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PARSHA INSIGHTS

DIAMONDS THAT ARE FOREVER

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

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 get bored with the necklace and start to play with the red velvet-lined box that the necklace came in.

It always amazes me that children are usually much more interested in the box than the present itself.

When it comes to *mitzvot* we are like children.

A *mitzvah* is a present valuable beyond our wildest dreams. We have no idea what a *mitzvah* is. We have no idea of its value.

“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 Eliphaz, acting on his father’s command, pursued Yaakov and was about to kill him. Eliphaz, however, had been raised by his grandfather, Yitzchak, and could not bring himself to kill his uncle Yaakov.

Eliphaz asked Yaakov what he should do. How could he let Yaakov live and yet also fulfill the *mitzvah* 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 Eliphaz would be able to fulfill the letter of his father’s command and fulfill the *mitzvah* 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. And G-d said, “Do not murder”. So why did Eliphaz seek Yaakov’s advice how to honor his father? Clearly, there was no *mitzvah* incumbent upon Eliphaz.

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

And you can’t say that Yaakov was careless with his money. The Talmud tells us that Yaakov, on his way to meeting his brother Esav, went back to retrieve some small jars. (*Chullin 91*)

A *tzaddik* realizes that the smallest gift that G-d gives us is as important as the largest. Neither may be wasted or neglected.

The *Avot* knew, as no one since, the value of “the diamonds in the box”. They never thought twice about giving away the box — spending all their money — because the box is only to hold the diamonds. They knew that this world and all its riches are nothing more than a velvet-lined Cartier box.

They never made the mistake, as we so often do, of keeping the box - and throwing away the diamonds.

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PARSHA OVERVIEW

Fleeing from Esav, Yaakov leaves Be'er Sheva and sets out for Charan, the home of his mother's family. After a 14-year stint in the Torah Academy 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 *Beit Hamikdash*. He sleeps there and dreams of angels going up and down a ladder between Heaven and earth. G-d promises him the Land of Israel, that he will found a great nation, and that he will enjoy Divine protection. Yaakov wakes 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 fools Yaakov, substituting Rachel's older sister, Leah. Yaakov commits himself to work another seven years in order to also marry Rachel. Leah bears four sons: Reuven, Shimon, Levi and

Yehuda, the first Tribes of Israel. Rachel is barren, and, in an attempt to give Yaakov children, she gives her handmaiden Bilhah to Yaakov as a wife. Bilhah bears Dan and Naftali. Leah also gives Yaakov her handmaiden Zilpah, who bears Gad and Asher. Leah then bears Yissachar, Zevulun, and a daughter, Dina. G-d finally blesses Rachel with a son, Yosef. Yaakov decides to leave Lavan, but Lavan, aware of the wealth Yaakov has made for him, is reluctant to let him go, and concludes a contract of employment with him. Lavan tries to swindle Yaakov, but Yaakov becomes extremely wealthy. Six years later, Yaakov, aware that Lavan has become dangerously resentful of his wealth, flees with his family. Lavan pursues them but is warned by G-d not to harm them. Yaakov and Lavan agree to a covenant and Lavan returns home. Yaakov continues on his way to face his brother Esav.

ISRAEL Forever

THE BIG LIE

The guideline to history which our Sages have given us is that whatever transpired with the Patriarchs will be relived in some form by their descendants.

In this week's Torah portion we read the outrageous claim of the deceitful Lavan in his confrontation with Yaakov that "these daughters are my daughters, and these children are my children, and these cattle are my cattle, and all that you see is mine."

Here we have the age-old slander that Jews have

profited at the expense of their non-Jewish neighbors.

In the Diaspora this lie was directed at individual Jews or communities by envious anti-Semites. Today this is the core of Arab propaganda which claims that the land given to the descendants of Avraham is really theirs.

Just as Lavan's argument proved to be futile because of a Heavenly warning to desist from harming Yaakov, so too do we pray for Heavenly intervention to render Arab propaganda meaningless and secure Israel forever.

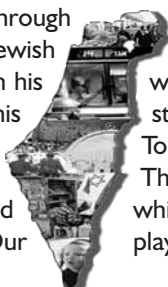
LOVE OF THE LAND - THE PLACES

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

DAVID – THE GATES OF JERUSALEM

David was not only the author of Tehillim through Divine inspiration and the king of the Jewish nation. He was also a mighty warrior, from his youth when he slew the Philistine giant Goliath, to his role as general and commander-in-chief who won every war he waged.

In a Psalm (122:2) of his Tehillim David revealed the secret of the success of his military career. "Our



feet stood in the gates of Jerusalem," sings David, and our Talmudic Sages (*Mesechta Makkot 10a*) explain his words in the following way: "Who enabled our feet to stand triumphant in battle? The Gates of Jerusalem where Torah was studied!"

This should serve as a timely reminder of the important role which Yeshivot in *Eretz Yisrael* and throughout the world are playing in guaranteeing the security of our people.

