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PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

You Are the Man on the Moon!

“Sarah’s lifetime was one hundred years, twenty years... ‘at one hundred she was as free of sin as she was at twenty...(Rashi).”
(23:1)

In 1967, Neil Armstrong, the first man to walk on the Moon, was celebrated as a national hero. While he certainly an extremely brave man, why was he a hero? Armstrong basically followed instructions. In fact, some speculate that it was exactly Armstrong’s down to earth - excuse the pun - prosaic nature that got him the job. The last thing NASA wanted was a romantic stargazer wandering around the moon, going off-script.

Can you imagine the feeling of walking on the moon?! *You* are walking on the moon! On the *moon*! The earth is a beautiful enormous green/blue orb hanging in the sky above your head. *Your* head! *You’re* the man on the moon. You did it! You!

It’s much easier to get excited about fulfilling positive mitzvos than to refrain from violating negative commandments. We feel so much more accomplished when we perform a good deed – davening with proper intent, or learning with exuberance – than we do when we merely refrain from doing what is wrong.

But feelings can be deceiving. The fulfillment of a positive mitzvah may feel more holy, but the Vilna Gaon writes that we are granted much more reward for refraining from sin. The *mishna* teaches that Hashem grants each and every *tzaddik* 310 “worlds” of reward. The Gaon writes that a full 300 of these worlds are granted to him because he turns away from evil, whereas “only” 10 worlds are given to him because of his doing good.

It may be easier to appreciate the doing a mitzvah – celebrating Yom Tov, learning Torah or praying a meaningful section – than to refrain from transgressing. The feeling of spirituality, the “wow factor,” is indeed more readily accessible in the cases of actions and doing good. But the substance of a Jew, the foundation upon which all is built, is refraining from bad.

When we commit to be more careful with what we see, we are laying the foundation of our World to Come, and we are therefore rewarded with the bulk of our reward in Olam Haba. And that is infinitely more exhilarating than walking on the moon.

Q & A

Questions

1. Name the four couples buried in Kiryat Arba.
2. What did Sarah hear that caused her death?
3. What title of honor did the Bnei Chet bestow upon Avraham?
4. Where was Avraham born?
5. How were Avraham's camels distinguished?
6. What is meant by "all the good of his master in his hand"?
7. What special character trait did Eliezer seek when choosing a wife for Yitzchak?
8. Why did Avraham's servant, Eliezer, run toward Rivka?
9. Why did Lavan run to greet Eliezer?
10. When Lavan told Eliezer that the house was cleared out, what did he remove?
11. Who did Eliezer want Yitzchak to marry?
12. Aside from Eliezer, to which other people did Rivka offer to give water?
13. Lavan answered Eliezer before his father, Betuel, had a chance. What does this indicate about Lavan's character?
14. What did Rivka mean when she said "I will go!"
15. What blessing did Rivka's family give her before she departed?
16. Who was Ketura?
17. What gift did Avraham give to Yitzchak?
18. How old was Avraham when he died?
19. For how many years did Yaakov attend the Yeshiva of Ever?
20. How many times is Eliezer's name mentioned in this week's Parsha?

Answers

1. 23:2 - Adam and Chava, Avraham and Sara, Yitzchak and Rivka, Yaakov and Leah.
2. 23:2 - That Yitzchak was almost slaughtered.
3. 23:6 - Prince of G-d.
4. 24:7 - Ur Kasdim.
5. 24:10 - They were muzzled, so they wouldn't graze in the fields of others.
6. 24:10 - Eliezer carried a document in which Avraham gave all he owned to Yitzchak so that people would want their daughter to marry him.
7. 24:14 - He sought someone who excelled in performing acts of kindness.
8. 24:17 - He saw that the waters of the well rose when she approached.
9. 24:29 - Lavan coveted his money.
10. 24:31 - Idols.
11. 24:39 - His own daughter.
12. 24:44 - To the men who accompanied Eliezer.
13. 24:50 - That he was wicked.
14. 24:58 - I will go even if you don't want me to go.
15. 24:60 - That the blessings given to Avraham would continue through her children.
16. 25:1 - Hagar.
17. 25:5 - The power of blessing.
18. 25:7 - 175 years old.
19. 25:17 - 14 years.
20. None.

