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PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

Don't Get Shanghaied!

"These are the generations..." (25:19)

The Rambam, in his commentary on the Mishna, describes how a king commands his servants to build a palace of perfect beauty, and to plant a world-class vineyard fit for a king. Says the Rambam, "It's possible that the whole reason that this palace was built was that one day a righteous Jew will come and find shelter from the sun in the shade of one of the walls of this palace, and be saved from dying. As it is states in Iyov (27:17), "A Rasha (evil person) prepares it, and the Tzadik (righteous person) wears it."

In other words, this entire existence, this entire world, was created for the Jewish People. Every being, every city, everyone in China, the entire world, was brought into existence for the Jews. When the Mir Yeshiva escaped from Europe, Rabbi Meir Ashkenazi, a Chasid who served as the spiritual leader of the Jewish refugees in Shanghai, arranged for the yeshiva to occupy the Beth Aharon Synagogue. The Synagogue was built in 1927 by Silas Hardoon (1851-1931), an assimilated business tycoon, in memory of his father, Aharon.

The story goes that Silas Hardoon's father appeared to him in a dream and asked him to build a shul in his memory. For some reason, Hardoon didn't build the shul in the center of town, but far from the community. The shul had two hundred and fifty-two seats, a huge kitchen and dining hall - and it remained empty for years. That is, until the Mir Yeshiva arrived - with exactly 252 bochurim.

Nowadays, China is a popular business venue for many Jewish businessmen. And just as Hashem arranged events so the shul would be there for the Mir, so every test was created for us to be righteous. Maybe you're on a China Airways flight to Shanghai and there's a challenge, such as a movie that you shouldn't watch. Maybe that entire movie was made just so you shouldn't watch it? And by turning off your screen, you reap an eternal reward. That's a really successful business trip. Maybe the only reason you went to China in the first place was not for your business meeting, but to succeed in this test - and not get "Shanghaied."

Every temptation, everything out there, was put there for you to succeed. Don't get Shanghaied!

Q & A

Questions

1. Why was it important that Yitzchak look like Avraham?
2. Why does the Torah stress that Rivka was Betuel's daughter and Lavan's sister?
3. What are the two differences between Tamar's pregnancy and Rivka's pregnancy?
4. Why was Esav named Esav?
5. Who gave Yaakov his name?
6. How did Esav deceive his father?
7. Why was Esav faint when he returned from the field?
8. Why are lentils a food for mourners?
9. What was the birthright that Yaakov bought from Esav?
10. Why was Yitzchak not permitted to go to Egypt?
11. Why did the Philistines plug up the wells?
12. Why did Yitzchak lose his sight? (three reasons)
13. At what age should one anticipate his own death?
14. Why did Rivka ask Yaakov to bring two kid goats?
15. Why did Esav leave his special garments with Rivka?
16. What fragrance did Yitzchak detect on Yaakov's garments?
17. What was the "fat of the land" promised to Esav?
18. When will Esav be freed from subjugation to Yaakov?
19. What inspired Esav to marry the daughter of Yishmael?
20. Knowing that Machalat was Yishmael's daughter, it's self-evident that she was the sister of Nevayot. Why, then, does the Torah state that Esav married "Yishmael's daughter, the sister of Nevayot"?

Answers

1. 25:19 - So everyone would agree that Avraham was indeed his father.
2. 25:20 - To praise her, that even though her family was evil she was righteous.
3. 25:24 - Rivka gave birth at full term to two children, one righteous and one wicked. Tamar gave birth after seven months to two righteous children.
4. 25:25 - He was born fully developed. The name Esav is based on the Hebrew word for "made".
5. 25:26 - G-d.
6. 25:27 - Esav deceived Yitzchak by asking questions that suggested that he was very strict in mitzvah observance.
7. 25:29 - From having murdered.
8. 25:30 - They are round like a wheel and mourning is like a revolving wheel that eventually touches everyone.
9. 25:31 - The right to bring sacrifices.
10. 26:2 - Through the akeida he had attained the status of a korban and was forbidden to leave Eretz Canaan.
11. 26:15 - They felt that either marauders would attack to capture the wells, or, if attacking for other reasons, they would use the wells as a water supply.
12. 27:1 - a) From the smoke of the incense offered by Esav's wives to their idols; b) From the angels' tears which fell into Yitzchak's eyes at the time of the akeida; c) In order for Yaakov to receive the blessings.
13. 27:2 - When he reaches five years from the age his parents were when they passed away, until five years after.
14. 27:9 - One for Yitzchak and the other to offer as a korban Pesach.
15. 27:15 - He suspected that his wives might steal them.
16. 27:27 - The scent of Gan Eden.
17. 27:36 - Italy.
18. 27:40 - When the Jewish People transgress the Torah.
19. 28:7 - Seeing that his father despised his current wives, he resolved to take a wife from his father's family.
20. 28:9 - To indicate that Yishmael died between her betrothal and her wedding, and that it was Nevayot who gave his sister in marriage to Esav. Knowing the date of Yishmael's death, we can determine the date of Esav's marriage and thus Yaakov's age, 63, at the time of his flight from Esav.

