

# OHRNET

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## PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

### HE'S MY BROTHER?

“We came to your brother, to Eisav.” (32:07)

**Y**ou've got to hand it to the Yetzer Hara, the voice inside one's heading that tries to convince that it's okay to do something wrong. It's amazing how it manages to fool us time and time again. The Yetzer Hara says, “Look over there! Look over there at that new thing! It's really okay!”

Do you really think that you're going to see something you haven't seen before? And yet the Yetzer Hara keeps dishing up the same old stuff, time and time again. How do we escape its clutches?

“We came to your brother, to Eisav.” Rashi comments, “We came to the person who you regard as your brother, but he behaves toward you like a wicked Eisav: he still harbors hatred.”

The Yetzer Hara wants us to think of him as ‘our brother’ but he wants to make all that is holy, repugnant, and all that is repugnant, holy.

The most exciting thing in this world is kedusha, holiness. Have you ever prayed really well even once in your life? Do you remember what that feels like? Someone who prays well even once is a totally different person even if he never prays like that ever again. We often think that kedushah/holiness is reserved for someone who is closeted away from society and is not for the ordinary person. And certainly it is not for me

Yet, this is a mistake. Each and every one of us, on whatever level we are, can become a different person. It's not an “all or nothing”. At any given moment, in every situation, we can become higher beings. Even as we struggle with our most difficult temptations, with our own personal Eisavs, we are never completely lost. We can always become even just a little more sanctified and move a little bit closer to Hashem.

In spirituality, there's no such thing as a small step. It may be a small step for a man, but it's a giant leap in Heaven.

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# PARSHA OVERVIEW

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**R**eturning home, Yaakov sends angelic messengers to appease his brother Esav. The messengers return, telling Yaakov that Esav is approaching with an army of 400. Yaakov takes the strategic precautions of dividing the camps, praying for assistance, and sending tribute to mollify Esav.

That night, Yaakov is left alone and wrestles with the angel of Esav. Yaakov emerges victorious but is left with an injured sinew in his thigh (which is the reason that 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 Esav meet and are reconciled, but Yaakov, still fearful of his brother, rejects Esav's offer that they should dwell together.

Shechem, a Caananite 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 family intermarry and enjoy the fruits of Caananite 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 milah*. 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 Torah portion concludes by listing Esav's descendants.

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# Q & A

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## Questions

1. What sort of messengers did Yaakov send to Esav?
2. Why was Yaakov both "afraid" and "distressed"?
3. In what three ways did Yaakov prepare for his encounter with Esav?
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 Esav embrace Yaakov?
9. Why did Yosef stand between Esav and Rachel?
10. Give an exact translation of the word nisa in verse 33:12.
11. What happened to the 400 men who accompanied Esav?
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. Esav 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 Esav's decision to leave the land of Canaan?

## Answers

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 Esav 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 Esav 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 triplet 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 - Esav 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 Esav 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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# WHAT'S IN A WORD?

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by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

## Enter the Gate

The Hebrew word *shaar* (“gate”) and its various inflections appear approximately 375 times throughout the Bible, making it one of the most common words in that corpus. Most commonly, it refers to a breach in the wall that surrounds a city, citadel, or Temple, which allowed people to enter. In some cases, the word *shaar* is used more broadly to refer to any sort of settlement where people lived. This essay focuses on two Aramaic words that are typically used as translations of the Hebrew *shaar* (*t’ra* and *bava*), with a special emphasis on alternate meanings of the word *shaar* and its cognates.

The Hebrew word *shaar* clearly derives from the trilateral root SHIN-AYIN-REISH. Another meaning of this trilateral root appears twice in the Bible: “And Isaac sowed in that land, and he found in that year one-hundred quantities (*meah shearim*)” (Gen. 26:12) and “As you have evaluated (*shaar*) in your soul, such it is in reality” (Prov. 23:7). In these two cases, *shaar* refers to the act of estimating or assessing the reality, or, more specifically, gauging the expected amount of something in a quantitative sense.