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

Synonyms in the Hebrew Language

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

True Love (Part 1 of 2)

The verb for “loving” appears in the Bible for the first time when Hashem commands Abraham to offer up his son “that he loves” (Gen. 22:2) – Isaac. Afterwards, Isaac himself becomes the subject of *ahavah*, as the Bible reports that after he married his wife Rebecca, “he loved her” (Gen. 24:67). Later on, Isaac is said to “love” his son Esau (Gen. 25:28) and asks him to prepare for him the delicacies that he “loves” before receiving special blessings (Gen. 27:4, 27:9, 27:14). The theme of *ahavah* continues in the book of Genesis with Rebecca “loving” Jacob (Gen. 25:28), Jacob “loving” his wife Rachel (Gen. 29:18, 29:30), Jacob “loving” his son Joseph (Gen. 37:3, 44:20), and so forth. In all of these passages – and many more – variations of the term *ahavah* are used. This essay attempts to hone in on the exact meaning of *ahavah*, and how the idea it represents may differ from other terms or conceptions of “love.”

Rabbi Pinchas Eliyahu Horowitz of Vilna (1765–1802) in his work *Sefer HaBrit* discusses the concept of *ahavah* at great length, and categorizes different types of *ahavah* as well as the interplay between *ahavah* and *yirah*. He especially elaborates on the distinction between what the rabbis (*Avot* 5:16) call “love which depends on a matter” and “love which does not depend on a matter.” His most basic definition of *ahavah* is that “Love is the expansion of the soul and its joy in something that pleases it, desiring it more than anything else. It opens the chambers of the heart, and the vital spirits within it will run alongside all the parts of the body.” Essentially, his definition of *ahavah* highlights “love” as an emotional experience that involves a deep connection, joy, desire, and the positive physiological and psychological impacts it has on an individual. He emphasizes how love is a profound and transformative emotion that extends beyond mere physical attraction or fondness. His description of the “opening of the chambers of the heart” and the “flow of vital spirits” suggest a profound, almost spiritual, connection associated with “love.” Rabbi Horowitz applies this understanding of “love” both to the commandment to “love” Hashem (Deut. 6:5) and the commandment to “love” fellow Jews (Lev. 19:18).

However, Rabbi Eliyahu Lopian (*Lev Eliyahu* vol. 1 p. 110) explains that most people are mistaken in their understanding of the concept of “love.” People think that love refers to a pleasant feeling that fills a person when in the company of someone defined as their “beloved.” Meaning, they delight in themselves through their loved one, using their beloved as merely a tool for their own enjoyment. However, Rabbi Lopian asserts, this understanding love is incorrect. The way he explains it, true love is that which awakens a person to give assistance to their friend and to bestow goodness upon them. In other words, true love is that which arouses a person to provide for their beloved and make them happy. For a similar lesson, see Rabbi Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler’s *Michtav M’Eliyahu*, vol. 1 pp. 32-36.

Rabbi Lopian famously compared this to someone entering a restaurant to eat, and when the waiter asks, “What do you like?” they answer, “I love fish.” Clearly, this person does not *love* the fish, but rather he loves himself and the good sensations he experiences when eating fish. The Bible relates that when Jacob had to work for Laban for seven years in order to marry Laban’s daughter Rachel, “those [years] were in his [Jacob’s] eyes like several days in his love [*b’ahavato*] of her” (Gen. 29:20). This passage is very difficult to understand, because according to the popular conception of “love,” when someone loves something and wants to attain it, then the days of waiting are just unbearable. But with the supernal type of “love” that Rabbi Lopian was talking about, it’s not about one person attaining some pleasant feeling, but about one giving to one’s beloved. Hence, the

more that Jacob worked for his beloved's father, the more he felt like he was giving towards her and fulfilling his *ahavah*. Of course, this is the exact opposite of the popular conception of "love," whereby the lover really loves themselves, meaning they love to delight in themselves through somebody else.

