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THE OHR SOMAYACH TORAH MAGAZINE ON THE INTERNET

לעזר ר' דוד בן שמואל רפאל ז"ל ח' כסלו תשנ"ה
ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

PARSHA INSIGHTS

TEARS

“And Lavan had two daughters; the name of the elder was Leah and the name of the younger, Rachel. And Leah’s eyes were weak.” (29:16,17)

It’s three o’clock in the morning. The baby starts to cry. You know that if you leave her, she’ll probably go back to sleep in a couple of minutes. After all, babies cry a good portion of their lives. You could turn over and go back to sleep. The baby will stop crying in a couple of minutes.

A baby stops crying because subconsciously **she realizes that tears don’t work.**

When your baby starts to cry and you pick her up, you are teaching her an invaluable lesson for life.

Our Sages teach us that Leah’s eyes were weak from constant weeping at the thought that, as Lavan’s elder daughter, she would be married to Yitzchak’s elder son, the evil Esav.

However, in spite of Yaakov loving Rachel and working seven years for her, and in spite of all the precautions Yaakov took against Lavan tricking him into marrying Leah, Leah’s tearful prayers succeeded not only in reversing the decree that she marry Esav, but even that she be Yaakov’s first wife.

When all the gates of Heaven are closed, the gate of tears is forever open.

You can teach that to a baby even at three o’clock in the morning.

DIAMONDS THAT ARE FOREVER

“And Yaakov kissed Rachel and lifted his voice and wept.” (29:11)

Have you noticed that when you

buy presents for young children, after a few minutes they usually seem more interested in the box that the present came in, than the present itself.

When it comes to mitzvos, we are like children being given a present which is valuable beyond our wildest dreams. We have no idea what a mitzva is. We have no idea of its value. If you give a child a priceless Cartier necklace, he will pick it up and play with it. It’s bright and shiny. But after a few minutes he will probably get bored with the necklace and start to play with the red velvet-lined box

“When all the gates of Heaven are closed, the gate of tears is forever open.”

that the necklace came in.

“And Yaakov kissed Rachel and lifted up his voice and wept.” Yaakov wept because he came to Rachel penniless. While on the way to Charan, Esav’s son Elifaz, acting on his father’s command, pursued Yaakov and was about to kill him. Elifaz, however, had been raised by his grandfather, Yitzchak, and he could not bring himself to kill his uncle Yaakov.

Elifaz asked Yaakov what he should do: How could he let Yaakov live and yet fulfill the mitzva of honoring his father’s command?

Yaakov told him to take all his money. For the Sages say that someone who is poor is considered as though he were dead. In this way Elifaz would be able to fulfill the letter of his father’s command and fulfill the mitzva of honoring his father.

This is a very strange dialogue: If a person’s father tells him to eat a Bacon/Cheeseburger, would he be penalized for failing to honor his parents by refusing to eat the burger? The limit of honoring one’s parents is where they instruct you to violate the will of G-d. So why did Elifaz seek Yaakov’s advice on how to honor his father? Clearly, there was no mitzva incumbent upon Elifaz.

We can see from this how great was the love of those first generations for mitzvos. Even though Elifaz had no obligation to fulfill his father’s command whatsoever, Yaakov spent all his money and impoverished himself so that Elifaz could fulfill the mitzva of “Kibud Av” (honoring one’s father).

A tzadik realizes that the smallest gift that Hashem gives us is as important as the largest: Neither may be wasted or neglected. Even though Esav wanted Yaakov’s death and not his impoverishment, nevertheless Yaakov Avinu gave up his entire fortune so that a mitzva could be fulfilled.