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

Synonyms in the Hebrew Language

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

True Love (Part 2 of 2)

In Part 1 of this essay we looked the Hebrew word *ahavah* and its various forms, offering various etymological theories as to the core root of that word and its underlying conceptual idea. In Part II of this essay, we continue our exploration of the concept of “love” by focusing on additional Hebrew words that convey the same idea or similar ideas – *r’chim*, *chibah*, and *agav*. We will look at the respective etymologies of these terms and their related cognates while trying to better understand how they may differ from *ahavah*, both conceptually and etymologically.

In general, the root REISH-CHET-MEM in Biblical Hebrew usually refers to “pity/mercy” (*racheim/rachamim*), “womb” (*rechem/racham*), or a type of bird (*racham*, see Lev. 11:18 and Deut. 14:17). However, in one particular case, it actually means “love.” Let me illustrate this explanation by noting that whenever the verb form of “pitying,” appears in the first person, the vowel under the REISH is always a *patach* (for example, *aracheim* in Ex. 33:19, Jer. 13:14, 30:18, Hos. 1:6-7, 2:6 and *arachamenu* in Jer. 31:20). However, there is once instance of a verb form of this root in which the vowel under the REISH is not a *patach*: King David composed a hymn that celebrated Hashem saving him from his enemies, which begins with the words: “I will <verb *erchamcha*> You – O Hashem – strengthen me!” (Ps. 18:2). The word *erchamcha* is clearly a derivative of the root REISH-CHET-MEM, but in this case it obviously does not refer to King David pitying Hashem. Instead, the commentators (including Ibn Janach, Rashi, Ibn Ezra, Radak, Ibn Ramoch, and others) all explain that in this case, the verb in question means “I [King David] will *love* You [Hashem].”

Although this is the only case of the term *r’chim* in the Bible that clearly refers to “love,” the Targumim are replete with such usages. In fact, the standard Aramaic term in the Targumim for rendering the Hebrew *ahavah* is *r’chim*. Some readers may be familiar with the term *r’chim* from the *L’Shem Yichud* prayer (a formulaic Kabbalistic declaration recited before performing *mitzvot*), whereby one refers to *dechilu u’rechimu*, which means the “fear” (*dachal*) and “love” (*r’chim*) of Hashem.

Although the concepts of “love” and “pity/mercy” are not quite the same idea, Rabbi Yitzchak Avineri (1900-1977) writes that it is not too astonishing that both meanings could be expressed by the same root – REISH-CHET-MEM – because love is the root of mercy in the sense that one only has mercy on those whom he loves. This jibes with the explanation of *ahavah* we offered in Part I that sees true love as an altruistic desire to give or help out one’s beloved.

Similarly, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (to Ex. 13:2) bridges the gaps between the various meanings of this trilateral root by defining its primary semantic denotation as “motherliness protection.” He uses this to explain the connection between *rechem* (the place in her body, wherein a mother protects her unborn fetus) and

rachamim (i.e., the dominant trait of a protective mother), which also fits with our conception of "love." We may add that the bird *racham* (often understood to mean "carrion-vulture" or "osprey") relates to these ideas because it serves as the harbinger of "rain," which is closely related to mercy (see *Chullin* 63a), and because this mother bird is understood to act especially merciful to its young (see *Peirush HaRokach* and *Moshav Zekanim* to Lev. 11:18).

