

OHR NET

SHABBAT PARSHAT TOLDOT · 2 KISLEV 5776 - NOV. 14, 2015 · VOL. 23 NO. 6

PARSHA INSIGHTS

A MYRTLE OR A THORN?

“The boys grew up and Esav became one who knows hunting, a man of the field; but Yaakov was a wholesome man abiding in tents.” (25-27)

Rabbi Levi said, “The boys can be compared to a myrtle bush and a thorn bush intertwined; once they have reached maturity and flowered, one gives forth its aroma and the other its thorns. For thirteen years together Esav and Yaakov both went to school, and together they both returned. After thirteen years, one went to *batei midrashot*, the houses of learning, and the other to places of idol worship and debauchery.”

There are no guarantees when it comes to bringing up our children. All that parents can do is to take good advice; to be examples of what they would like their child to be. (“Don’t do as I do, do as I tell you” rarely, if ever, succeeds); to follow the 3F’s: Firm, Friendly and Fair; and to pray very hard.

Rabbi Eliezer said, “A man needs to nurture his son until 13 years old, then he says, “*Baruch she’patrani...*” — “Blessed is He Who has exempted me from the punishment of this one (the son).” Until the age of thirteen the sins of the son can be visited upon the father. Thus, the father blesses G-d that he has delivered him from the punishment due to his son, and that henceforth the son will be liable for his actions.

There is dispute whether this blessing should be said with “*Shem u’Malchut*”, meaning whether we mention G-d’s Name and Kingship in the blessing. In the Shulchan Aruch Code of Jewish Law, Rabbi Moshe Iserles, the Rema, adjudicates that one should omit G-d’s name when saying the blessing, and this is the accepted ruling.

It once happened that a certain boy was brought by his father to the Rabbi of Jerusalem, Rabbi Zvi Pesach Frank (1873–1960) on the day of his bar mitzvah. Rabbi Frank said to the father, “Even though the halacha is that one should say “*Baruch she’patrani*” without “*Shem*

u’Malchut”, in the case of this boy you could certainly say it!”

The boy looked quizzically at the Rabbi.

Many years later, it happened that on the boy’s wedding day, Rabbi Zvi Pesach Frank was amongst the guests. In the meantime this young fellow had matured into a distinguished scholar. The groom made his way over to the Rabbi and introduced himself, reminding him of their meeting at his bar mitzvah. He said to Rabbi Frank, “Could I please ask the Rabbi what he meant by saying that in *my* case my father could certainly say *Baruch she’patrani* with *Shem u’Malchut*?”

Rabbi Frank replied, “The Mishna Berura’s gloss on the Rema says the reason for the blessing is that until thirteen the father is punished when the son sins because he has failed to educate his son properly in the ways of the Torah. Once the son becomes thirteen it’s up to the son to strengthen himself in the commandments of G-d. However, the Mishna Berura continues that even though the father ceases to have a mitzvah to educate, he is still obliged to rebuke his son for his actions if necessary. In many cases, the responsibility of a father for his son’s spiritual life extends way beyond bar mitzvah.

“In your case, I knew that you would be capable of being responsible for yourself, and that your father was truly acquitted of his responsibility for you.

“Thus I told him he could make the blessing using G-d’s name.”

• Sources: *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim, 225, Mishna Berura footnote 7; Rabbi Noach Orloweck; Story heard from Rabbi Dovid Cohen, Rosh Yeshivat Chevron*

SOTA 23 - 29

“Just as a Sotah (suspected adulteress) is forbidden to remain with her husband, so too is she forbidden to the man she is suspected of committing adultery with.”

This halacha is taught in our *mishna* and is based on special derivations from verses as explained in this *mishna* and in the *gemara* (28a). It is codified in Shulchan Aruch Even Ha’ezer 178:17, where it is clarified that even if she marries the suspected adulterer after receiving a get from her husband, and even if she has children with the second husband, she is forbidden to remain with him.

• Sotah 27b

“And (when) the husband is free of guilt, the water checks his wife; if the husband is not free of guilt, the water does not check his wife.”

This teaching is found in a *beraita* and is learned from the verse that the *beraita* cites: “And (when) the husband is clear from transgression, and that woman will receive her punishment”. Rashi explains that the word “when” is not written explicitly in the verse to teach that the husband should not worry and think that he is responsible for the fatal consequences his wife suffers; rather it is a Divine punishment. Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch writes that the husband must be free of guilt, since it would not be correct to expect G-d to publicly inform of his wife’s immorality if he is also guilty of the same immorality.

• Sotah 28a

LOVE OF THE LAND

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

AMUKA — SEARCH FOR A SOUL-MATE

Single people from all over Israel and the world come to pray at the tomb of Rabbi Yonatan ben Uziel in Amuka, an unpopulated area north of Tsefat. Tradition has it that those without spouses or children have found their salvation as a result of heartfelt prayers said at the tomb of the great Talmudic Sage.