The Avos knew the value of “the diamonds in the box.” They never would think twice about giving away the box — spending all their money — because the box is only to hold the diamonds. They knew that this world

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Feeling from Esav, Yaakov leaves Be'er Sheva and sets out towards Charan, the home of his mother's family. After a fourteen year stopover in the Yeshiva of Shem and Ever, he resumes his journey and comes to Mount Moriah, the place where his father Yitzchak was brought as an offering, and the future site of the *Beis Hamikdash*. He lays down to sleep and has a prophetic dream of angels ascending and descending on a ladder between heaven and earth. Hashem promises him the Land of Israel, that he will found a great nation and he will be guarded by Divine protection everywhere. Yaakov awakes and vows to build an altar there and tithe all that he will receive. Then he travels to Charan and meets his cousin Rachel at the well. He arranges with her father, Lavan, to work seven years for her hand in marriage, but Lavan deceives Yaakov and substitutes Rachel's elder sister, Leah. Yaakov then commits himself to work another seven years in order to also marry Rachel. Leah bears him four sons —

Reuven, Shimon, Levi and Yehuda — the first Tribes of Israel. Rachel is jealous that she cannot conceive, and gives her handmaiden Bilhah to Yaakov. Bilhah bears Dan and Naftali. Leah also gives Yaakov her handmaiden Zilpah, who bears Gad and Asher. Leah now gives birth to Yissachar, Zevulun, and a daughter, Dina. Hashem finally blesses Rachel with a son, Yosef. Yaakov decides to leave Lavan, but Lavan, aware of how much wealth Yaakov has made for him, is reluctant to let him go, and concludes a contract of employment with him. Lavan tries again to swindle Yaakov, but is unsuccessful, and Yaakov becomes extremely wealthy. Twenty years later, Yaakov, aware that Lavan has become resentful of his wealth, takes advantage of his father-in-law's temporary absence, and flees with his family. Lavan pursues them but is warned by Hashem not to harm them. A covenant is agreed upon by Yaakov and Lavan, and Lavan returns home. Yaakov continues on his way to face his brother Esav.

HAFTORAH: HOSHEA 12:13 - 14:10

"You corrupted yourself, Israel, for your help is only through Me." (13:9)

A great king once asked one of the sages of Israel why it was that, at the time of the destruction of the *Beis Hamikdash*, so many thousands of Jews were slain.

The sage replied that the Jewish People had always put their trust in Hashem saving them, and He had always protected them. They had never concerned themselves with the strategies of war, rather they had always poured out their hearts in prayer and offerings.

Therefore, when the Jewish People sinned, and consequently lost Hashem's protection, they were left bereft of any

defense at all. They fell before their enemies like the standing crop before the scythe, like lambs abandoned by their shepherd, torn by the teeth of wolves.

The Jewish People are the lamb amongst the 70 wolves. The lamb is not protected by F-16s or the military might of any world-power — however broad its shoulders may be. The Jewish People have only one Friend. But He is the only Friend we need.

HEALTH FOOD

"For the ways of Hashem are just — the righteous will walk in them, but the evil will stumble on them." (14:10)

There was once an outstandingly generous man who stinted neither money nor effort in welcoming guests into his home. Once, he made a large banquet for anyone who wanted to come, and laid on the most sumptuous and expensive foods.

One of the guests had a fragile constitution. Nevertheless, he set about gorging himself on all the delights. Not surprisingly, the result was that he became seriously ill.

The man was furious with the host, accusing him of ruining people's health.

The host replied "Please ask the other guests if the food has upset their health. Unfortunately, your health is frail. That's why the food upset you. This banquet was provided only for people who are healthy."

The spiritually blind say that Hashem hates people, weighing them down with the burdensome yoke of mitzvos; that He creates only obstacles to a life of freedom.

What a colossal mistake! The *tzadik* not only sees himself as enriched and ennobled by keeping mitzvos, but **he derives his very sustenance and life-force from them.**

That is what the prophet is telling us here: "The ways of Hashem are just" which is born out by the fact that "the righteous will walk in them" — the righteous will thrive on them. But if you look upon them as a heavy burden then "the evil will stumble on them" — the spiritually blind see mitzvos as nothing more than a killjoy.

The radiance of the *tzadikim*, however, testifies to the quality of the "diet."

