

Parshat Bereishit

We Take Nothing with Us When We Die Nomi Kaltmann - Class of 2023

תכריכים האבן ניט קיין קעשענעס

Shrouds Don't Have Pockets -Yiddish Idiom

My husband Daniel and I recently bought a house and moved all our things from our rental home, to a house of our very own. The experience has been overwhelming in many ways. Not just because we have little children, which helped create an added layer of chaos to the move. Rather, as we continued to pack up our old house, we noticed how much *stuff* we had accumulated in the few years we had lived there.

This was an alarming revelation for us, not because we had things that we no longer needed, but because we had actively worked throughout the years we have been married, to reduce the amount of unnecessary objects we allowed to inhabit our home. All clutter and unnecessary things we had accumulated were given to thrift shops, but the move forced us to acknowledge the sheer number of material *things* that we had actively brought into our lives.

For the most part, many people believe that they own an 'average' number of possessions. Discounting all of the necessities like clothing, books, sentimental objects and furniture, there is an astounding number of items which clutter one's habitat.

Nondescript items such as notebooks, bills, papers on which random thoughts are jotted down, bottles, pens, batteries and tissues litter our homes. These random knick knacks gather up, and before long, you've unintentionally become a hoarder of an unnecessary number of *things*.

Humans are experts at collecting and accruing items. There are a number of reasons for this, but many times the things we own are important to us not just because of their monetary value, but rather because they are things to which we have formed emotional attachments.

Objects that are sentimental take us back to the moment we acquired them. Childhood objects can help us to relive our youth and items from bygone years can make us reminisce about the good times or periods of time we may feel strongly about.

In fact, from a psychological perspective, the objects and collections may also help us to ease anxiety about losing a part of ourselves or help keep elements of the past alive in our current lives. Collections can add happiness through the excitement of searching for objects that we are seeking along with groups of people that share similar interests in a particular area.

Similarly, professional collectors may be motivated by the thrill of accumulating and the excitement of obtaining beautiful, rare and expensive objects. It is also possible that collecting allows us to form psychological security by helping to fill areas in our lives that we may feel lacking.

But at the same time, it is striking that the number of objects we gather to us during our lifetime become worthless when we leave this world. We enter into this world with nothing, and we leave the same way. We have no pockets, and we have no bank accounts in *Olam Habah*. Why then do we place such an emphasis on objects, money and inanimate objects which have no benefit to us in the next life?

This week's Parsha, Bereishit, discusses the story of creation. God creates the world in six days and rests on the seventh day.

As part of this creation narrative, the world begins to exist and God fills it day by day with water, land, plants, animals and at last he creates humans.

When God created man and woman, they are naked and own nothing in the world. Adam and Eve were content without any worldly possessions except the necessities to survive, and each other. The innate desire to own stuff and to hoard that which we do not need was not part of the first man and woman's world.

The Torah records that Adam and Eve lived in the Garden of Eden, and although they were naked, they did not feel embarrassed. However, all of this changes once Adam and Eve ate from the tree of Knowledge of Good and Bad. Human instincts and emotions such as shame and understanding our 'lacking' begin with that first sin, and the sense of needing to own *stuff* has perpetuated to this very day.

This provides an interesting thought paradigm in relation to our understanding of our desire to own, collect and take things from place to place. On one hand, it is such a very real human emotion and desire which demonstrates our understanding of what we are lacking or what we desire. This is such a real human emotion that has been with us since the time of the Garden of Eden.

The Yiddish idiom noted above makes a witty reference to the fact that we enter and leave this world with nothing. While stockpiling objects can help us to allay our existential anxieties, the desire to acquire should give us the opportunity to also examine our standing on this earth.

What do the objects we collect say about ourselves? Do they demonstrate the kind of people we want to be? Do the objects reflect our values and the things we want to be remembered by?

Or do they represent the more materialistic aspects of our personalities in which we seek items purely for the satisfaction of having them in our possession?

As we begin the new year, it is a perfect time to assess our emotions and our humanity. We may seek comfort in our collections and adding more *stuff* into our lives, but ultimately, our goal on this earth should be to improve ourselves and the world that we live in through good deeds, kindness and giving.

We should accumulate goodness and kindness, friends who support us and good memories that we have shared with others, instead of lifeless objects, which bear no meaning to us in the next life, nor have meaning to others.

Bereishit allows us to see this with a new and clear refocused perspective. We entered the world with nothing, and it is with our bodies we return to our God. It is the memories, our legacies that we leave behind on earth, and it is those elements in our lives that we should be accruing.



Nomi Kaltmann is from Melbourne, Australia. Nomi comes to Maharat after earning her Bachelor of Laws and Bachelor of Liberal Arts in Politics and Jewish Civilizations from Monash University. She also holds a Masters degree in Legal Practice from the Australian National University.

Previously Nomi has worked for the Shadow Attorney General of Australia and as an advisor to the former Minister for Small Business in the Victorian Legislative Assembly. Nomi also coordinated and accompanied a Parliamentary delegation to Israel and the Palestinian Territories. Specialising in charities and not-for-profit law, Nomi has worked for the Australian Charities Commission.

Nomi was one of the founding members of the Women's Orthodox Tefillah Group in Victoria. She has previously studied at Midreshet HaRova and completed a Masters research unit that looked at the current state of Australian family law and issues relating to Agunot and Gett.

Nomi is married to Daniel Guttmann and they have two beautiful children.