

OHRNET

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PARSHA INSIGHTS

A LEARNING EXPERIENCE

"I dwelled with Lavan." (32:5)

Why is it that the secular world seems to have so much gleaming success while the religious world seems to shlep along like an old beggar in a worn-out coat?

Rashi points out that the numerical equivalent of the word 'dwelled' is 613, the same number as the Torah's *mitzvot*, and Yaakov was hinting to his brother Eisav that, despite his close contact with Lavan for the previous 20 years, he had not learned from Lavan's wicked ways.

Usually this Rashi is understood to be a praise of Yaakov, that he never became corrupted by Lavan's evil. But maybe it can be understood differently.

Yaakov was also saying to Eisav, "You don't have to worry about me; I'm not such a *tzaddik*. True, I kept the 613 *mitzvot*, but in spite of the fact that I lived with Lavan for 22 years, I failed to take a lesson from the enthusiasm with which he pursued everything bad. Had I learned that from him – *oy va voy* for you my brother Eisav!"

Maybe if we did the *mitzvot* with as much zeal and enthusiasm as the secular world pursues the pleasures of this world, then we'd be as successful as them.

• Sources: Rabbi Meir Shapiro and the *Chidushei HaRim* in *Mayana shel Torah*

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PARSHA OVERVIEW

Returning home, Yaakov sends angelic messengers to appease his brother Eisav. The messengers return, telling Yaakov that Eisav is approaching with an army of 400. Yaakov takes the strategic precautions of dividing the camps, praying for assistance, and sending tribute to mollify Eisav. That night Yaakov is left alone and wrestles with the Angel of Eisav. Yaakov emerges victorious but is left with an injured sinew in his thigh (which is the reason why it is forbidden to eat the sciatic nerve of a kosher animal). The angel tells him that his name in the future will be Yisrael, signifying that he has prevailed against man (Lavan) and the supernatural (the angel). Yaakov and Eisav meet and are reconciled, but Yaakov, still fearful of his brother, rejects Eisav's offer that they should dwell together. Shechem, a Canaanite prince, abducts and violates Dina, Yaakov's daughter. In return for Dina's hand in marriage, the prince and his father suggest that Yaakov and his fami-

ly intermarry and enjoy the fruits of Canaanite prosperity. Yaakov's sons trick Shechem and his father by feigning agreement. However, they stipulate that all the males of the city must undergo *brit mila*. Shimon and Levi, two of Dina's brothers, enter the town and execute all the males who were weakened by the circumcision. This action is justified by the city's tacit complicity in the abduction of their sister. G-d commands Yaakov to go to Beit-El and build an altar. His mother Rivka's nurse, Devorah, dies and is buried below Beit-El. G-d appears again to Yaakov, blesses him and changes his name to Yisrael. While traveling, Rachel goes into labor and gives birth to Binyamin, the twelfth of the tribes of Israel. She dies in childbirth and is buried on the Beit Lechem road. Yaakov builds a monument to her. Yitzchak passes away at the age of 180 and is buried by his sons. The Parsha concludes by listing Eisav's descendants.

ISRAEL Forever

RELATIONS WITH THE NATIONS

The ever-changing relationship between the State of Israel and the nations of the world finds symbolic expression in this week's Torah portion.

When the Patriarch Yaakov prepared for a confrontation with his wicked brother Eisav, he divided his household into two camps so that if one camp was attacked the other would be able to flee to safety. In his commentary, Ramban sees this as a preview of the experience of Yaakov's descendants in the exile they were to endure in lands ruled by Eisav's descendants. "One ruler will make decrees against

their finances or their lives," he writes, "while another ruler will have pity on them and rescue their refugees."

Not only does this explain the movement of Jews throughout the centuries from one land to another, but it can also be seen as a prediction of the changing attitudes of almost all nations towards the Jewish state. This should be seen not only as a warning that we cannot rely on any nation forever, but also as a source of confidence that Heaven will never abandon us and will protect Israel forever.

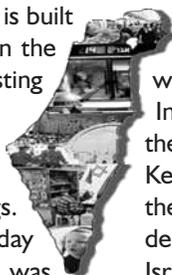
LOVE OF THE LAND - THE PLACES

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

KEFAR SABA – OLD AND NEW

Located in the Tel Aviv area, this modern city is built on the site of an ancient town mentioned in the Talmud in connection with a very interesting incident.

There was an old tree in Kefar Saba that was avoided by *kohanim* because there was a tradition that there was a human buried in the surroundings. Searches for a grave proved to be futile but one day a strong wind uprooted the tree and below it was



found a human skull.