• *Cochav M'Yaakov in Mayana shel Torah*

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LOVE OF THE LAND

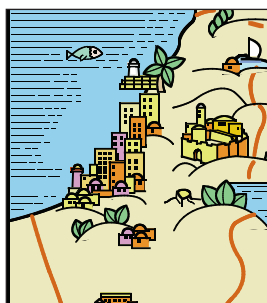
Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael

LAND OF THE DEER

A heathen skeptic once scoffed at the claim made by the Sages that millions of Jews once lived in a part of Eretz Yisrael called *Har Hamelech*; he accused them of being liars because the area could not possibly hold so many people.

To this Rabbi Chanina responded with the description given by the Prophet Yirmiyahu of Eretz Yisrael as

"the land of the deer." Why is it compared to a deer?



When the skin of a deer is removed from its carcass it is impossible to once again have it envelop the deer's flesh, because it has contracted. In similar fashion, when Jews live in Eretz Yisrael the Land expands to absorb them but when they do not live in the Land it contracts.

• *Gittin 57a*

PARSHA Q&A ?

1. When Yaakov traveled to Charan, the Torah stresses that he departed from Be'er Sheva. Why?
2. On the night of his dream, Yaakov did something he hadn't done in 14 years. What?
3. In his dream, Yaakov saw angels going up and down. What were the missions of these angels?
4. Hashem compressed the entire land of Israel underneath the sleeping Yaakov. What did this symbolize?
5. Why did Yaakov rebuke the shepherds?
6. Why was Rachel tending her father's sheep; that is, why didn't her brothers tend the sheep as was customary in those days?
7. Why did Yaakov cry when he met Rachel?
8. Who was Elifaz, and why didn't he kill Yaakov when he had the chance?
9. Why did Lavan run to greet Yaakov?
10. Why were Leah's eyes tender?
11. How old was Yaakov when he married Leah and Rachel?
12. Why did Rachel envy Leah?
13. Who was Yaakov's fifth son?
14. How do you say "dudaim" in Arabic?
15. "Hashem remembered Rachel" (30:22). What did He remember?
16. What does "Yosef" mean? Why was he named that?
17. How many times did Lavan change Yaakov's wages?
18. Where are there two Aramaic words in this week's Parsha?
19. Who was Bilhah's father? Who was Zilpah's father?
20. Who escorted Yaakov into Eretz Yisrael?

BONUS QUESTION?

"And he removed the stone from the mouth of the well..." (29:10)

Yaakov single-handedly plucked a giant boulder from the mouth of the well, a stone which normally took many men just to roll. Why was it necessary for Yaakov to display his superhuman strength at this particular stage in his career?

answer on page six

I DIDN'T KNOW THAT!

"It was the next morning and — Behold! — she was Leah!" (29:25).

Yaakov said to Leah, "You swindler, daughter of a swindler! Last night I called 'Rachel' and you responded!" "I learned that from you," said Leah. "Your father (Yitzchak) called 'Esav' and you responded (in order to steal Esav's blessing)!"

• *Daas Zekenim Mibaalei Tosafos*

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

1. 28:10 - The departure of a righteous person leaves a noticeable void in that place.
2. 28:11 - Sleep at night lying down.
3. 28:12 - The ascending angels accompanied Yaakov in Eretz Canaan. The descending angels accompanied Yaakov outside of the Land.
4. 28:13 - That the Land would be easy for his descendants to conquer.
5. 29:7 - He thought they were loafing, stopping work early in the day.
6. 30:27 - Her brothers weren't born yet.
7. 29:11 - He saw prophetically that they would not be buried together; or because he was penniless.
8. 29:11 - Elifaz was Esav's son who chased Yaakov in order to kill him. But because Elifaz had grown up under the tutelage of Yitzchak, he relented.
9. 29:13 - He thought Yaakov was carrying money.
10. 29:17 - She cried continually because she thought she was destined to marry Esav.
11. 29:21 - Eighty-four.
12. 30:1 - She envied her mitzvos, thinking they were the reason Leah merited having children.
13. 30:5 - Dan.
14. 30:14 - Jasmine (*Yasmin*).
15. 30:22 - That Rachel gave Leah the "signs of recognition" that Yaakov had taught her, so that Leah wouldn't be embarrassed.
16. 30:24 - "Yosef" means "He will add." Rachel prayed to Hashem for another son, in addition to Yosef.
17. 31:7 - One hundred times.
18. 31:41 - *Yagar Sahadusa*, meaning 'wall of testimony.'
19. 31:50 - Lavan.
20. 32:1 - The angels of Eretz Yisrael.

