

Torah Weekly

Is It Wrong to Like a Lot of Stuff?

PARSHAT TAZRIA METZORA

12-18 April 2026
25 Nissan -1 Iyar

Torah Reading:
Shemini: Leviticus 9:1 - 11:47
Samuel II 6:1-19

Calendars

We have Jewish Calendars. If you would like one, please send us a letter and we will send you one, or ask the Rabbi/Chaplain to contact us.

Family Programs

Do you have family on the outside struggling? Please contact or have them contact our office to learn more about our family programs. You and they are not alone, we are here to help.

Grape Juice & Matzah

We offer free Grape Juice and Matzah for you to be able to make the blessings every Shabbos. Please have your chaplain / Rabbi contact us to enroll (available to all prisons).

Is it OK to own a lot of stuff? Is it OK to want to have a lot of things? Is it wrong to enjoy a good shopping spree and to delight in yet another Amazon box at your doorstep?

People often rail against the consumer culture in which we live, and there's something intuitively noble about the notion of paring down and making do with less. He who is content with very little and shuns an overt material lifestyle would seem to be oh-so-righteous, no?

So the next time you're tempted to order another gadget on Amazon, is the "right" thing to hold back? If you have a lot of stuff in your closets, is it pious to start clearing things out and donating them?

No, that's not necessary.

In a surprising twist, the Torah teaches us a radical approach to how we ought to think about all our "stuff."

Clearing the House

In the two portions of Tazria and Metzora, we learn about a curious leprosy-like disease called tzara'at that was prevalent in ancient times as a punishment for one who spoke slanderous words. Towards the end of our parshah, we learn about tzara'at that appears not on human skin, but on the walls of one's house.

Upon spotting a lesion, the owner is to call a kohen to determine whether or not it is indeed tzara'at. Prior to the arrival of the kohen, the Torah tells us that he will first send a warning: "The kohen shall order that they clear out the house, before the kohen comes to look at the lesion, so that everything in the house should not become unclean. After this, the kohen shall come to look at the house."

You see, if the house turns out to indeed be infected, it is deemed impure—along with everything inside of it. Inasmuch as, in Rashi's words, "the Torah is concerned for the property of the Jewish people," the owner is afforded the chance to clear his possessions from the house before

the kohen arrives and thus spare them from potential destruction.

This is quite surprising. After all, we're talking about someone who has gravely sinned, a slanderer who is getting what's coming to him for speaking ill of others. Why are we so concerned about his possessions? One could even argue that he deserves it, so why are we giving him the chance to spare his stuff?

Concerned About the Property

The key lies in careful examination of the words "the Torah is concerned for the property of the Jewish people." Note that the concern here is not for the owner and the prospect of him crying over his lost jugs, rather it is for the jugs themselves, the "property."

This brings us to a classic Chassidic idea about "divine sparks" and our mission on earth.

It's a big idea, like mind-blowingly big, but here it is in a nutshell: Though it may not seem this way to the naked eye, everything in this world has a divine "spark," a G-dly force of energy that animates it. Trapped inside the coarse material matter of your laptop, your steak dinner and the front door of your house is a divine spark of G-dliness waiting to be redeemed.

How are these sparks redeemed?

By interacting and engaging with them for holy purposes. And when I say "holy purposes," that doesn't necessarily mean to saw off your front door and fashion a Torah-scroll holder out of it. Rather, every time you pass through your front door and kiss the mezuzah, it has now been sublimated, the G-dly spark released. When you use your laptop to read a Torah column or use the energy boost from your steak dinner to finally clean the garage like your wife asked you to, the sparks in those items are redeemed as well.

In fact, taught the famous Chassidic master the Baal Shem Tov, when you're hungry for a bowl of vegan steel-cut oats, it's not what you think it is. You think you want the oats because you're hungry. But what's really going on is that your G-dly soul senses the divine spark in those steel-cut oats and wants to set them free, so you're now all of a sudden hungry for oats. Voilà—you eat the oats, you use that energy to help your friend move into her new apartment, and the sparks are flying high.

Your Spark

The Kabbalists take this idea one step further, lending precision to the specific items we interact with over the course of our life. You see, if your job is to engage with material matter and make it holy, then it follows that the particular items life throws your way are not random. Rather, the reason why you own a Macbook and not a Surface Pro (besides the fact that you're convinced the Macbook is so much better) is because there's something about your soul that makes you uniquely suited to be the one to redeem the G-dly spark in that particular Macbook.

You ordered steak and not chicken? It's because you're the one

Sacred material – do not desecrate
Aleph Institute
Hyman & Martha Rogal Center
5804 Beacon Street
Pittsburgh, PA 15217
412-421-0111
Fax: 412-521-5948
www.alephne.org
info@alephne.org



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No One Alone,
No One Forgotten.

who's best suited to sublimate steak right now.