Although there is no clear connection between this



Sage and the power of these particular prayers, the Talmud tells us a few things about his extraordinary Torah achievement. When this outstanding disciple of Hillel studied Torah the fiery energy of his Torah singed the wings of a bird flying overhead.

He is best known, however, for his translation of the Torah and Prophets into Aramaic.

PLEASE JOIN US...

...in saying Tehillim/Psalms and a special prayer to G-d for the safety and security of all of Klal Yisrael in these times of conflict and conclude with the following special prayer:

“Our brothers, the entire family of Israel, who are delivered into distress and captivity, whether they are on sea or dry land – may G-d have mercy on them and remove them from stress to relief, from darkness to light, from subjugation to redemption now, speedily and soon.”

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.

OHRNET magazine is published by OHR SOMAYACH Tanenbaum College

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Abarbanel

ON THE PARSHA

By Rabbi Pinchas Kasnett

Toldot

In this Parsha is the famous narrative of Esav's sale of his birthright (*bechora*) to his younger brother Yaakov for a pot of lentils. Abarbanel finds numerous difficulties with the whole story. What exactly were the special rights of the first-born? If they were truly significant, why would Esav give them up for a mere pot of lentils? If they were not significant, why was Yaakov so anxious to obtain them, and why did he take advantage of his brother's physical weakness at the time to purchase these rights for a ridiculously low price? He should have given his brother food without asking for anything in return; wasn't Yaakov supposedly the paragon of honesty and virtue? If we want to say that the first-born receives a double inheritance, this rule does not take effect until later, after the Torah is given. If we want to say that the first-born is entitled to the honor and respect of his younger siblings, why does Yaakov want to take this away from Esav in such an underhanded manner? Finally, if the firstborn privileges are to be understood in a spiritual, not material sense, G-d could of course see to it that those advantages were bestowed on whomever He wished, as we see later on in the case of Ephriam supplanting his older brother Menashe, and David being elevated over his older siblings.

Abarbanel answers that it is clear that Yaakov had no interest in either his material inheritance or being honored and respected by Esav, as we see later on where Yaakov still addresses Esav as "my master" and refers to himself as "your servant". Rather, Yaakov was seeking to inherit the blessing that Avraham had received from G-d, namely the unique Divine Providence, that special relationship between G-d and his progeny, which would result in their acquisition of the Land of Israel. This was the true wealth that Yitzchak would pass on to his offspring, not his herds and properties.

Yaakov knew that this spiritual inheritance could not be passed on both to him and to Esav. Esav was an inherently evil individual with no fear of G-d and no belief in Divine Providence. However, Yaakov was unsure whether Yitzchak would stick to tradition, and, because he was the firstborn, allow Esav to retain this blessing anyhow, or he would see that Yaakov, because of his righteousness and fear of G-d, would be far more deserving. He was even afraid that the blessing would pass to one of the sons of Yishmael or

another one of Avraham's progeny. As a result he calculated that it was better to somehow get Esav to part with his firstborn status willingly rather than for him to give up such a holy and precious gift.

Underlying the sale of the *bechora* for a pot of lentils is a much deeper understanding of the family dynamics. Yaakov understood that one of the responsibilities of the firstborn was to take over the material and spiritual leadership of the family if the father was old or incapacitated. Esav, by spending his time hunting in the fields, had essentially abrogated that role. When Esav comes in hungry from the fields and asks to be fed by Yaakov, a role reversal takes place. It is normally the job of the oldest to take care of the younger. Here it is Yaakov taking care of Esav. Essentially Yaakov is telling Esav, "If you want to take the responsibility of taking the place of our father, then fine. But if you are willing to transfer those responsibilities to me, this will be demonstrated by the act of my feeding you." This can be inferred as well from the exact wording of the verse when Yaakov says, "Sell, *as this day*, your birthright to me." What Yaakov means is that just as today I am assuming the role of the firstborn, so shall it be in the future as well. Clearly Yaakov could have shown simple kindness and given his weak and starving brother something to eat. But here was an opportunity to effect a legal transfer of the *bechora* whose spiritual connotation Yaakov treasured.

Esav responds by saying, "What is the *bechora* to me?" As far as any material benefits are concerned, he realizes that due to his lifestyle he may even die before his father and get nothing. He had no interest in assuming his father's responsibilities and privileges which included the inheritance of G-d's promise to Avraham. This meant nothing to him, as he had no belief in Divine Providence or the entire concept of attaching oneself to G-d. Finally, knowing that a morally degenerate individual like Esav would likely go back on his commitment, Yaakov tells Esav, "Swear to me, *as this day*." As we said earlier, this choice of words is an indication that his oath to transfer the *bechora* would be permanent. Since we know that Yaakov and Esav were fifteen years old at this point and that Esav only mentions the sale of the *bechora* many years later when Yaakov deceives his father and takes Esav's blessing, it is apparent that for all those years Esav did not regret what he did.

