

O H R N E T

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PARSHA INSIGHTS

THE GREEN GREEN STUFF

“...Pour into me now some of that red red stuff...” (25:32)

We live in a world of addiction. And not just to drugs. There are addictions to sweets and chocolate, to TV programs and to golf.

One modern addiction even has its own name: “Workaholism.”

Everyone needs to work. Every one needs to find a way to put chicken on the table for Shabbat. The Mishna in Pirkei Avot tells us that we should minimize our involvement with business and maximize our time spent learning Torah. We live in a physical world, but we must never become enmeshed in it. There is no mitzvah for a person to be a workaholic. Work was designed to be a curse: “By the sweat of your brow you will eat bread.” The irony is that nowadays the curse has been embraced as a blessing.

In this week’s Torah portion, we find the world’s first

workaholic:

“...Pour into me now some of that red red stuff...” Esav’s other name is Edom, meaning “red”. Esav returned so exhausted from work that he recognized the lentils Yaakov was cooking only by their color.

Esav had lost the basic human recognition of “what things are,” and degenerated to the level of “what things look like.” He had lost the basic human understanding of essence, and grasped only the superficial. When Yaakov saw this spiritual degeneration he realized that Esav was in no way fit for the spiritual duties incumbent on the first-born, and immediately asked him to sell him the birthright.

This is the difference between the descendents of Yaakov and Esav to this day. Yaakov grasps the world of the inside, whereas Esav lays hold of only the surface, the outside.

Being a workaholic is not a Jewish thing.

Source:

• Based on the Sforno in Lev Eliyahu

PARSHA OVERVIEW

After 20 years of marriage, Yitzchak’s prayers are answered and Rivka conceives twins. The pregnancy is extremely painful. G-d 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 G-d 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 dug by his father, prophetically alluding to the three future Temples. Avimelech, seeing that Yitzchak is blessed by G-d, 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, so Rivka sends Yaakov to her brother Lavan where he may find a suitable wife.

HERE TO STAY

When the Patriarch Yitzchak was faced with a famine in Eretz Yisrael he recalled what his father Avraham had done in similar circumstances and set out for neighboring Egypt. When he reached the southernmost point he was intercepted by a Divine message ordering him to remain in the Holy Land.

“You were sanctified as a sacrifice to Heaven,” he was told, “so that no land outside of Eretz Yisrael is worthy of your presence.”

This connection between sacrifice and the land first appears in the Heavenly promise given to Avraham following his circumcision at the age of 99. The bit of blood shed in the

making of that Covenant between Avraham and his Creator was valued by the latter as a virtual sacrifice of the former’s entire being. Such self-sacrifice made Avraham and his descendants inseparable from Eretz Yisrael, which became their “eternal inheritance” to which they would be privileged to return even after being exiled from it because of their sins.

Our current return to Eretz Yisrael is fraught with many difficulties and many Jews have been tempted to leave. Perhaps they should learn to appreciate the little sacrifices they make to remain here as at least a faint echo of the patriarchal sacrifices that earn for us the right to remain in Israel forever.

LOVE OF THE LAND - THE NAMES

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael

ERETZ CHEMDAH – A PLEASANT LAND

This name, familiar to us from the second blessing in our Grace after Meals, is found in Tanach both in references to the past and to the future.

In *Tehilim* (106:24) King David recalls the sin of the nation in accepting the slander of Eretz Yisrael perpetrated by the spies and thus being guilty of “despising the pleasant land” and being compelled to wander for forty years in the wilderness before inheriting it.

The Prophet Yirmiyahu (3:18-19), on the other hand, envisions the end of exile when “the House of



Yehuda shall walk with the House of Yisrael and they shall come together out of the land of the north to that land that I have given for an inheritance to your fathers... a pleasant land, the finest heritage of all the nations.”

Jews throughout history have atoned for the mistake of “despising the pleasant land” by appreciating its pleasantness in the worst of times and praying for its ultimate return to maximal pleasantness as promised by the Prophet.

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PARSHA Q&A ?

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?"

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary unless otherwise stated.

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 angel's 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.

BONUS QUESTION ?

"Esav said, 'Give me some of this red red, because I'm exhausted.' Therefore, they called him 'Red.'" Esav was born red, but they didn't call him "Red" until this incident. Why not?

BONUS ANSWER !