Interestingly, there is one person in the Bible named Racham (I Chron. 2:44), as well as various people in the Talmud named Rav Rechumi or Ben-Rechumi (*Pesachim* 39a, *Ketubot* 62b, *Nazir* 13a, *Zevachim* 77a). It remains unclear whether these given name refer to "love," "mercy," "rain," or something else entirely.

For the continuation of this essay that goes on to explore the Hebrew words *chibah* and *agav*, as well as the Greek word *agape*, visit us online at: https://ohr.edu/this_week/whats_in_a_word/

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TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Bava Kama 16-22

Establishing a Yeshiva

“And all of the kingdom of Yehuda, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, bestowed honor upon him when he passed from this world.” (Divrei Hayamim II 32:33) “This teaches that they established a Yeshiva at his gravesite.”

The verse cited in this *beraita* on our *daf* refers to the passing of the righteous King Chizkiyahu, who was shown this great honor because he was extremely diligent and prolific in assuring the teaching Torah to the all of the people – men and women, adults and young children – who were part of his kingdom (Tosefot).

Rashi explains that the “establishment of a Yeshiva” means that the Torah students were gathered there to toil in Torah study. The *gemara* cites three opinions as to how long this Yeshiva remained at his graveside: three days, seven days and thirty days. Both Rashi and Tosefot note that the Torah study was not exactly adjacent to the grave, but was at a minimum distance of four *amot* away. This is because we are taught not to perform a mitzvah in close proximity to a person’s grave, as this would show a lack of sensitivity, since that person can no longer fulfill mitzvahs. “One who mocks a poor man blasphemes the One Who made him” states the verse in Mishlei (17:5), which our Sages teach means to not “mock” one who has passed from this world (and is now “poor” in the sense that he can no longer fulfill any mitzvah here), by fulfilling a mitzvah at his burial site. (Berachot 18a)

This honor showed to King Chizkiyahu near his grave takes me back to a day more than 30 years ago. On that day, a very dear student at a Yeshiva I was affiliated with in Israel was killed in battle during the First Lebanon War. The funeral was at Mount Herzl in Jerusalem, and was attended by thousands. The people included all of the students where he was studying Torah until the war erupted, a large number of soldiers in uniform of all ranks from his IDF unit, in addition to a multitude of family members and friends. The head of the Yeshiva spoke at the funeral in English and Hebrew, citing this *gemara* in Bava Kama about King Chizkiyahu. The Rabbi implored that a Yeshiva be established near the grave in honor of our fallen “brother.” I clearly recall that after this eulogy nearly everyone remained at the cemetery, crying, and not certain how to deal with this great loss. But, after a short while, it became clear to many what should be done. It was necessary to heed the words of the Rabbi who spoke, and begin learning Torah there as much as possible. And so it was. Very many who attended the funeral joined in this act of showing “honor” to the beloved departed Torah student with Torah study, then and there, with soldiers from all religious backgrounds studying together with the students from the Yeshiva.

▪ *Bava Kama 16b*

COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

BIRKAT HAMAZON – BLUEPRINT OF JEWISH DESTINY

INTRODUCTION (i)

“Anyone who recites Birkat HaMazon is blessed through it.”
(Zohar HaKadosh to Parshat Terumah)

If you stop and ask your average “Yossi” in your local Shul about the function of Birkat HaMazon, I would imagine the answer you will hear is that Birkat HaMazon is our way of thanking Hashem for the delicious food we have just consumed.

And he would be right. But only up to a point.

When reading through Birkat HaMazon, it is clear that the first paragraph takes care of saying thank you. In the first paragraph we proclaim that Hashem feeds and sustains the entire world. That Hashem prepares the food for us to eat. And we conclude with the blessing, “Blessed are You, Hashem, Who feeds all.” If the sole function of Birkat HaMazon is to thank Hashem for what we have eaten, it is clear that we have fulfilled our obligation by reciting the first paragraph, and we should stop there. But we don’t stop there. We continue on and on. We bless the Land of Israel. We make mention of the Brit Milah. We then move to the Davidic dynasty and ask that Yerushalayim be rebuilt. The final blessing in Birkat HaMazon is a reference to a very specific moment in Jewish history. During the uprising of Bar Kochba against the Roman conquerors of the Land of Israel, some nineteen hundred years ago, hundreds of thousands of Jews were massacred by the Romans around the vicinity of Beitar. In their unfathomable wickedness, the Romans decreed for the bodies to be left unburied. Hashem performed a miracle, and the bodies did not decompose until they were finally buried in accordance with Jewish Law – seven years later. Finally, Birkat HaMazon comes to an end with a series of short prayers asking for Hashem’s compassion.