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Rav Bulman *zt"l*
on the
Torah Portion of the Week

JULIET AND ROMEO

From: [Name Withheld]

*Dear Rabbi,
Can a girl ask a boy to marry with her? Is it against the tzniut (modesty) law if a girl does this?
I am a religious girl living in [withheld] and I am 26 years old. He is my colleague and also he is a Torah scholar.*

Dear [Name Withheld],

You may know the famous story where Rachel, the young daughter of the wealthy Kalva Savua “proposes” to the older, poor, uneducated work-hand of her father — Akiva.

Despite his humble background, she saw that he had very elevated character traits and much potential to be a Torah scholar.

She approached him with the following proposal: If I agree to be engaged and married to you, will you agree to learn Torah?

He initially refused, feeling unsuited to learn Torah. But she inspired him by showing him a large stone that had been born away by water, arguing that if something as soft as water can bore a hole into something as hard as stone, surely something as strong as Torah can bore into his heart of flesh. So encouraged, he agreed.

Of course, eventually he became one of the greatest rabbis of all times — Rabbi Akiva.

In this account related in the Talmud, Rachel not only proposed to Akiva, but actually coaxed him into marrying her when he initially demurred.

And since she was righteous, and sensitive to issues of tzniut (in fact, the Talmud emphasizes that tzniut was one of the laudable traits she saw in Akiva), her act of proposing to him must not have been a prohibition.

That being said, nowadays, this is generally not done, and might be viewed, if not as a prohibition, perhaps as a compromise of tzniut.

I imagine this is particularly so in the culture of your country, where I assume it is usually the man who proposes, and your doing so might seem too assertive.

Also, since this man hasn’t proposed to you yet, you would be taking a risk of his refusing you, which is a position you might not want to be in.

If it were possible, it would be better to have someone else suggest the idea to him, without indicating it’s coming from you, and see what his response is. If he’s open to the idea, and interested, then he could be encouraged to initiate the match with the idea that you are also interested.

In fact, this is more or less how it’s usually done in religious communities, whether it’s the man or the woman who is interested in investigating and initiating the prospects of marriage with the other.

May you find your proper soul-mate at the proper time. Amen.

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 onto 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 first-born. 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.

SHEMONEH ESREI: EIGHTEENTH BLESSING - PART 2

**“We offer thanks (*modim*) to You,
for it is You Who are our G-d...”**

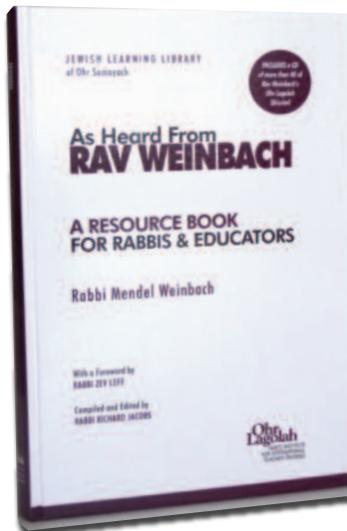
Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch explains that the root of word for “thanks-giving” (*modem: todah*) mentioned at the start of this blessing doesn’t just mean saying “thank you” as we are accustomed to saying in the modern world. The word in Hebrew is derived from “*yadah*” — “*yud, dalet, hei*” — which spells the Hebrew word for “hand”. Thus, the actual meaning of “*modeh*”, thanks, is to “give G-d one’s hand.” It is well known that the hand symbolizes one’s deeds; accordingly, we can derive a fundamental message from the above point. We must dedicate all of our activities to G-d by fulfilling His will. Our “hand” belongs to G-d, for it is from Him alone that we have the powers and abilities that we possess. Thus, to be part of the Jewish People means to “sign our hand over to G-d” (Isaiah 44:5). This is how we say “thank you” to G-d.

Our awareness of what is owed to G-d will result in an acknowledgment of just how indebted we are to Him. We find in the Torah that during the years of famine the

Egyptians sold themselves into slavery in exchange for their lives (Gen. 47:19). Accordingly, we must realize from Whom we receive the gift of life, and totally dedicate ourselves to Divine service.

Perhaps we can further explain using the word “*yad*” since it also means a “handle” to a vessel. Just as it is clear to all that the handle of a vessel has no use of its own, so too, we, G-d’s people, must be completely devoted to our Divine mission. As soldiers enlisted in the army become more responsible to their country, so too, when G-d chose the nation of Israel we have become more responsible to Him. As a result, our lives are full of Divine commands which occupy our entire being, morning, noon and night. Ultimately, this all-encompassing life experience is for our own benefit, as it is taught in Pirkei Avot, “The Holy One wanted to give Israel merit, He therefore increased for them Torah and mitzvot...”

