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PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

Here Today

“...For I have loved him (Avraham) because he commands his children and his household after him that they may keep the way of Hashem, doing charity and justice...” (18:19)

Walking through Ohr Somayach last week, I had a couple of moments of reflection. There’s a major building project which, please G-d, will give us a beautiful new Beit Midrash and classrooms. The whole front of what used to be the staircase leading up to the Beit Midrash from Shimon HaTzadik Street is no longer there and in its place is a vast hole. The door that used to lead to that staircase is securely locked, but locked doors can be unlocked and so that door is also barred by two serious cross beams, but there’s still a small crack under the door that you can peek through and see a vast chasm of nothing where there used to be a place.

That place exists now in the minds of those who remember it. I went to daven in the Conference Room. It’s been a long time since I was in there and as I walked in I looked at the long table and its two ends and remembered two Torah giants who used to sit there, at different times, at its two ends. At the end further from the window, Rav Dov Schwartzman, *zatzal*, used to give shiur. I was in his shiur when he was teaching his ‘favorite’ Masechta – Bava Kama. I found it very difficult. One day, he asked me who my chavrusa was, and I said that I didn’t have a chavrusa. He said to me, “I will be your chavrusa!” From then on, after every shiur he would painstakingly go over one of the points of the shiur. I looked at his place and thought, “He’s not here anymore and only the people who were in his shiur can still see him sitting there.” My eye turned to the other end of the table and I remembered how Rav Moshe Shapira, *zatzal*, would open our eyes and take us soaring into to the heights and beauty of Jewish thought – *l’fi erkeinu* – according to our ability. He is no longer here among us and only those who were in that shiur can still see him sitting there.

Someone once said, “We live our lives as though we were immortal,” but the only certain thing in life is death. I remember Rav Mendel Weinbach, *zatzal*, saying to me once

at a funeral that every time he went to a funeral he knew fewer and fewer people. Now he no longer goes to funerals, and I myself recognize fewer and fewer people at funerals.

However long your life is – it’s still very short. This can fill you with despair or galvanize you into action.

At the beginning of the Torah portion of Lech Lecha, where Avraham makes his entrance into the history of the world, the Torah writes nothing about the reason why Hashem chose Avraham to proclaim His Unity in the world. It doesn’t say that Avraham was a *tzadik*, as it does with regard to Noach. In fact it says nothing about him at all. The Torah just says “*Lech Lecha*.” Hashem’s choice of Avraham seems almost arbitrary. The Maharal says that had the Torah enumerated Avraham’s virtues, it would imply that he was chosen for those virtues, and, were his offspring to veer from his path, then Hashem might renege on his choice of Avraham’s progeny as His agents in the world. Thus the Torah says nothing of Avraham’s virtues, to teach us that G-d’s love of Avraham was absolute and unqualified. His covenant with Avraham and his descendants was eternal and did not depend on future generations emulating him.

However, it seems from this verse in this week’s portion that Hashem had reasons why he loved Avraham: “*Because he commands his children and his household after him that they may keep the way of Hashem, doing charity and justice...*”

My father, of blessing memory, used to say that saying “Don’t do as I do. Do as I tell you” is ineffective parenting. Hashem loved Avraham not because of what he did, but because what he did revealed who he was.

Those of us who remember the great ones of Ohr Somayach who are no longer with us, remember them not so much for what they did but because what they did revealed who they were.

TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Vayera: Nidah 16-22

Two Against One

The Chachamim say, "The minority aspect is as if it does not exist."

We learn on our *daf* about the status of a piece of dough found in a child's hand. It is not known whether the child holding it is *tamei* or *tahor*, ritually pure or not, and the status of the dough depends on the status of the child holding it. The Torah teaches us to apply the appropriate logical principles to determine the status in any case of doubt, such as in our case.

The *Chachamim* rule that the dough is *tamei* since the majority of children touch *shratzim*, which renders them *tamei'im*. Rabbi Meir, however, says that the dough is *tahor*. Why? The *gemara* explains because he combines the factors of *mi'ut* and *chazaka*. A *mi'ut* (minority) of children don't touch *shratzim*, and, also, there is a *chazaka* (last known status) that the dough was *tahor*. Rabbi Meir says that when we combine these two factors we override the lone factor of *rov* (majority who touch), and conclude that the dough's status is *tahor*. The *Chachamim* reason that when there is a *rov*, there is no *mi'ut* to combine to the *chazaka*.