WEEKLY DAF

SHABBOS 2 - 8

THE BEGGAR AND THE BENEFACTOR

A poor beggar standing on the street and his benefactor inside the house are the characters utilized by the first *mishnah* in *Mesechta Shabbos* to illustrate the laws relating to the Torah's prohibition of transferring an object from a private to public domain and vice versa. One example is that of the benefactor taking some food from inside his home and extending it outside into the hand of the beggar. The benefactor is guilty of transferring an object from the private to public domain, and if he did so because he forgot that it was Shabbos, or forgot that this act was forbidden on Shabbos, he must bring a *korban chatas* (sin offering) as an atonement.

Why did the *mishnah* choose to illustrate this law with an act of charity?

Rambam offers a simple explanation. Had the *mishnah* simply described a scene of two people, one inside and the other outside, there would have been a need to identify the outsider as "the person standing in the street." By referring to him as the beggar he can

economically be identified with a single word.

Rabbi Ovadia of Bartenura offers a different approach. In a later *perek* (19:4) there is a discussion concerning a situation in which a person unintentionally violates the Shabbos while in the process of performing a mitzvah as to whether such a violation obligates him to bring a sacrifice. Our *mishnah* therefore uses the example of charity to incidentally communicate that even though the benefactor inside the house was involved in doing a mitzvah when he forgot that it was Shabbos, he is still guilty of Shabbos violation and must bring a sacrifice as atonement.

• *Shabbos 2a*

A RIGHT TO QUESTION

When the Sage Rav posed a question to Rabbi Yehuda Hanassi, generally referred to as Rebbi, he received an immediate response. Rav's uncle, Rabbi Chiya, reprimanded him, however, for asking Rebbi a question in a *mesechta* which he was not currently studying.

"Haven't I told you," he said, "that when Rebbi is studying one *mesechta* you should not ask him something in

another *mesechta*. If not for the fact that Rebbi is such a great scholar you could have caused him embarrassment by forcing him to give you an inaccurate answer."

On the basis of this statement Rambam rules (Laws of Talmud Torah 4:6) that a student of Torah should not ask his teacher a question related to a subject which he is not currently studying, for fear of embarrassing him.

What about the other way around? May the teacher challenge his student with a question related to a subject which he is not currently studying?

Regarding this, Rambam states clearly that the teacher may certainly do so in order to stimulate his student to be more perseverant in his study and review. The source is the oft repeated cases of the Sage Rabba doing unusual things in order to test the awareness of his disciple, the Sage Abaye. If the teacher can even say or do unusual things in order to test his disciples' memory of what they studied, reasons Rambam, he can certainly ask them direct questions in areas not currently being studied in order to test their memory, without consideration that he might thus embarrass them.

• *Shabbos 3b*

continued from page one

and all its riches are nothing more than a velvet-lined Cartier box.

SKY-SCRAPING

"And behold a ladder with its feet fixed on the ground and its head reaching heavenward; and behold! Angels of G-d ascending and descending on it." (28:12)

Man is like a ladder.

PARSHA INSIGHTS

Necessarily Man's feet are "fixed on the ground" in the physical world. He is obliged to involve himself in a material existence. Nevertheless, if whatever he does is for the sake of Heaven, his "head reaches the heavens."

Our actions in this world directly influence the way the spiritual realm interacts with the creation. We can tip the balance to the positive or the negative — "the angels of G-d ascend and

descend on it."

Even the angels depend on the ladder that man creates by his actions in this world. Man is the dominant force and the focus of the entire creation. He even has the power to lower the angles or to elevate them.