Discounting the first blessing, it seems at first glance as if our having eaten bread and Birkat HaMazon have very little in common with each other! Obviously, this cannot be the case, but what, exactly, are we trying to accomplish when we recite Birkat HaMazon? And why are we mentioning concepts that appear to have no connection whatsoever to our having eaten bread?

Feelings of satiety have a habit of letting us imagine that we are self-sufficient. Not just in the physical realms but in the spiritual realms, as well. The Chidushei HaRim, the first Rebbe from Gur, reveals an astonishing insight into human nature. The Torah relates (Ber. 11:4) that during the reign of Nimrod, the citizens of the world decided to rebel against Hashem and build a towering structure to enable them to go war against Him. The Chidushei HaRim asks what possessed them to imagine they could fight against Hashem? How could they possibly dare believe they would be able to subsist without Hashem? He answers that the preceding verse is the key to understanding their mindset, “They said to one another, ‘Come let us make bricks and burn them in the fire.’ And the brick served them as stone, and the bitumen served them as mortar.”

The Chidushei HaRim explains that this is the first time ever that human beings “created” something by themselves. They took other, preexisting, materials and they turned them into bricks. It was that sense of

independence – the feeling of self-reliance – that led them to believe they didn't need Hashem anymore. They would manage by themselves because they could “create.”

For this reason, Birkat HaMazon revolves around so many concepts. Concepts that seem to share no association with what we imagine that Birkat HaMazon is supposed to represent, which to say “thank you” to Hashem. Birkat HaMazon is teaching us that we must be thankful to Hashem for so much more than “just” the food He has given us. We must learn to recognize from Whom our blessings derive. We must learn how to acknowledge that without Hashem we have nothing. No past, no present and no future. So, within Birkat HaMazon we thank Hashem for what we have just eaten, the present. We thank Him for the future, the Holy Temple and the Mashiach. And we thank Him for the past, for giving us the Torah, for giving us the Land of Israel and for the miracle in Beitar.

To be continued...

TAAMEI HAMITZVOS

Reasons behind the Mitzvos

By Rabbi Shmuel Kraines

The Aron used to lead the Jewish people into battle, and they would experience supernatural victories in its merit. This week we will explore the symbolism of the Aron, as it is reflected through one of its mitzvos.

Not Removing the Aron's Handles

Mitzvah 96 (see also mitzvos 95 and 379)

“Within the rings of the ark shall the staves be; they may not be removed from them.” (Shemos 25:15)

THE MITZVAH

The Aron (ark), the Shulchan (Table), and the Mizbei'ach HaZahav (Golden Altar for incense) were equipped with rods that were inserted through rings on their sides in order to serve as handles and facilitate their transportation. These handles of Shulchan and the Mizbei'ach were inserted only when the nation travelled, and were removed when they encamped, but the Torah prohibits the removal of the Aron's handles at all times. Even once it arrived in its permanent home, the Beis HaMikdash, the handles remained.

REASON ONE: ESSENTIAL SYMBOLS

The Aron contained the Luchos HaBris (Tablets of the Covenant), where were the symbol of the covenant between Hashem and the Jewish people. The Aron was thus not only a container, but also a symbolic article, with each of its parts symbolizing a different element of the Covenant. The Ten Commandments that were engraved on the Luchos are a microcosm of the entire Torah, and thus, the Aron is especially symbolic of the Torah scholar, who carries the Torah within him. Its handles, which supported it, symbolize the supporters of Torah study. If they would be removed, this would suggest that supporters of Torah do not share intrinsically

in the Torah study that they support. They may receive reward for their service, but the Torah that is studied is not *theirs*. Therefore, the Torah commanded never to remove the handles, to demonstrate that the supporters of the Torah are partners with those that study it, and they will share equally in the reward for the study in the World to Come. Furthermore, since the Aron houses and represents the Covenant, it is not fitting for it to be incomplete in any way at any time.