The commentaries ask a question on Rabbi Meir's reason. Why combine the *mi'ut* with a *chazaka* of the dough's *tahor* status instead of combining it with the *chazaka* of the child's *tahor* status? (Rabbi Akiva Eiger)

One suggestion to answer this question is that doing so would lead to a logical contradiction. If we would

combine the *mi'ut* of children who don't touch *shratzim* together with the *tahor chazaka* of children, we would, in effect, nullify the reality and the halacha of the *rov*. We would conclude that in not any case of doubt would the child be *tamei*, which would contradict the fact that a *rov* of children touch *shratzim* and are actually *tamei!* Therefore, we cannot rely on the child's *chazaka*, but rather must rely on the dough's *tahor chazaka* according to Rabbi Meir. (Rabbi Aryeh Leib Steinman)

We would like to take this opportunity to heartily invite the reader to visit us at Ohr Somayach, or attend a local Torah class, in order to better understand these basic Torah principles of *rov* and *chazaka* – and more – and learn the methodology for applying them to our lives.

- *Nidah 18b*

Not Black or White

Rabbi Yanai gave his children very specific instructions regarding his burial prior to his passing from this world. He said, "My sons – do not bury me in either black clothes or in white ones. Not in black because I may be resurrected among the righteous and will look like a mourner among the grooms. And not in white because I may not merit this honor (to be resurrected among the righteous) and will appear like a groom among the mourners."

- *Nidah 20a*

LOVE OF THE LAND

Sir Montefiore and Rachel's Tomb

Although the Torah relates that the Patriarch Yaakov put up a monument to mark the grave of his beloved wife Rachel, the structure that we see in Beit Lechem when visiting this holy site was built in 1841 by Sir Moses Montefiore. The British benefactor received a building permit from the

Turkish sultan and paid the fees for maintaining the site. Before his death at the age of 101 he asked that a small imitation of the dome on Rachel's grave be placed on his grave and that dust from Rachel's tomb be placed on his own grave.

Questions

1. Why did G-d appear to Avraham after the *brit mila*?
2. Why was Avraham sitting at the entrance to his tent?
3. What were the missions of the three angels?
4. Why did Avraham enjoin the guests to wash the dust off their feet?
5. Why did Avraham ask specifically Yishmael, and not someone else, to prepare food for the guests?
6. Why did the angels ask Avraham where Sarah was?
7. When G-d related Sarah's thoughts to Avraham, He did not relate them precisely. Why?
8. What "cry" from Sodom came before G-d?
9. How many angels went to Sodom?
10. Why was Lot sitting at the gate of Sodom?
11. Lot served the angels matzah. Why?
12. Why did Lot delay when he left Sodom?
13. Why were Lot and his family not permitted to look back at Sodom?
14. Lot's wife looked back and became a pillar of salt. Why was she punished in this particular way?
15. In what merit did G-d save Lot?
16. Why did Avraham relocate after the destruction of Sodom?
17. Why did Avimelech give gifts to Avraham?
18. Why was Avraham told to listen to Sarah?
19. Why did G-d listen to the prayer of Yishmael and not to that of Hagar?
20. Who accompanied Avraham and Yitzchak to the *akeidah* (binding)?

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

Answers

1. 18:1 - Avraham was sick, so G-d came to "visit" him.
2. 18:1 - He was looking for guests.
3. 18:2 - To announce Yitzchak's birth, to heal Avraham and to destroy Sodom.
4. 18:4 - He thought they were among those who worship the dust, and he didn't want any object of idolatry in his home.
5. 18:7 - To train him in the performance of mitzvahs.
6. 18:9 - To call attention to Sarah's modesty, so as to endear her to her husband.
7. 18:13 - For the sake of peace.
8. 18:21 - The cry of a girl who was executed for giving food to the poor.
9. 19:1 - Two: one to destroy the city and one to save Lot.
10. 19:1 - He was a judge.
11. 19:3 - It was Passover.
12. 19:16 - He wanted to save his property.
13. 19:17 - As they, too, deserved to be punished, it wasn't fitting for them to witness the destruction of Sodom.
14. 19:26 - She was stingy, not wanting to give the guests salt.
15. 19:29 - Lot had protected Avraham by concealing from the Egyptians the fact that Sarah was his wife.
16. 20:1 - Because travel in the region ceased and Avraham could no longer find guests.
17. 20:14 - So that Avraham would pray for him.
18. 21:12 - Because she was greater in prophecy.
19. 21:17 - Because the prayer of a sick person is more readily accepted than the prayer of others on his behalf.
20. 22:3 - Yishmael and Eliezer.