*

To read the rest of this essay about the Hebrew word *ahavah* and related terms, and find out what "love" truly means, visit us online at: http://ohr.edu/this_week/whats_in_a_word/

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Sarah, the mother of the Jewish People, passes on at age 127. After mourning and eulogizing her, Avraham seeks to bury her in the Cave of Machpela. As this is the burial place of Adam and Chava, Avraham pays its owner, Ephron the Hittite, an exorbitant sum.

Avraham sends his faithful servant Eliezer to find a suitable wife for his son, Yitzchak, making him swear to choose a wife only from among Avraham's family. Eliezer travels to Aram Naharaim and prays for a sign. Providentially, Rivka appears. Eliezer asks for water. Not only does she give him water, but she draws water for all 10 of his thirsty camels (some 140 gallons)! This extreme kindness marks her as the right wife for Yitzchak and a suitable mother of the Jewish People. Negotiations with Rivka's father and her brother, Lavan, result in her leaving with Eliezer. Yitzchak brings Rivka into his mother Sarah's tent, marries her and loves her. He is then consoled for the loss of his mother.

Avraham remarries Hagar, who is renamed Ketura to indicate her improved ways. Six children are born to them. After giving them gifts, Avraham sends them to the East. Avraham passes away at the age of 175 and is buried next to Sarah in the Cave of Machpela.

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TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Bava Kama 9-15

Beautifying a Mitzvah

Rabbi Zeira said, “One should add a third (more money) in order to beautify a mitzvah.”

Rashi explains: If one wants to buy a *Sefer Torah* (Torah Scroll), and he finds two to choose from, if one is more beautiful than the other he should add a third of the value and buy the more beautiful one. Rashi cites a *beraita* for this requirement to “beautify a mitzvah.” “The Torah states ‘This is my G-d and I will glorify Him,’ which teaches us to be beautiful in the presence of G-d in mitzvah fulfillment. For example, one should have a beautiful *Sefer Torah*, a beautiful *lulav*, a beautiful *talit* and beautiful *tzitzit*.”

Tosefot explains the obligation to beautify the mitzvah in a different manner, not in terms of adding a third more *money*, but to obtain a *larger etrog*. In the event that he finds one *etrog* that is small but kosher, he should beautify the mitzvah by buying a larger *etrog*, up to a third larger.

The *gemara* also records that in Eretz Yisrael it was taught in the name of Rabbi Zeira, “Until a third, from his own; after that, is from G-d.” Rashi elucidates this cryptic statement as follows: For the additional third of money that a person spends to beautify a mitzvah, he receives reward in the World-to-Come instead of this world. But if he spends more than an additional third, Hashem will reward him in this world during his lifetime. Tosefot appears to concur with Rashi on this point. The halacha regarding “*hidur mitzvah*” – beautifying a mitzvah – is codified in the Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 656:1.

▪ *Bava Kama 9b*

Home Safety

Rabbi Natan said, “From where do we learn that a person should not raise a ‘bad dog’ (i.e., dangerous) in his house, and that he should not put up an unsafe ladder in his house? The verse states “Don’t put blood in your house” (Deut. 23:8).

Although the verse specifically mentions only the mitzvah of building a *ma’akeh* (parapet) on the roof of one’s house to help prevent a person who goes there from falling and losing his life, Rabbi Natan teaches that this verse is also the source for not having dangerous objects around one’s house.