The word *shaar* appears many times in the Mishna. Most commonly it refers to a “gate,” especially one in the Holy Temple or a city gate where judges sat (Brachot 9:5, Maaserot 2:2, 3:6, Orlah 2:12, Eruvin 8:4, Shekalim 5:1, 6:3, Yoma 1:3, Sukkah 4:9, 5:4-5, Taanit 2:5, 4:1, Sotah 1:5, 8:3, Bava Batra 1:5, Sanhedrin 2:1, Eduyot 1:3, Tamid 1:1, 3:7-8, 5:6, Middot 1:1, 1:3-5, 1:7, 2:3, 2:6, 4:2). Less commonly, *shaar* refers to a “price” or “exchange rate” (Maaser Sheini 4:1-2, Taanit 2:9, Bava Metzia 4:12, 5:1, 5:7-8) or, when in verb form, to the act of “evaluating” or “assessing” (Terumot 4:6, Shekalim 4:9, Chullin 7:4, Keilim 7:3, 7:6, 17:5). Rabbi Shmuel Dovid Luzzatto (1800-1865), also known as Shadal, bridges the gaps between these disparate meanings by explaining that the merchants who

gathered at the city “gate” would spend their time “appraising” and “evaluating” merchandise and other commodities, so it was they who would determine the “price” for whatever was being sold and they who would set the relevant “exchange rates.”

The word *shiur* appears once in the Mishna (Kritut 4:1) and refers to a specific “amount,” or unit of “measurement.” This usage mirrors the mentioned-previously Biblical meaning of *shaar* in the sense of specific quantities. In the vernacular, a *shiur* refers to a “lecture” or “lesson” given on a specific topic, perhaps because the lecturer or teacher must measure his or her words, or otherwise make sure to limit the discussion to the specific topic.

Let’s move on to the Aramaic terms at the heart of our discussion. The Aramaic term *t’ra* first appears in the Bible (Daniel 2:49, 3:26, Ezra 7:24), and it is the typical word in the Targumim for rendering the Hebrew *shaar* into Aramaic. It is tempting to say that *tera* is simply an Aramaicized form of *shaar*, with the initial Hebrew SHIN morphing into an Aramaic TAV (as often happens) and the subsequent letters AYIN and REISH switching their positions in the root. However, there is a more convincing etymology: The Targumim use *t’ra* not just to translate the Hebrew *shaar*, but to translate other Hebrew words related to “demolition,” “destruction,” “rupturing,” and “breaching” (see Targum to Lev. 14:45, Deut. 12:3, II Shmuel 6:8, and Yechezkel 22:30). Based on this, Rabbi Eliyahu HaBachur (1469-1549) in *Meturgaman* suggests that *tera* in the sense of “gate” is related to this meaning of the Aramaic word, seemingly because a gate is essentially nothing more than a break/breach in the wall. In fact, the Targumim (to Gen. 18:1, Ex. 33:9, Judges 4:20) use the word *t’ra* as a translation for the Hebrew word *petach* (“opening”), which also means just that.

\*To read the rest of this article, visit us online at: [http://ohr.edu/this\\_week/whats\\_in\\_a\\_word/](http://ohr.edu/this_week/whats_in_a_word/)

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# COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

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by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

## The Amidah (Part 28) – The Final Paragraph: Personally Speaking

“Prayer is not a miracle. It is a tool, man’s paintbrush in the art of life. Prayer is man’s weapon to defend himself in the struggle of life. It is a reality. A fact of life”

(Rabbi Avraham Chaim Feuer)

“May Hashem, guard my tongue from evil and my lips from speaking deceitfully. To those who curse me, let my soul be silent, and let my soul be like dust to everyone. Open my heart to Your Torah, then my soul will pursue Your commandments. As for all those who design evil against me, speedily nullify their counsel and disrupt their design. Act for Your Name’s sake, act for Your right hand’s sake, act for Your sanctity’s sake, act for Your Torah’s sake. That Your beloved may be given rest, let Your right hand save and respond to me. May the expressions of my mouth and the thoughts of my heart find favor before You, Hashem, my Rock and my Redeemer. He Who makes peace in His heights, may He make peace upon us and upon all Israel. And let us say: Amen.”

There is an intriguing Midrash (Vayikra Rabbah 33:1) that relates how Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel once sent his devoted servant, Tavi, to the marketplace to buy something delicious to eat. Tavi came back with a tongue. Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel then sent Tavi back to buy something bad to eat, and this time he came back with a...tongue! When Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel demanded an explanation for how it was possible that exactly the same food can be both good and bad, Tavi, in his wisdom, answered: “When one uses one’s tongue properly, it is the best of things, but, when used improperly, there is nothing worse!”