**Shach to Shemos 25:13, based on Pesachim 53b; Chafetz Chaim. Ralbag.*

REASON TWO: THE HONOR OF THE ARON

Since the Aron is the pride and glory of the Jewish people, we are commanded to treat it with the utmost respect and reverence. It would not be fitting, therefore, to manipulate it or to alter its form in any way, even only by inserting and removing its handles. Moreover, it may occur that it becomes necessary to travel with it in hurry, and if the handles are not already firmly attached, they may be inserted improperly, and the Aron might fall.

The insertion of the handles for the purpose of transportation would be disrespectful in another way as well. The Aron did not need to be carried. On the contrary, our Sages teach that “the Aron carried those that carried it.” Therefore, the Torah commands us to leave the handles on at all times, to show that that just as the handles were unnecessary while the Aron rested in the Mishkan, so too were they unnecessary when it was being carried. It would seem that even so, the Torah commanded their construction in accordance with the principle that “one does not rely on a miracle.” In light of this idea, we gain further insight into the aforementioned idea that the handles allude to the supporters of the Torah: The Torah does not truly require people’s support; on the contrary, those who “support” it are, actually, supported *by it*.

**Chizkuni and Bechor Shor. Chinuch.*

REASON THREE: THE TORAH IS PORTABLE

Another reason the handles may not be removed is that the removal of an article’s handles indicates that it is in its place, but the Aron and the Torah it represents are not limited to any earthly place; indeed, it was presented to us in the middle of a desert! The Aron is certainly associated with the Mishkan, but it is independent of it. It led the Jewish people through the Wilderness and it sometimes led them in their battles. Even when the Beis HaMikdash was destroyed and the Jewish people were exiled outside Eretz Yisrael, the Torah remained with them. Its holiness is so great that it cannot be limited.

In contrast, whenever the Mishkan rested, the handles of the Menorah and the Table *could* be removed. These articles represented Hashem’s spiritual blessings and physical blessings respectively, which are linked specifically to His Sanctuary and our service to Him there. Thus, whenever they were at rest in the Mishkan, their handles could be removed, indicating that this was the place of these articles, and that they served no function outside the Mishkan.

**Berachos 8a; Rav Hirsch.*

PARSHA OVERVIEW

After 20 years of marriage, Yitzchak's prayers are answered and Rivka conceives twins. The pregnancy is extremely painful. Hashem reveals to Rivka that the suffering is a microcosmic prelude to the worldwide conflict that will rage between the two great nations descended from these twins, Rome and Israel. Esav is born, and then Yaakov, holding on to Esav's heel. They grow, and Esav becomes a hunter, a man of the physical world, whereas Yaakov sits in the tents of Torah, developing his soul.

On the day of their grandfather Avraham's funeral, Yaakov is cooking lentils, the traditional mourner's meal. Esav rushes in, ravenous from a hard day's hunting, and sells his birthright (and its concomitant spiritual responsibilities) for a bowl of lentils, demonstrating his unworthiness for the position of firstborn.

A famine strikes Canaan and Yitzchak thinks of escaping to Egypt, but Hashem tells him that because he was bound as a sacrifice, he has become holy and must remain in the Holy Land. He relocates to Gerar in the land of the Philistines, where, to protect Rivka, he has to say she is his sister. The Philistines grow jealous of Yitzchak when he becomes immensely wealthy, and Avimelech the king asks him to leave. Yitzchak re-digs three wells that were dug by his father, prophetically alluding to the three future Temples. Avimelech, seeing that Yitzchak is blessed by Hashem, makes a treaty with him.

When Yitzchak senses his end approaching, he summons Esav to give him his blessings. Rivka, acting on a prophetic command that the blessings must go to Yaakov, arranges for Yaakov to impersonate Esav and receive the blessings. When Esav in frustration reveals to his father that Yaakov has bought the birthright, Yitzchak realizes that the birthright has been bestowed correctly on Yaakov and confirms the blessings he has given Yaakov. Esav vows to kill Yaakov, and so Rivka sends Yaakov to her brother Lavan where he could find a suitable wife.

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