The land upon which modern Kefar Saba was built was purchased from Arabs in 1898. In the War of Independence it was the site of fierce battles which caused the Arab residents of the surrounding area to flee, enabling Kefar Saba to increase in size. Until the Six Day War in 1967 the city was only three kilometers from the Jordanian border and suffered from attacks from Arab infiltration. The Israeli victory in that war endowed the city with security.

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PARSHA Q&A ?

1. What sort of messengers did Yaakov send to Eisav?
2. Why was Yaakov both “afraid” and “distressed?”
3. In what three ways did Yaakov prepare for his encounter with Eisav?
4. Where did Dina hide and why?
5. After helping his family across the river, Yaakov remained alone on the other side. Why?
6. What was the angel forced to do before Yaakov agreed to release him?
7. What was it that healed Yaakov’s leg?
8. Why did Eisav embrace Yaakov?
9. Why did Yosef stand between Eisav and Rachel?
10. Give an exact translation of the word *nisa* in verse 33:12.
11. What happened to the 400 men who accompanied Eisav?
12. Why does the Torah refer to Dina as the daughter of Leah and not as the daughter of Yaakov?
13. Whom should Shimon and Levi have consulted concerning their plan to kill the people of Shechem?
14. Who was born along with Binyamin?
15. What does the name Binyamin mean? Why did Yaakov call him that?
16. The Torah states, “The sons of Yaakov were twelve.” Why?
17. How old was Yaakov when Yosef was sold?
18. Eisav changed his wife’s name to Yehudit. Why?
19. Which three categories of people have their sins pardoned?
20. What is the connection between the Egyptian oppression of the Jewish people and Eisav’s decision to leave the land of Canaan?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week’s Questions!

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

1. 32:4 - Angels.
2. 32:8 - He was afraid he would be killed. He was distressed that he would have to kill.
3. 32:9 - He sent gifts, he prayed, and he prepared for war.
4. 32:23 - Yaakov hid her in a chest so that Eisav wouldn’t see her and want to marry her.
5. 32:25 - He went back to get some small containers he had forgotten.
6. 32:27 - Admit that the blessings given by Yitzchak rightfully belong to Yaakov.
7. 32:32 - The shining of the sun.
8. 33:4 - His pity was aroused when he saw Yaakov bowing to him so many times.
9. 33:7 - To stop Eisav from gazing at her.
10. 33:12 - It means “travel”. It does not mean “we will travel.” This is because the letter *nun* is part of the word and does not mean “we” as it sometimes does.
11. 33:16 - They slipped away one by one.
12. 34:1 - Because she was outgoing like her mother, Leah.
13. 34:25 - Their father, Yaakov.
14. 35:17 - His two twin sisters.
15. 35:18 - *Ben-Yemin* means “Son of the South.” He was the only son born in the Land of Israel, which is south of Aram Naharaim.
16. 35:22 - To stress that all of them, including Reuven, were righteous.
17. 35:29 - One hundred and eight.
18. 36:2 - To fool Yitzchak into thinking that she had abandoned idolatry.
19. 36:3 - One who converts to Judaism, one who is elevated to a position of leadership, and one who marries.
20. 36:6 - Eisav knew that the privilege of living in the Land of Israel was accompanied by the prophecy that the Jews would be “foreigners in a land not their own.” Therefore Eisav said, “I’m leaving — I don’t want the Land if it means I have to ‘pay the bill’ of subjugation in Egypt.”

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BAVA BATRA 107 - 113

- When a division of inherited property can be reversed
- Selling half a field
- The laws of inheritance
- The Torah source for the order of inheritance
- The problematic descendant of Moshe
- Checking on the brothers of a prospective wife
- The importance of working for a livelihood
- The daughter as an heir
- Sons and daughters inheriting their mother
- The husband as heir of his wife
- When inheritance causes ownership of property to move from one tribe to another
- Limitations on the right of the firstborn to a double portion of the inheritance

A CURIOUS BEGINNING

In listing the laws of inheritance the *Mishnah* first mentions that a father inherits his son's possessions if the son left no children to inherit him. Mentioning this form of inheritance before the case of a son inheriting his father seems to be a strange way to begin because it refers to a tragic case of a father losing a childless son in his own lifetime. It would have been more appropriate to begin with the case of a son

inheriting his father. As Rashbam points out in his commentary, it is considered a blessing for a man to have his son bury him, for we find that G-d blessed Yaakov that his son Yosef would bury him.