Tavi’s insight explains why the final paragraph of the Amidah begins with a plea that Hashem will “guard my tongue from evil and my lips from speaking deceitfully.” The sixteenth century Kabbalist, Rabbi Moshe ben Machir from Tzefat, in his seminal work on prayer called Seder Hayom, explains that since we have just used concluded our recitation of the Amidah, we now offer a prayer for Divine assistance to help us use our mouths for the right purpose. The essence of the prayer is that our hearts and our mouths should be united together in serving Hashem to the fullest. However, because it is more than possible that we did not pray with the correct intent and concentration, we turn to Hashem, declaring that any lack of focus was unintentional and was not a rebellion against Him. Interestingly, we begin the Amidah with a request for Hashem to assist us in reciting the Amidah with the correct intent, and we conclude our recitation with a similar entreaty. Why is that? Because it is difficult to remain focused on our relationship with Hashem both when we are involved in both prayer and when we are not.

The Jerusalem Talmud (Brachot chapter 8, Halacha1) describes how Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai used to tell everyone that if it would have been up to him to “design” human beings, he would have created them with two mouths instead of one. One mouth would be dedicated to speaking about holy and spiritual matters, while the other mouth would be used exclusively for mundane issues. However, after giving this idea more thought, Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai conceded that this was not a good idea. After all, he said, so many people abuse the one mouth that they have by speaking about all kinds of forbidden subjects and/or speaking in an entirely inappropriate way – imagine how much worse it would be if they could speak with two mouths! Rabbi Simcha Bunim Alter (1898-1992), the sixth Rebbe of Gur, known as the Lev Simcha after the works that he authored, used to say that prayers recited by someone with an unclean mouth will not be heard. Therefore, we entreat Hashem that He accept the Amidah we have just concluded as if it was said with the purest and loftiest intentions.

This is why, writes Rabbi Shimon Schwab, the final paragraph of the Amidah is not a prayer asking that we be able to perform a specific mitzvah. Rather, it is reemphasizing the insidious nature of Lashon Hara (evil speech) and the immense battle that we all have in trying to fight against it.

Rabbi Elazar Azikri (1533-1600) lived in Tzfat and is considered to be one of the most prominent Kabbalists of his generation. He composed the hauntingly beautiful piyut (liturgical poem) Yedid Nefesh, which is sung around the world even nowadays in many Shuls and homes on Shabbat. His most famous work is a book titled Sefer Charedim, which is a Kabbalistic exploration of the 613 mitzvahs according to the limbs of the body and according to time. In chapter 67, Rabbi Azkiri explains that the concluding paragraph of the Amidah is written in the present tense because it is a continuous plea to Hashem to save us from the Yetzer Hara (Evil Inclination).

To be continued...

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## PEREK SHIRA: The Song of Existence

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by Rabbi Shmuel Kraines

### The Song of the Goose

**T**he domesticated goose says: Thank Hashem, call in His name, inform the nations of His deeds. Sing to Him, make music for Him, speak of all of His wonders. (Tehillim 105:1-2)

The goose is the most vocal amongst kosher birds and it symbolizes Kosher and pure vocalization: publicizing of Hashem's praise. It honks raucously, even for no apparent reason, calling to its human neighbors that they too should not be silent.

In particular, the goose symbolizes Torah wisdom. One who sees a goose in his dream can anticipate that he will merit wisdom. This is because the study of Torah requires saying the words of Torah aloud. The goose is especially symbolic of the role of the Rosh Yeshiva, who raises his voice so the public can hear it. It says "Sing to Him" since the Torah is called a song.

All living beings sing of their Creator, yet so many people do not know Him. We should fill our mouths with Hashem's praise and do our utmost to make Him known, especially in public gatherings of Torah and prayer. Fittingly, the song of the goose is the opening phrase of our morning praises, Pesukei D'Zimrah.

Sources: Berachos 57a; Zimras Ha'aretz; Maharsha to Sotah 48a; Perek B'Shir

*\*In loving memory of Harav Zeev Shlomo ben Zecharia Leib*

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# TALMUD TIPS

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by Rabbi Moshe Newman

## Nedarim 30-36

### A World-Sustaining Mitzvah

“The mitzvah of mila (circumcision) is so important that without it the heavens and earth would not be sustained.”

**R**ebbi teaches the essential connection between this mitzvah and the world’s existence from a verse in Yirmiyahu (33:25), “If not for My covenant day and night, I would not sustain the heavens and the earth.” Rebbi maintains that the “covenant” refers to the covenant of brit mila. The gemara also cites Rabbi Elazar who disagrees with Rebbi on the meaning of the word “covenant” in the verse, and maintains that it refers to the covenant of Torah. He states that the world would not exist without Torah.

