have the courage to fight, and I certainly did not ask them to tag along. For that they need a leader, and I am not that. Even if I was, they were outside, and I was not there to command them. As it is, I think things went smoothly enough, although I admit it was a bit risky on my part."

"Nimrod could have killed you on the spot. You know how unpredictable that horrible tyrant is."

"I know, I know. But to be honest, I was willing to put my life on the line for what I believe is true and just. Fortunately, I genuinely believe that the Prime Cause put the correct words in my mouth. I had Nimrod on the ropes rather quickly, and he was actually worried that I might start a war with him."

Avrom chuckled.

"Unfortunately, the news is not great. We are probably going to have to leave here and take with us whatever we can. I am truly sorry. I will try to think of some other plan, but to be honest I'm not willing to get

into a conflict with Nimrod."

Sarai smiled.

"Don't apologise, husband. I have followed you thus far, and I'm not planning on stopping now."

The next morning Avrom arose and waited for his wife to awake. Over the morning repast he brought up something rather unusual.

"My dear, I know this will sound strange, but in my sleep last night I am absolutely certain the Prime Cause spoke to me."

He held up his hand, forestalling Sarai's reply.

"Don't ask me how I know. I cannot explain exactly. However, it was not like any dream I have ever had. I could hear a voice speaking to me with such clarity, without the usual jarring and sudden changes one normally experiences. I can still remember every word. There was a feeling of peace, of I suppose love, comfort. I simply cannot describe it."

"Well, before I make any judgement, what did the Prime Cause say?"

"I have to leave my homeland, my birthplace, my father's house and travel to a land that will be revealed to me."

"So that's not exactly outrageous, we were planning on leaving anyway. But to simply wander out without some kind of a plan? Maybe this was a regular dream confirming what you wanted to do anyway?"

"No, my dear, this was something entirely different. There is not a shred of doubt in my mind that this was truly the Prime Cause speaking. I have no choice but to obey."

"Given your opinions about priests and soothsayers, I must confess that you announcing something like this is a surprise, and yet it tells me you are absolutely convinced. However, unlike those charlatans, you are not really asking for anything I have not already agreed to, and this too assures me that you are certainly correct."

Avrom looked at his wife with a look she had never seen before.

"This is something much bigger than ever before. I only knew of the Prime Cause through my logical analysis and philosophy. My knowledge now is at a completely different level. It is not that I am now more certain or convinced, but that I can see how the Prime Cause truly cares for the individual, for example. My wealth was not a result of my prowess in commerce, but a blessing from the Prime Cause. If only those pagans could experience what I have, they would simply drop their foolishness in an instant."

"Are you thinking of going out and converting the masses?" Asked his wife nervously.

Avrom burst out laughing, and when he calmed down replied.

"Me? Go out like a prophet and what exactly? Preach? Oh, that would be droll. No, of course not. I am not a preacher. I cannot convey what I know, but if someone asks, perhaps I can respond with more certainty. But it is neither here nor there. We have to pack for a journey whose length we do not know."

The news spread like wildfire. Thousand of followers poured into the streets around them, and representatives went to the house to speak to Avrom.

"Are you sure you must leave, master? Perhaps we can find some kind of accommodation with Nimrod?"

Avrom shook his head.

"First of all, I am not your master. If you do have a master, it is only the Prime Cause. But no, this has nothing to do with Nimrod. This is something entirely different. I must leave, and I have no idea where I will end up. Meanwhile, I shall travel towards Canaan."

"And what will become of us?"

"Your destiny is in your hands. You can either remain here and attempt to fend off the pagans yourself, or you can leave as well."

"May we travel with you?"

"I certainly do not object to company, but understand that currently I have no idea where I am going, other than towards Canaan. Also, I have little time, since I need to pack the mules with whatever we can bring along, and that's a considerable amount of stuff. I will be leaving in a few days."

But merely a week passed, and when the sun rose, a large group of people left Ur Casdim for the very last time, destination unknown. Although Ur eventually grew into a powerful and populous city, the descendants of Nimrod are entirely unknown, and yet Avram's descendants are well known, have rebuilt their land and reclaimed their ancient heritage, some 3,600 years later.



WE ARE EXCITED TO BE STARTING FOR THE SECOND YEAR, OUR

# אבות ובנות

PROGRAMME THIS WINTER

Each Motzei Shabbos alongside Ovos U'vonim, taking place in the Ezras Noshim

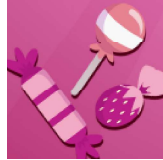
COMMENCING

## מוצאי שבת פרשת לך לך

Reception to Year 5 - From 1 hour after Nacht

WEEKLY RAFFLE TO WIN GREAT PRIZES!

For more information, please speak to Marc Zimmel



Ohr Yerushalayim invites all boys and their fathers/grandfathers to join us for the winter season of

# אבות ובנים

starting this Shabbos לך לך

Raffle

Treats

1 Hour After Shabbos