In closing, we must also offer up thanks-giving to G-d for the opportunity to serve Him, for in so doing, we receive the ultimate good, upon which the world was founded.



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BUS FAIR

Penny Pincher is in general a good sort of lady — friendly to all, always willing to lend a helping hand and scrupulous in her observance of most *mitzvot*. Every person has his foibles, however, and Penny's main shortcoming is her miserly nature. She is always trying to save a buck, and unfortunately she is sometimes even prepared to sacrifice some of her morals on the altar of financial gain. It takes Penny 20 minutes to walk to work every day. The bus would get her there in five, but it costs \$2.50. In Penny's city the bus network runs on the honor system. Occasionally a conductor boards to check tickets, but most of the time, the bus company is happy to trust that people will pay their fares. Penny decides that this a perfect opportunity to save 15 minutes each way. That's an extra half-an-hour every day! And, by not paying, she could also avoid paying more than \$1,000 a year in bus fare. That is, ahem, a pretty penny! As is often the case when people do something which they know deep down is wrong, she thinks long and hard to rationalize her actions.

The Gemara discusses the case of a squatter on someone else's property. If the property is not generally used or rented out, there is a difference of opinion as to whether the squatter is liable to pay. The squatter may claim, "In what way have I deprived you of anything? You haven't lost anything; what am I paying you for?!" On the other hand, the property owner may counter, "You used my property and derived benefit from it! Pay for that!" Jewish legal authorities agree that the law follows the opinion that there is no obligation to pay. Payment for something taken is a restitution of loss caused to an owner, and in this case no loss has actually been incurred. The squatter has indeed benefitted, but the owner has not lost out. In such cases, where one party benefits without causing loss to another party, there is nothing to pay *back*, as nothing was taken from the owner. And it's the same with taking the bus, Penny reasons. I wouldn't otherwise need to pay since I'd be walking if I weren't on the bus, and I'll be sure only to get on when the bus is empty so I won't be taking up any space which someone else could have taken. I'm not actually depriving the bus company of anything. (Even though Penny's extra weight adds to the bus company's fuel costs, let's assume that that amount is negligible.)

But, as I'm sure you've guessed by now ... it's not quite that simple!

Penny, doubtless blinded by her avaricious tendencies, has overlooked a few crucial things. Even though in some cases, like the one of the squatter above, there is no obligation to pay, that is only *post facto*. There is no debate regarding the

permissibility of squatting on another's property in the first place — it is not allowed. The fact that after the fact there is nothing to charge the squatter, for the technical reason that there is nothing to pay *back*, does not mean that he was within his rights to squat in the first place! So even if we will agree that Penny will not have to pay the bus company, ahem, a penny, she is still forbidden to ride the bus without paying.

Furthermore, Tosefot explains that in a case where it is made absolutely clear by the owner that no one is permitted on his property, there is also no debate. The property is no longer considered in the sub-set of properties which are usually not rented out. The owner has made it clear that he will only countenance use of the property for payment — i.e. it is now a rental property. Everyone agrees that in such a case, the full value of any benefit derived by the squatter must be paid. Similarly then, assuming that the bus company makes it clear somewhere that tickets must be bought or that free-riders will be prosecuted or something to that effect, it is arguable that Penny would have to pay, even *post facto*.

Apart from all this, there is another very pressing issue. One of the more serious prohibitions in Judaism is *chillul Hashem*, "desecration of G-d's name". Whether we like it or not, Jews (especially visibly Jewish Jews, but all Jews) are ambassadors of G-d. We are His people and we are supposed to reflect a high standard of morality and ethics. Even if something is technically permissible (which, please note, it is *not* in Penny's case), a Jew always has to take into account the way he is perceived by those around him. Admittedly, Penny is not the most identifiably Jewish of names, but it is certainly possible that someone will recognize Penny or be able to tell by other means that she is Jewish. And people are often very quick to generalize from one Jew's actions. Just imagine the headline: "Religious Jew Cheats Bus Company".

Unfortunately, as we have seen so many times in our history, there have always been those who will find any excuse to hate us. Of course, not every Jew-hater can be deterred from his parochialism; there are those who are prepared to give us a shot. At least for them, our aim should be to live lives beyond reproach, so that those who know us hold Jews in high esteem. Let's hope that the, ahem, penny finally drops for Ms. Pincher and those like her who try to cut moral corners. If Penny would decide to live her life trying her best to do what is right, she will see that opportunities to make a good name for herself and for her people are, ahem, a "pretty penny."