ASK!

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Name Calling

Jeremy asked:

I have noticed that while Ashkenazim name their children after animals, Sephardim do not. Is this just a coincidence or is there some kind of halachic disagreement between the two groups?

Lynn asked wrote:

Why is it that Sephardim will name their children after living people but Ashkenazim do not?

Dear Jeremy & Lynn,

First, some background about names. Names are labels we use to convey the essence of something. The first place we find the procedure of giving a name is when Adam names the animals, and then names Chava. The difference between this naming of animals and the naming of people is that animal names describe the species but not the individual, whereas people's names describe *only* the individual. The Talmud tells us that the name given to a person can affect his character, and we are therefore careful to give our children names that will affect them positively. The Talmud also explains the verse in Proverbs "The remembrance of a *tzadik* is a blessing, and the *name* of the wicked should rot" to mean that one should not name a child after a wicked person. Another aspect of the significance of names was told to me by Rabbi Moshe Shapiro, of blessed memory, that when a child is named after someone, the child "continues in the footsteps" of his namesake, in order to complete their original task.

Now, please allow me to address your questions. After investigating this subject I agree with your distinction about animal names. Ashkenazim in fact often name their children after animals, while Sephardim do not. One phenomenon that I encountered in my research is that when Rabbi Yosef Karo (a noted Sephardic *Posek*) lists the

spelling of names for the purpose of writing a *Get*, none of the names are "animal names," yet when the *Rema* (a noted Ashkenazic *Posek*) lists names for the same purpose he includes many names of animals. I asked Rabbi Chaim Pinchas Scheinberg, *zatzal*, "Why would one group choose names of animals and another would not?" He told me that really neither group is naming their offspring for animals since we are careful about not "contaminating" our children with the *tumah* (impure spiritual effect) of non-kosher animals. So why do Ashkenazim seemingly name children after animals? The answer is that they are not naming them after the animals *per se*, but are recalling the qualities of the great people of early generations who exemplified those positive animal traits. For example, when someone is named *Aryeh* (Leo, or Leonard), the trait of Yehuda is being evoked: lion-like, royal and "king of the beasts." With the name of *Zev* (Wolf) we are recalling Binyamin, whose character was wolf-like – "a mighty and fearless warrior." The animals are mere *symbols* of very human qualities. "Yehuda ben Teima said: Be as fearless as a leopard, as light as an eagle, as fast as a deer and as powerful as a lion – to do the will of your Father in Heaven."

The reason Sephardic Jews name children after a living relative is in order to honor the one after whom the baby is named. Ashkenazim do not name their children after living relatives because, although it would be a bestowal of great honor, it would be considered an *ayin hara* ("evil-eye") for the living relative – meaning that naming the child after someone might "bring on" that person's early demise. I also asked Rav Scheinberg if it would make a difference if the relative said that they are not concerned about the *ayin hara*. He replied that even if they say they are not concerned, we still shouldn't do it, because our assumption is that deep down they probably really care.

YIDDLE RIDDLE

Since we are on the topic of names I have this riddle for you:

The names of two sets of grandfathers/grandsons are mentioned in the weekday *Shemoneh Esrei*.

Who are they? *Answer next week*

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

Synonyms in the Hebrew Language
by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

Who Are You?

When three angels came to visit Avraham's tent, they asked him, "Where (*ayeh*) is your wife Sarah?" (Gen. 18:9). Similarly, when Adam ate from the Tree of Knowledge and through his newly-acquired knowledge became embarrassed of his nakedness, he hid himself from G-d. In response, G-d rhetorically asked Adam, "Where are you (*ayeka*)?" (Gen. 3:9). In this case, the word used is *ayeka* – a cognate of *ayeh*. A third cognate is used when G-d chided Kayin for killing his brother with another cognate of this root, "Where (*ey*) is your brother Hevel?" (Gen. 4:9). A second word for "where" is *an* (I Sam. 10:14, Iyov 8:2) – and its more common derivatives *anah* in Biblical Hebrew and *le'an* in Rabbinic Hebrew. However, the most common word for "where" is *eifoh*. In total there are three Hebrew words that mean "where": *ey/ayeh*, *anah*, and *eifoh*. In this essay we will examine the roots of these words and use that information to clarify the differences between their exact meanings.

Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim of Breslau (1740-1814) explains that the root of the words *ey/ayeh* is ALEPH-YUD, which refers to a query about a specific location. Another word derived from this root is *ee* ("island"). An island is aptly called an *ee* (literally "Where is it?") because it is surrounded by water on all sides and there are no landmarks that one can use to find it. Since its exact location is hard to determine, the word for an island "asks" where it is.

Rabbi Shlomo Aharon Wertheimer (1866-1935) notes that besides meaning "where," the word *ey* sometimes serves to question "if" or "how" something actually exists, and can also mean "which."

Rashi (to Iyov 38:4) explains that *eifoh* is a portmanteau of the words *ey* ("which") and *poh* ("here"). In other words, when someone asks "Where?" he is essentially asking "Which here?" The same is true of the Aramaic words for "where" (*heicha/heichan*), which are derived from the Aramaic words "which" (*hei*) and "here" (*ka/kan*). This is somewhat reminiscent of the English word *where* which may be understood to be comprised of the letter *w*,

standing for "which," and the word "here." Nonetheless, linguists trace the etymology of the English *where* differently.

Rashi (to Gen. 27:33, 43:11), as elucidated by Rabbi Eliyahu Mizrachi (1455-1525), explains that in addition to meaning "where," the word *eifoh* can also mean "now" (Isa. 22:1) or "what/who" (Judges 8:18). Radak in *Sefer HaShorashim* evidently follows this approach as well. Others point out that in some cases *eifo* is an interjection that serves as a general expression of confusion and astonishment and does not necessarily mean "where." [For a full discussion of whether the word *eifoh* (which ends with the letter HEY) and the word *eifo* (which ends with the letters VAV-ALEPH) mean the same thing or are simply homonyms, see Rabbi Uriel Frank's article in *Kovetz HaMa'yan* (Tevet 5770).]

Rabbi Wertheimer writes that *ayeh* is a general term for "Where?" used when one has no inkling of a given thing's location, whereas *eifo* indicates that one has a general sense of where the thing is but is asking where it is exactly. Rabbi Pappenheim similarly understands that *eifoh* denotes a vaguer question about location than *ey/ayeh* does.

Along these lines, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch's great uncle, Rabbi Yehuda Leib Shapira-Frankfurter (1743-1826), writes in *HaRechasim LeVikah* that while *eifoh* is used for run-of-the-mill "where is" questions, *ayeh* is used when someone searching for something is surprised that it is not in its expected place. In other words, *eifoh* means "Where is...?" and *ayeh* means "Why is... not here?" In the case of Adam hiding after his sin, G-d used a derivative of *ayeh* to rhetorically ask why Adam was not in his regular place (with the obvious answer being that he was hiding because of his sin).

Rabbi Yaakov Tzvi Mecklenburg (1785-1865) expands on this approach and uses it to explain why the angels asked Avraham, "Where is (*ayeh*) your wife Sarah?" One would have expected that Sarah would be busy setting the table

for the banquet in the guests' honor, especially because Avraham was post-surgery and quite weak. When the angels noticed her absence they asked, "Ayeḥ your wife Sarah," as if to inquire "Why is she not here where we expected her to be?" The Talmud (*Bava Metzia* 87a) explains that this question was also rhetorical – the angels knew Sarah's whereabouts but still asked in order to endear her to her husband by highlighting her superlative modesty.

Rabbi Pappenheim explains that in contrast to *ayeḥ* and *eifoḥ* that focus on something's *current location*, the root ALEPH-NUN – which is the source of the words *an/anaḥ/le'an* – questions something's *destination*. In other words, words derived from this root ask "to where?" The word *aniaḥ* ("boat") is derived from this root because a boat does not travel in a straight line to its destination, but rather moves about however the waters push it. Since a boat's final destination is not readily apparent by observing its route, one might ask about such a seafaring

vessel, "Where is it going?" – and therefore the very word for boat is derived from the question itself.

We have discussed in our writings the interrelationship between time and space in the Hebrew Language. With that paradigm in mind, it is quite understandable that the word *anaḥ* is borrowed from a spatial context to a temporal context, to refer to a specific target time ("Until when...?" in Num. 14:11).

We have also mentioned before that when the letter MEM is added to a root, it tends to flip the root's meaning. Thus, a MEM prefixed to this root yields *m'ayin*, meaning "from where" (Gen. 29:4, Num. 11:13, Ps 121:1) a question about something's place of origin as opposed to its destination.