Sources:

- *Diamonds That Are Forever* - Chidushei Halev
- *Sky-Scraping* - Mayana Shel Torah

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WATCHING THE DETECTIVES

[Name and email Withheld] wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

I am a New York City Police Detective in a South Bronx precinct. Part of my duties include “interview interrogation” of people who have been arrested for felonious (usually violent) crimes. Before this process I read the suspect his Miranda warnings, if the suspect agrees to talk to me I then attempt to obtain a written confession from him. I do this by feigning sympathy and understanding thereby gaining his confidence. I never make false promises, threats or use violence. The person usually leaves the room shaking my hand and thinking that I’m his friend. Basically what I am doing is misleading and disingenuous, although legal. Afterwards, although I have obtained a confession from a violent felon, I can’t help but feel guilty, it’s like I’ve gained someone’s trust and betrayed them. Do you think that my guilt feelings are justified? (If you hear from any Israeli detectives with similar experiences I would enjoy corresponding with them.)

Dear [Name and email Withheld],

I’ve read your letter many times and each time I am struck by your extraordinary sensitivity.

There is absolutely no Halachic problem with building a relationship with someone in order to be able to right a wrong. However, this is on condition that the suspect is neither promised something that you can’t deliver, or coerced into making a confession. Even if it is perfectly clear that he is guilty of a crime, it’s forbidden to use physical force or verbal threats to have him admit it. May Hashem grant you the ability to carry on with your important work and retain your acute sensitivity.

MEZUZAH MEMORY

Judith Amrani from Houston, Texas <amrju@gardere.com> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

We always kiss the mezuzah upon leaving our home. I am notorious for forgetting things and have to go back into the house again. My question is: Should I kiss the mezuzah again upon (finally) leaving? Thanks!

PS I like your newly expanded e-mails.

Dear Judith Amrani,

It’s a widespread custom to kiss the mezuzah when leaving home, but once is probably enough. Actually, the custom is to touch the mezuzah with your hand and then kiss your hand. The Shulchan Aruch mentions the custom to touch the mezuzah and to pray for Hashem to watch over you. It seems like Hashem is watching over you, since after you kiss the mezuzah you always remember that you forgot something you need!

Sources:

- Yoreh Deah, 285:2, Rema
- Ibid. Birkei Yosef

Forgetting reminds me: A man tells his psychiatrist:

“Doctor, I can’t remember anything! I forgot what happened yesterday, I forgot what my car looks like, I can’t even remember my own name.”

Doctor: How long have you had this problem?

Man: What problem?

FORTY SOMETHING

Basil Hyde Johannesburg, S. Africa <herbert@netactive.co.za> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

It seems that there might be some connection between the 40 days and 40 nights of the Flood followed by the rainbow and the 40 days and 40 nights that Moses spent on Sinai followed by the golden calf. Do you know of any such connec-

tion made by any of the Rabbis of earlier times? Thank you for a most absorbing and interesting series of Q & A’s.

Kathryn Parks, Sweeny, Texas <kjp1939@tgn.net> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

My name is Kathryn and my Sunday School class is studying Noah and the flood. We were wondering what the significance of the number forty is in that G-d caused it to rain forty days and nights? Why forty? Thank you so much for any help you might give us.

Dear Basil Hyde and Kathryn Parks,

We find the number 40 in several places in the Torah. 40 days of rain during the flood; Moses was on Mount Sinai 40 days receiving the Torah; the minimum amount of water required in a mikveh — ritual bath — is 40 seah (halachic measures). The Torah prescribes 40 lashes for some serious crimes. In addition, our Sages teach that a fetus takes 40 days from conception to develop into human form. The Maharal of Prague, Rabbi Yehuda Loewe, explains that the number 40 always means cataclysmic change and new creation. The flood eradicated all trace of the terrible spiritual state that existed previously and created a new mankind. By receiving the Torah, the Jews were born as a new nation. One who is impure immerses in the mikveh and emerges as a new person who is pure. Lashes motivate the criminal to recreate himself spiritually and return to the ways of the Torah.