There was nothing so unusual about Esav being born with a red complexion; many people are born with a red complexion. People only began calling him "Red" in order to deride him for selling his birthright for some red food.

• Ramban and Kli Yakar

BLEMISHING THE BLEMISHED

An animal must be without a physical blemish in order to qualify as a sacrifice. It is forbidden to inflict a blemish upon an animal consecrated as a sacrifice since this renders it unfit for the altar.

This prohibition raises an interesting problem in regard to one such consecrated animal – the male firstborn of cows and sheep that must be given to a *kohen* who will offer it as a sacrifice and eat its meat. If such an animal suffers the blemish of a serious condition that requires the surgery of bloodletting to save it, is it permissible to perform this surgery even though it means inflicting it with a disqualifying blemish? Or must caution be taken to limit such surgery to a place that will heal and not cause a blemish?

The crux of the question is whether there is a prohibition against inflicting a blemish upon an animal that is already blemished. The answer depends on the interpretation of two parts of the same passage dealing with this prohibition.

“...Unblemished shall it be to be acceptable, no blemish whatsoever shall be in it.” (*Vayikra* 22:21)

Rabbi Meir saw in the prohibition against causing a blemish to a sacrificial animal that is implied in this passage a sweeping ban on doing so even if a blemish already exists. The word *kol* used to insist on “no blemish whatsoever” is all-inclusive.

The other Sages, however, point to the earlier part of that passage which limits the prohibition to an animal that is still unblemished, allowing us to conclude that if it already has a blemish, such as in the bloodletting case cited above, there is no ban on inflicting an additional blemish.

Neither of the two parties to this debate is oblivious to the source cited by the other. Rabbi Meir, however, interprets the exclusion cited by the other Sages as applying only to a blemished sacrificial animal that has been redeemed from the Sanctuary, allowing for another blemish to be inflicted on it. The other Sages, in turn, interpret the all-inclusive word *kol* as a ban on indirectly causing a blemish such as placing some sweet foodstuff on the animal’s ear so as to invite a dog to bite it off and wound the animal.

• *Menachot* 56b

WHEN ADDING SUBTRACTS

For certain sins there is a sliding scale for the nature of the atonement depending upon the economic situation of the sinner. One who can afford neither animal nor bird as a sacrifice is given the opportunity to atone for his sin by bringing a *mincha* flour offering.

This *mincha* differs from those brought as voluntary offerings in that no oil or incense may be added to it. What happens, however, if the *kohen* handling this offering put oil or incense on it – is the offering disqualified? It all depends on how we understand the passage containing this prohibition.

“He shall put no oil upon it,” says the Torah, “nor shall he put any incense upon it, for it is a *sin offering*.” (*Vayikra* 5:11)

The stress on the word “it” indicates that it qualifies as an atonement *mincha* only if he follows the Torah’s instructions of not adding these forbidden ingredients. The use of the term “sin-offering” after mentioning the addition of oil and incense sends an opposite signal that even if the *kohen* made the forbidden addition the *mincha* is still valid.

The *gemara*’s resolution is that there is a difference between adding oil and adding incense. Since oil that has been absorbed by the flour cannot be separated from it, the *mincha* becomes disqualified. In the case of incense, however, it is possible to remove the incense from the surface of the *mincha*, so it does not become disqualified by merely adding that separable ingredient.

• *Menachot* 59b

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TORAH BEFORE SINAI

From: Mordechai in Jerusalem

Dear Rabbi,

Please give me a clue about how the Patriarchs found out the details of the Torah before it was given at Sinai.

Dear Mordechai,

In G-d's promise to give the Land of Israel to Isaac and his offspring, G-d explained the reason is "Because Abraham obeyed My voice, and observed My safeguards, My commandments, My decrees, and My Torahs" (Gen. 26:5). Rashi explains that "My Torahs" (plural) refers to the fact that Abraham kept both the Written and Oral Torah; "My decrees" refers to laws that are not based on human logic; "My commandments" refers to laws dictated by human morals; and "My safeguards" indicates that Abraham upheld even Rabbinical enactments aimed at guarding Torah law.

Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin in *Nefesh HaChaim* explains that just as Mankind can reach scientific conclusions through intellectual investigation, so too can Mankind

reach spiritual conclusions through spiritual contemplation. If a person is sensitive enough, it is possible to reach even the hidden, esoteric depths of the Torah. This is what Abraham did. Through probing the wonders and marvels of the world, Abraham built up an awareness of G-d that eventually led to a complete and absolute understanding of His will.