The Maharsha asks why the two “sustainers of the world” mentioned on our daf are not part of the list of the “three sustainers of the world” taught by Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel in Pirkei Avot (1:18): Judgment, truth and peace. He explains, based on the Tur, that there are two types of “sustainers of the world.” There are those that are vital for society to function in a positive manner, and there are those which are indispensable for the existence of the universe and all of Creation. Pirkei Avot refers to the former, whereas the Sages in our sugya refer to the latter.

Nedarim 32a

### Another World-Sustaining Mitzvah

Rabbi Elazar said, “The mitzvah of Torah is so important that without it the heavens and earth would not be sustained.”

His source, as mentioned above, is a verse in Yirmiyahu (33:25), “If not for My covenant day and night, I would not sustain the heavens and the earth.” Rabbi Elazar explains the verse to teach that without the learning of Torah day and night, Hashem would see no justification for the Creation to continue to exist.

I’d like to share an anecdote with you. There is a custom for publishers to decorate the front page of every volume of the Talmud with beautiful graphics that surround the name of the tractate. This is done in order to “beautify the mitzvah.” However, in all volumes published by a certain publisher, my friends and I noticed drawings of the sun, moon and stars as part of these graphics, accompanied by the above verse from Yirmiyahu regarding the essential connection between Torah and Creation.

We asked a local halachic authority about these drawings of the celestial bodies, and were told it was problematic. After we contacted the publisher, these objects were deleted from future editions.

Nedarim 32a

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# LETTER AND SPIRIT

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

## A Historic Struggle

**A**fter twenty years in Lavan's home, with his family completely grown, Yaakov sets off to resettle in the Land of his fathers. He prepares for a face-off with his brother Esav, who has been plotting to kill him for some 35 years.

This encounter is even more consequential than it seems. Just as Yaakov and Esav are at odds with each other here, so they stand opposed to each other for the duration of history. Yaakov has spent the last twenty years raising his children; he is the hard working family man. Esav has spent this time becoming a political force, the leader of an army, a chief of his tribe. Yaakov represents family life, serving others, and seeing to their welfare and happiness. Esav represents the glitter of political power and might. The struggle between them and the outcome of this struggle foreshadow a raging battle that has haunted humanity for thousands of years. In the words of Rav Hirsch:

*"Is it sufficient just to be a human being, and are political power and social creativity of no significance unless they lead to the loftiest of all human aspirations, or, on the contrary, does everything that is human in man, in home, and in family life exist only to serve the purposes of political triumph?"*

The night before this fateful encounter, Yaakov experiences an even more fateful encounter, with his brother's angel. This adversary wrestles with Yaakov the entire night, as Yaakov attempts to protect himself. The angel realizes that he cannot prevail against Yaakov, and he is able only to injure his leg. The angel then asks to be released, for the dawn is breaking, but Yaakov refuses let him go until the angel blesses him: "You will no longer be called Yaakov, but Yisrael, for you have become the commanding power before G-d and men, since you have prevailed."

As long as the night prevails, Yaakov's adversary appears to have the upper hand, but as soon as day breaks it is Yaakov who sets the terms to end the struggle. All he asks is that instead of hatred and hostility, the adversary – other nations – extend their blessing and support. During the long night of exile that enemy seeks to destroy Yaakov, quashing his identity and extinguishing his values. While the enemy, reincarnated in every generation, attacked throughout our long bitter history, *he saw that he could not prevail* – nothing would extinguish us or force our complete assimilation. Yaakov sought not to destroy the other; he wanted only not to fall, and in that he succeeded. The goal of history – realized at daybreak – is the recognition that happiness and progress depend on those principles which Yaakov has lived by throughout the ages. No longer shall he be known as "Yaakov" – he who holds on to the heel – but rather "Yisrael" – he who shows the world that G-d towers above all.

This final blessing, we are told, will happen "there." There, where Yaakov stood, poised to return to the Land of his future, set on a course to build the Jewish People. It is "there" that the angel blessed Yaakov, by changing his name. And it is "there" – on the soil of our Promised Land and en route to our promised future – that we stand today, waiting for dawn to break, for Yaakov, the downtrodden, to be recognized as Yisrael, who has taught the world the way of G-d.

- Sources: Bereishet 32:8; 32:27-32; Collected Writings, Vol. VIII, "The Jewish Wayfarer's Sustenance," p. 229