The Maharsha explains the need to teach the prohibition of ‘giving home to’ these additional potential dangers, in addition to the explicit need for the verse to teach the mitzvah of *ma’akeh*. A *ma’akeh* serves as protection for the dwellers of his household, who may go on the roof and risk the danger of falling off. Therefore, a *ma’akeh* is needed. However, a dangerous dog is something he may want to have for protection against thieves and criminals, and is a creature well known to his family and would seemingly pose no danger to them. Likewise, a ladder that is not really safe is known by his family to be a potential threat, since they live there and know the unsafe state of the ladder. Therefore, members of his household will know to be careful with these potentially life-threatening items. Rabbi Natan teaches that it is nevertheless forbidden to possess these items in one’s home, since they are dangerous by nature, and thus pose a danger to guests and others who come to his house. In fact, they may even be considered a threat to the lives of his own household members, despite their awareness of the potentially harmful nature of these items.

▪ *Bava Kama 15b*

COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

HAVDALAH (PART 9) – AFTERWORD

“Hashem, my G-d, will illuminate my darkness”

(King David, Tehillim 18:29)

In Tehillim (18:29), King David, lyrically declares that Hashem will illuminate the darkness: *“Hashem, Elokai yagiah choshki.”* In the opening words of the verse, King David uses the more standard expression for lighting something up, *“taihr.”* But in the second half of the verse, he uses a more poetic word, *“yagiah.”* The Malbim, with his typical insightful brilliance, explains the word *“taihr”* as a derivative of the word *“ohr”* and refers to light that emanates from its own source. For example, the Torah describes the sun as *“ha’m’ohr hagadol, the great light.”* *“Yagiah,”* on the other hand, is rooted in the word *“nogah,”* which is a reference to light that does not have its own source. Rather, it is light that reflects light from something else, just as the moon reflects the light of the sun.

In this beautiful verse, King David is describing the way that Hashem’s world works. Hashem’s *“ohr”* is so intense and vivid that it needs to be reflected off of something physical for us to be able to benefit from it. Otherwise, its brilliance would blind us.

After having spent the last twenty-five hours in the otherworldly domain that is Shabbat, after having been privy to the pure light that belongs to the Spiritual Realms, it is now time to reflect Shabbat’s purity into the weekdays. We need to use this beautiful physical world that we inhabit for six days each week as our vehicle for bringing Hashem’s blessing of light and warmth into our lives.

Rabbi Yaakov Kaminetzky writes that in other religious philosophies there is a huge gulf between the physical, sensual being and the spiritual. According to their approach, it is possible to grow spiritually only by involvement in religious practices, such as prayer and ritual. In their view, the body and the spirit cannot coexist. This is not so with Judaism. Our week is comprised of both holiness and the mundane, together. It is true that Shabbat is an obviously holy day, but it is replete with physicality. And it is equally true that the weekdays are much more physical than Shabbat, but they are also overflowing with spiritual opportunities that await our attention.

This is why Shabbat draws to a close with Havdalah. The Rabbis teach that fulfilling our obligation to recite Havdalah utilizes each one of our five senses. We are commanded to pick up the cup of wine in our hands, the sense of touch. We smell the spices, the sense of smell. We must look at the flame of the candle, the sense of sight. We must listen to the blessings, the sense of hearing. Finally, the wine must be drunk, which uses the sense of taste.

Rabbeinu Bachye ben Asher explains that the five senses are one of the primary definitions of humankind. As we reenter the physical realms, we gather our five senses together to serve Hashem. We take leave of Shabbat, revitalized and rejuvenated, ready to unite the spiritual and the physical by giving each of our worldly actions spiritual meaning.

At Havdalah, we use each one of the senses to become cognizant that it is our responsibility to permeate the week with meaning. To imbue the mundane with light and joy. To reach an awareness that the intensely brilliant light and spiritual warmth of Shabbat can be found within the ordinary. If only we are prepared to look for it.

In the profound words of the Sefat Emet, a candle can be extinguished, but light, itself, cannot.