Rabbi Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin (referred to by the acronym "Natziv") adds a beautiful dimension to this idea. He writes that Sarah also arrived at this level of keeping the entire Torah, even before meeting Abraham. However, Sarah did so in a somewhat different way. While Abraham came to an absolute awareness of G-d through contemplation of nature, Sarah attained this awareness through introspection into her own soul. Sarah's sensitivity was so attuned that she used her own spiritual essence to come to an understanding of the *mitzvot*.

So, Abraham kept the Torah through the external wonders of nature and Sarah kept the Torah through the internal wonders of her soul. In a sense Abraham was keeping the Torah "from the outside in" and Sarah was keeping the Torah "from the inside out"! In this way they forged complementary paths that would serve as gateways for their offspring, as well as for Jews of all future generations, to find G-d and keep His Torah.

WHAT'S THE RIGHT THING TO DO?

REAL-LIFE QUESTIONS OF SOCIAL AND BUSINESS ETHICS

KEEPING YOUR WORD

Question: I recently went into a shop, paid for an item and then changed my mind about buying it and asked for my money back. What is the right thing to do in such a case?

Answer: The *Mishna (Bava Metzia 44a)* rules that although the purchase is not halachically consummated until one takes physical possession of a portable item, the one who backs out after money has been given is reminded that "The One Who punished the people of the Generation of the Flood and Who punished the people of the Generation of the Dispersal (following the construction of the Tower of Babel) will punish the one who does not keep his word."

Even if there was no exchange of money there is a moral obligation for one to keep his promise to give a gift or make

a deal unless the loss to the one who wishes to renege is so substantial that we can assume that the other party never took the promise seriously.

There is an even loftier ethical standard mentioned in the Talmud of a Sage who felt committed to sell an item at the first and lowest price offered him while he was reciting the *Shema* and could not respond. Since he had decided in his heart to sell at that price, he was unwilling to accept payment of the higher price mistakenly offered by the buyer who misinterpreted his silence as bargaining.

In conclusion, keeping your word is a serious matter and a competent halachic authority should be consulted when the occasion arises for failing to do so.

PUBLIC DOMAIN

Comments, quibbles and reactions concerning previous Ohrnet features

Re: A Teshuva Story (Rosh Hashana Ohrnet)

I enjoyed your teshuva story. I have one too. Several years ago, my husband's mother wrote us a letter. She had been in New York, visiting a cousin that she hadn't seen in many years, and in conversation they realized that both had children living in Israel. Both my mother-in-law and her cousin immediately wrote to their offspring, telling them that they had family in Israel, and on the same day that we received my mother-in-law's letter, we also received the letter from the cousin's daughter. She had received her father's letter

telling her about her cousin in Israel, and was thrilled to hear that she had relatives here...but she already knew us! How? At one time she used to come up to the city in Israel where we live for Shabbats, and the youth hostel where she stayed would set her up with local families for Shabbat meals. And, on one of those visits, one of those families had been us! We had eaten together, never knowing that our guest and my husband were cousins. Now our cousin is married (to an Ohr Somayach alumnus), lives in Israel, and has provided us with more Israeli cousins.

• L. R.

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

CLEANING AWAY THE ILLNESS

The Torah scholars in the Kollel in the Israeli town of Hod Hasharon were interrupted in their studies late one day some years ago by the loud sobbing of a woman who had entered their Beit Medrish with her daughter. The doctors, she told them, had diagnosed her daughter as suffering from an incurable illness and she was searching for some special merit to gain Heavenly mercy.

"Please allow my daughter and myself to clean your Beit Medrish," she begged. "I remember from my childhood in Morocco that this is considered a very big mitzvah. Perhaps if I clean G-d's house He will clean away my daughter's condition."

The scholars were glad to accommodate her. They told her that they were leaving in another half hour and that she was welcome to do the cleaning she desired. When they returned the next day they were amazed to see how thorough a job she and her daughter had done in beautifying this sacred area.

A couple of days later mother and daughter returned to the Kollel, this time with broad smiles in place of tears. Another examination had determined that the illness had mysteriously vanished and the doctors were curious as to what miracle treatment the girl had undergone. For the mother, however, there was no mystery.

DID YOU KNOW THAT...

... The Ohr Somayach branch in Johannesburg, South Africa, has added an elementary school to its multifaceted operation.

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