The reason given for beginning with a tragedy rather than a blessing is that since the law that a father takes precedence as an heir over the deceased's brothers is derived from the Sages' interpretation of a passage rather than from an explicit source, it is more beloved by the codifier of the *Mishnah*.

• *Bava Batra 108*

What the SAGES Say

"One who plans to marry a woman should check on her brothers for we have learned that most children take after their mother's brothers."

• *The Sage Rava - Bava Batra 110a*

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HALO

From: Jerry

*Dear Rabbi,
Does the concept of a halo or aura around a person appear in Judaism?*

Dear Jerry,

The answer is yes. In Jewish mystical sources the Hebrew terms are “*hila*” (emanation of light) and “*ohr hamakif*” (surrounding/enveloping light). It’s very interesting, in fact, that the terms for these concepts are nearly identical to the ancient Hebrew words. Halo is as in the verse “*Hilo* [His light] *aley roshi* [is upon my head]” (Job 29:3); and aura is as in the word “*ora*” which also means light.

The fact that we find illustrations of light surrounding the heads of holy people from different cultures seems to indicate that this is a universal phenomenon that reflects the spiritual elevation of a person and can be perceived by others. The depiction and description of aura is similar to this, although in a more varied and individual way.

However, Judaism offers the earliest and most intense description of the “*hila*” in the Torah’s depiction of Moshe when he came down from Mount Sinai (Exodus 34:29). His face literally beamed rays of light [not horns! – an unfortunate myth based on the Septuagint’s mistranslation of the word “*karan*” (radiated) as “*keren*” (horn)] — which were so intense and palpable that the people were blinded by the light and could only look at Moshe after he veiled his face. His “*hila*” was so brilliant that it could be

perceived by all but viewed by none.

Similarly, ancient Jewish sources describe the pure, holy and elevated plane of a fetus in its mother’s womb as G-d lighting a candle over its head while an angel teaches the baby the entire Torah. In this very spiritual state, while the soul is still greatly aglow with the light of the upper realms before becoming occluded by the material of this world, the fetus is literally a little bundle of light as its head is surrounded by the “*hila*” of the Divine Presence.

Many of the Jewish kabalistic texts are replete with references and discussions of the “*hila*” and the “*ohr hamakif*”. They deal with the properties and intensity of spiritual light/energy and their colors, their causes and their differences and variations between different people. In general, the intensity and color of a person’s “*hila*” and “*ohr hamakif*” are functions of his connection to G-d through the Torah and the *mitzvot*. An example of this is found in Rabbi Chaim of Voloshzin’s “*Nefesh HaChaim*” (Gate 1, ch. 6):

“When a person fulfills all of the mitzvot in perfection, with all of their details in the plane of action, and infuses [this body of mitzvot with a soul of] intense purity and holiness of thought and intention, he rectifies [energizes/harmonizes] all of the upper worlds and realms which in turn reflect back upon him and infuse within all of his creative powers and limbs the elevated holiness of these worlds such that the Glory of G-d hovers around him constantly.”

This is the source of the aura of light often perceived around the bodies of the righteous *tzaddikim* generally, and particularly glowing from their foreheads and faces, and on their hands which are the instruments of thought and deed respectively.

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THE BICYCLE EXCHANGE

Question: My neighbor's son took a liking to my son's bicycle and drove his father crazy that he must have a similar bike. This neighbor bought his son a much better bike than that of my son but this did not satisfy him. One day while my family was out the frustrated neighbor took my son's bike and replaced it with the superior one he had purchased for his son. Upon discovering the switch my son demanded that his old bike be returned, while the neighbor argued that since he gave him a better bike, there was no need for him

to return the old one. What is the right thing to do?

Answer: In his book "Pure Money", Dayan Shlomo Cohen, a rabbinical judge in Jerusalem, rules that since an old bike may be preferred by its owner to a new one, it is not certain that the exchange was beneficial to your son. Your neighbor was therefore unconsciously guilty of theft and must return the old bike to your son.

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY _____

THE WIDOW'S MIRACLE

The visitor from Kibbutz Ramot Menashe came all the way to Bnei Brak to tell her story to Rabbi Yitzchak Zilberstein, the rav of the Ramat Elchanan community.

A severe thunderstorm had struck the kibbutz causing severe damage to the duplex homes. Only one roof remained untouched by the storm. Although the other half

of the duplex was hit, the part in which a widow lived remained unscathed.

When the storm subsided the widow's neighbors came to visit her. She told them that only a few days earlier she had decided to make a radical change in her life and become observant. One can imagine the impact of such an incident on a secular kibbutz.

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