TAAMEI HAMITZVOS

Reasons behind the Mitzvos

By Rabbi Shmuel Kraines

FEAR OF THE ENEMY

Mitzvah 525 (see also mitzvah 526)

You might say in your heart, "These nations are greater than me! How can I possibly conquer them?" Do not fear them; you shall surely remember what Hashem your G-d did to Pharaoh and to all the Egyptians...Do not be terrified of them, for Hashem your L-rd is in your midst – the great and awesome Hashem! (Devarim 7:17-21)

THE MITZVAH

We are commanded to refrain from being afraid of our enemies during battle, and not to flee from them. It is our obligation to stand up against the enemies of the Jewish People (*Sefer HaChinuch*).

Fear comes upon a person involuntarily. The Torah therefore advises to think thoughts that dispel fear, such as remembering that the omnipotent Hashem is among us and fighting for us, and remembering what He did to the Egyptians who came upon us (*Malbim* to v. 18).

REASON ONE: FEAR WEAKENS

Soldiers are commanded not to fear the enemy since this will cause them to flee, and flight is the beginning of defeat (*Rabbi Menachem HaBavli*, based on *Sotah* 8:6).

Rambam (*Melachim* 7:15): "Once a soldier enters battle, he must place his trust upon the Hope of Israel and their Savior in their time of distress, and he must realize that he is fighting for Hashem's sake. He should therefore place his life in His hands and should not fear. He should not think about his loved ones, but should rather erase their memories from his heart and focus entirely on the battle. Anyone who begins to think and worry, and brings terror upon himself, has transgressed this commandment. Moreover, the lives of the whole nation are dependent upon him, and therefore, if he does not fight with all his heart and soul, [but rather succumbs to feelings of terror], it is as if he has murdered. It is thus written, *and he shall not cause his fellow [soldiers'] hearts to melt like his own*. On the other hand, a soldier who fights with all his heart and without fear, and whose intent is only to sanctify Hashem's name, is assured that he will not be harmed, and he will merit to establish a family and bear progeny and merit eternal life in the World to Come."

REASON TWO: FOR THE HONOR OF HASHEM AND HIS NATION

Fighting on behalf of the Jewish People is a matter of Hashem's honor. We are therefore commanded to trust in Hashem and not care about our bodies when we have the opportunity to convey glory to Hashem and his nation (*Sefer HaChinuch*). [In addition, by fearing people as if they have the power to harm us against Hashem's will, we are being disrespectful to Hashem, Who has commanded us to trust in Him.]

REASON THREE: FEAR HAS NEGATIVE SPIRITUAL EFFECTS

Hashem promised the Jewish people that when they observe the Torah, He will deliver all of their enemies into their hands, and He therefore commanded us not to fear. Fear of people comes from a weakness of character. It can also be harmful, because when a person becomes afraid, the angel that protects him becomes weakened, and he strengthens his foes and brings upon himself calamities that he does not deserve. Conversely, if someone trusts in Hashem and does not fear the enemy, he can merit to be spared even from deserved harm (*Rabbeinu Bachaye* (v. 25) and *Shem MiShmuel* (Moadim, Zechor Bris 5675) based on *Mishlei* 29:25; *Rabbeinu Yonah* to *Mishlei* 3:26; see beginning of *Chovos HaLevavos*, *Shaar HaBitachon*).

REASON FOUR: CONTRADICTION TO FEAR OF HASHEM

When we take to heart that He is One and Only, we revere Hashem and fear disobeying His will. This also means that we should *not* fear others, who cannot harm us against Hashem's will. Fear of Hashem and fear of others are therefore mutually exclusive, and when a person fears people, he automatically removes some of his fear of Hashem. The Torah therefore commands us to recall that Hashem is a "great and awesome G-d," meaning that we should fear *only* Him, and nobody else (*Kad HaKemach: Yirah*; see also *Ibn Ezra*).

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