For questions, comments, or to propose ideas for a future article, please contact the author at rcklein@ohr.edu

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Three days after performing *brit mila* on himself, Avraham is visited by G-d. When three angels appear in human form, Avraham rushes to show them hospitality by bringing them into his tent, despite this being the most painful time after the operation. Sarah laughs when she hears from them that she will bear a son next year. G-d reveals to Avraham that He will destroy Sodom, and Avraham pleads for Sodom to be spared. G-d agrees that if there are fifty righteous people in Sodom He will not destroy it. Avraham "bargains" G-d down to ten righteous people. However, not even ten can be found. Lot, his wife and two daughters are rescued just before sulfur and fire rain down on Sodom and her sister cities. Lot's wife looks back and is turned into a pillar of salt. Lot's daughters fear that as a result of the destruction there will be no husbands for them. They decide to get their father drunk and through him to perpetuate the human race. From the elder daughter, Moav is born, and from the younger, Ammon. Avraham moves to Gerar where Avimelech abducts Sarah. After G-d appears to Avimelech in a dream, he releases Sarah and appeases Avraham.

As promised, a son, Yitzchak, is born to Sarah and Avraham. On the eighth day after the birth, Avraham circumcises him as commanded. Avraham makes a feast the day Yitzchak is weaned. Sarah tells Avraham to banish Hagar and Hagar's son Yishmael because she sees in him signs of degeneracy. Avraham is distressed at the prospect of banishing his son, but G-d tells him to listen to whatever Sarah tells him to do. After nearly dying of thirst in the desert, Yishmael is rescued by an angel and G-d promises that he will be the progenitor of a mighty nation. Avimelech enters into an alliance with Avraham when he sees that G-d is with him.

In a tenth and final test, G-d instructs Avraham to take Yitzchak, who is now 37, and to offer him as a sacrifice. Avraham does this, in spite of ostensibly aborting Jewish nationhood and contradicting his life-long preaching against human sacrifice. At the last moment, G-d sends an angel to stop Avraham. Because of Avraham's unquestioning obedience, G-d promises him that even if the Jewish People sin, they will never be completely dominated by their foes. The Torah portion concludes with the genealogy and birth of Rivka.

LETTER AND SPIRIT

Insights based on the writings of Rav S.R. Hirsch
by Rabbi Yosef Hershman

Inpouring of Prayer

The first instance of the word for prayer appears in this week's Torah portion, when G-d appears to Avimelech and warns him to return Sarah to Avraham untouched, and if he does so, Avraham will pray, *yitpallel*, for him.

The root of this Hebrew word is *pallel*, which means to judge. The form of the word is reflexive and literally means "to judge oneself." But judging oneself and praying hardly seem to have any similarity to each other! Rav Hirsch offers an explanation that challenges the way most people think about prayer.

The root *pallel* is related to the root *ballel*, which means to admix – the introduction of a foreign element into a substance to create a new substance. According to the Jewish conception, this is the task of the judge. Ideally he introduces justice, the Divine truth of things, into the disputed matter to create a unity where lies, discord and conflict resided.

When one prays – *mitpallel* – he introduces G-d's truth into his being. The common conception of prayer is an outpouring from within – an expression of what the heart already feels. There is surely a place for this in Judaism, but it is expressed in other, less commonly used, terms for 'prayer' – *techinah* (supplication), *siach* (speech). *Tefillah*, however, means infusing the heart with truths that come from *outside* oneself.

Tefillah is referred to as "the work that is in the heart" (and not "the work that comes from the heart"). It is the work of refining one's inner self, to elevate one's mind and heart to recognition of truth and desire for serving G-d.

This explanation sheds a bright new light on institutionalized prayer. If prayer were meant as an *outpouring* of our emotions, it would make no sense to have fixed times and fixed texts for our prayers. How could we assume that all members of the community would be imbued with the same thoughts and emotions at predetermined times – three times a day, no less? Our deep inner world which already exists could not find expression in the set phrases formulated by others. Those deep inner experiences find their way of self-expression – in supplication (*techinah*) or speaking to G-d (*siach*), and sometimes more profoundly in tears or in the quiet and protective silence of the soul.

Instead, *tefillah* is in *inpouring to the heart*. The purpose of our fixed prayers is to awaken the heart and to revive within it those timeless values that still require reinforcement and special care. One can truly say that the less we feel in the mood for prayer, the more we need it. The soul's connection to G-d is not the basis of prayer, but its goal.

● Source: Commentary, Genesis 20:7

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