The Kabbalists use this idea to explain why we lose things at random: It's because your job redeeming the G-dly energy in that item is over, and there's now someone else whose soul is better suited to engage with it. So you lose your MacBook and someone else finds it, picking up the spiritual work where you left off.

Hopefully, that'll make you feel better about the Macbook you recently lost.

We emerge with a profound understanding of the idea that "the Torah is concerned for the property of the Jewish people." Yes, it's the property (not just the person) the Torah is concerned about, because the Torah wants you to own it, engage with it, and redeem the G-dly energy in it.

And that's why the Torah wants the person whose house is about to be condemned because of tzara'at to keep his things. Though he may have sinned and arguably deserves to lose the roof over his head, that doesn't change the fact that his soul is still uniquely suited to transform the dishes, furniture and gadgets in his home. If we're able to keep them in his hands, we'll do whatever it takes to make that happen so he can continue engaging with "his" soul-items.

Keep Your Stuff

And with that, we now can now officially feel better about all the stuff we own—if we approach it the right way. Once we understand that the material items in our possession are uniquely matched to our soul and only we can properly make them holy and divine, well, then we should tackle that mission with gusto.

So if you were thinking about selling your newest iPhone on eBay because you were inspired to lead a simpler lifestyle, consider this: Don't sell it; rather, resolve to use it in the most G-dly way possible. Read Torah articles on it, send out helpful messages to friends, and listen to Torah classes with your podcast apps.

If you have a lot of clothing, dress your finest on Shabbat and festivals. If you're a foodie, perhaps up the kosher game in your neighborhood and persuade a friend on the fence that kosher isn't all that bland. If your house is grand, no need to downsize; rather, invite guests to celebrate Shabbat, host a Torah class, or have a get-together that uplifts people's spirits.

If G-d has given you "stuff," it is your duty to reflect on how you are uniquely suited to engage with those things in a holy, G-dly, meaningful way. Enjoy it, use it, and most importantly, do good things with it.

By Aharon Loschak

IN JEWISH HISTORY

Passing of R. Chaim Halberstam of Sanz (1876)

R. Chaim Halberstam served as rabbi of Sanz, Poland, and was the founder of the Sanz Chassidic dynasty. His halachic responsa and Torah expositions were published under the name Divrei Chaim. He passed away on 25 Nissan in the year 5636 (1876).

Passing of Joshua (1245 BCE)

Joshua (1355-1245 BCE), who assumed the leadership of the people of Israel after Moses' passing (see Jewish History for the 5th of Adar) and led them into the Holy Land (see Jewish History for the 10th of Nissan), passed away on Nissan 26. He passed away at the age of 110, in the 28th year of his leadership. He was buried in his own estate in Timnat-Serach, in Mount Ephraim.

Jericho's Wall Collapses (1273 BCE)

On the seventh day of the encirclement of Jericho (see Jewish History for the 22nd of Nissan), the Jews, accompanied by the Holy Ark, circled the city seven times. After the blowing of the shofar, the walls miraculously crashed and sank, leaving the city open and unprotected. Jericho was easily conquered, becoming the first fortified Canaanite city to fall to the Children of Israel in their conquest of the Promised Land.

Buchenwald Liberated (1945)

The Buchenwald concentration camp was founded in 1937 near the town of Weimar, Germany. Approximately 250,000 prisoners were incarcerated in this camp until its liberation in 1945.

Weimar is a German city known for its highly cultured citizenry. It was the home of many of the upper class intellectual members of Europe's society. Among others, Goethe, Schiller, Franz Liszt, and Bach lived in Weimar.

Though technically not an extermination camp, approximately 56,000 prisoners were murdered in Buchenwald (not including many others who died after being transferred to other extermination camps). They died from vicious medical experiments, summary executions, torture, beatings, starvation, and inhuman work conditions. The camp was also known for its brutality. German officers would force inmates to eat their meager soup ration off the mud on the ground; would keep them standing in the cold until they froze to death; and they would even use skin of dead inmates to make lamp shades.

On the 29th of Nissan 1945 the Sixth Armored Division of the United States Third Army liberated the camp.

Among the more famous inmates who spent time in Buchenwald are Rabbi Israel Meir Lau, former Chief Rabbi of Israel, and Nobel Laureate Elie Wiesel.

Jews Counted in Desert (1312 BCE)

"G-d spoke to Moses in the Sinai Desert...on the first day of the second month [Iyar] during the second year from their departure from Egypt, saying: 'Count the number of the nation of Israel, according to their families and their fathers' households.... Those who are twenty years old and older....'"