Our Sages teach that the world was created through ten Divine utterances. Mystically, each of these ten utterances manifests itself on four different levels, hence a total of forty. On Shabbat, we refrain from 39 categories of forbidden labor. The Talmud refers to these 39 as “forty minus one” because each one parallels one of the forty levels of creation, except for the highest level of creation — creation of something from absolute nothingness — which has no

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parallel in our physical world.

PRAYING OUT LOUD

Eric Rosenberg <ERosenb510@aol.com> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

I was leading Shabbat services at a local Jewish nursing home and noticed that some of the congregants were visually impaired. When I came to the shemoneh esrei [silent prayer] I wasn't sure what to do — should I have read the shemoneh esrei out loud for those who cannot see well enough to read? Also, I assume it was O.K. for people to sit who did not feel they had the strength to

remain standing?

Dear Eric Rosenberg,

As you know, after the congregation says the silent prayer, the Cantor repeats it out loud. This repetition of the *shemoneh esrei* is intended for exactly the situation you describe — to help the people who don't know the prayers by heart and can't read them. Therefore, here's what you should do in such a situation: Before the prayers, announce that anyone who has difficulty reading the prayers should listen carefully during the repetition. If possible, they should say the prayer along with you word for word, and if that's not possible they should just listen carefully to the entire prayer and say *amen* to each blessing.

As for sitting during prayer, you're right: A person who finds it a hardship to stand may sit during *shemoneh esreh*.

New Feature!

PUBLIC DOMAIN
Comments, quibbles and reactions concerning previous "Ask-the-Rabbi" features.

Regarding "Ask the Rabbi" in which you wrote that Mount Sinai is called "Har Moriah — Mountain of Teaching, where G-d taught Moses the Torah." Is this to be confused with the Mount Moriah that Avraham almost sacrificed Yitzchak on?

• J&J Baldus <nabiydiy@artelco.com>

I think that Har Moriah is a name for Har Habayit and not for Har Sinai.

• Ben Pashkoff <benj@netvision.net.il>

The Rabbi Responds:

Dear J&J Baldus and Ben Pashkoff,

The Midrash (*Bamidbar Rabbah 1:8*) states that one of the names of Mount Sinai was "Moriah." As you pointed out Moriah is also one of the names of the Temple Mount. Moriah means "the place where Hashem can be seen." When the Jewish People got the Torah, Mount Sinai was a place where Hashem's presence was manifest. After the Torah was given, Mount Sinai reverted to its previous, mundane status. The Temple Mount, however, remains the eternal place where Hashem's presence is most manifest.

Hi. I was the individual who asked the question about starting to study at the age of 37. You published my question and some great people wrote back with encouragement and gave me their email addresses. Unfortunately, my computer system went down and I lost their email addresses. Would you be so kind as to publish this so I can ask them to write back? Thanks.

• David from Alaska <Haneve@hotmail.com>

YIDDLE RIDDLE

Last week we wrote:

Here is a riddle I am submitting from my father-in-law Stanley Chazan and my daughter Aviva Stroh: "Name 6 couples mentioned in *Tanach* whose first names start with the same letter in Hebrew.

• Jack Stroh, East Brunswick, NJ <jackst@erols.com>

Answer:

Noach and Naama
Esav and Adah
Aharon and Elisheva
Otniel ben Knaz and Achsah bat Kalev
Achav and Izevel
Esther and Achashveirosh

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BONUS ANSWER!

Yaakov wanted to marry Rachel, but her father, the money-hungry Lavan, would never agree unless it somehow served his own selfish interests. Since Yaakov was empty-handed, the only thing he could offer Lavan was his services. He therefore displayed his exceptional strength and prowess so Lavan would desire him as a servant.

• Heard from Rabbi Avigdor Miller

RECOMMENDED READING LIST

RAMBAN

28:12 Yaakov's Dream
29:2 Three Flocks
30:2 Yaakov's Anger
31:19 The *Terafim*

SFORNO

28:12-13 Yaakov's Dream
29:6 A Proper Guest
29:11 Why Yaakov Cried
31:32 Yaakov's Curse
32:1 A Father's Blessing