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. G-d compressed the entire Land of Israel underneath the sleeping Yaakov. What did this symbolize?
4. Yaakov said "I will return with *shalom*." What did he mean by "*shalom*"?
5. Why did Yaakov rebuke the shepherds?
6. Why did Rachel, and not her brothers, tend her father's sheep?
7. Why did Yaakov cry when he met Rachel?
8. Why did Lavan run to greet Yaakov?
9. Why were Leah's eyes tender?
10. How old was Yaakov when he married?
11. What did Rachel find enviable about Leah?
12. Who was Yaakov's fifth son?
13. Who was Leah's handmaiden? Was she older or younger than Rachel's handmaiden?
14. How do you say *dudaim* in Arabic?
15. "G-d remembered Rachel" (30:22). What did He remember?
16. What does "Yosef" mean? Why was he named that?
17. G-d forbade Lavan to speak to Yaakov "either of good or of bad." Why didn't G-d want Lavan to speak of good?
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*?

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. 28:13 - That the Land would be easy for his descendants to conquer.
4. 28:21 - Completely without sin.
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. 29:13 - He thought Yaakov was carrying money.
9. 29:17 - She cried continually because she thought she was destined to marry Esav.
10. 29:21 - Eighty-four.
11. 30:1 - Her good deeds, thinking they were the reason Leah merited children.
12. 30:5 - Dan.
13. 30:10 - Zilpah. She was younger.
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 asked G-d for another son in addition to Yosef.
17. 31:24 - Because the "good" that comes from wicked people is bad for the righteous.
18. 31:41 - *Yagar Sahaduta*, meaning "wall of testimony."
19. 31:50 - Lavan.
20. 32:1 - The angels of *Eretz Yisrael*.

S U B S C R I B E !

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- The source for requiring the proper intention in regard to sacrificial services
- Which sacrifice can be offered after death of its owner
- The atonement achieved by the replacement sacrifice
- The difference between individual and communal sacrifices in regard to intention
- Atonement for failure to perform a positive command
- Sacrifice offered with intention for one who is not its owner

THE MISSING SAGE

“What a shame that you were not together with us last night in the *techum* of Bei Charmoch when the Sage Rava posed such a wonderful problem and solved it.”

This is what the Sage Ravina said to Rabbi Papa in reporting a revelation made by Rava concerning the offering of sacrifices without specifically designating their purpose.

Similar expressions of regret that a particular Sage was missing during an important discussion are found in two other places.

Rabbi Chisda made the same comment to the Sage Rami bar Chma (*Bava Kama* 20a) when he missed out on a discussion of the law regarding one who resides in the home of another without his permission.

Rabbi Nachman said the same to Rabbi Huna (*Bava Batra*

51a) about his absence when there was a discussion regarding a man's sale of property to this wife.

Rashi in *Bava Kama* offers two explanations of what is meant by the term *techum* used in these statements. One is that the Beit Midrash where the discussion took place was beyond the *techum* (area) in which a Jew may walk from his town on Shabbat. Rashbam in *Bava Batra* elaborates that the places of Torah study were located at a particular point in the *techum* Shabbat to make them accessible to the surrounding communities.

The second explanation, which is also the approach of the *Sefer Ha'aruch*, is that the term *techum* refers to the Beit Midrash, which is the area of Torah study, and that the absence of the Sage was not necessarily due to any Shabbat restriction.

• *Zevachim* 2b

What the SAGES Say

“The *olah* sacrifice is the gift of one who has failed to fulfill a positive command for his atonement has already been achieved with his repentance.”

• *The Sage Rava - Zevachim* 7b

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ELOKIM

From: Angelina

*Dear Rabbi,
I'm confused about the name of G-d "Elokim". For starters, I'm not sure what it means. Also, why do religious Jewish people pronounce it the way I wrote it and not the way it's written in Hebrew with an "h"? Is it a holy name? And if so, why do I seem to remember it being used in other, non-holy contexts (if that's right)?*

Dear Angelina,

This name of G-d is based on the Hebrew word "el" which means simply "power" or "strength". An example of this usage is in the description of Lavan's pursuing and confronting Jacob during his return to the Land of Israel. Lavan says, "Yesh b'el yadi - It is in my **power** to do you harm, but the G-d of your father addressed me last night [in a dream] saying, 'Beware of speaking with Jacob either bad or good'" (Gen 31:29). Rashi and Onkelus both explain "el" to mean power or strength.

The name "Elokim", then, in reference to G-d, connotes His complete mastership and control over everything. It is the name of G-d which most closely corresponds with what might be referred to in English as "The Omnipotent". Therefore, this is the name of G-d used throughout the Torah's description of Creation. In all cases of 'G-d created', 'G-d said', 'G-d saw', 'G-d called' etc., the word for G-d is "Elokim". [Interestingly, the four-letter Name which connotes G-d's actual interaction *with* Creation, is used only later during the description of His creating Mankind.]

The reason why this name is often pronounced and written "Elokim" with a "k" sound instead of a "h" sound in place of the Hebrew letter "hey" is out of deference to a name of G-d, and to avoid the possibility of "taking G-d's name in vain". It should be clarified that when actually reading full verses containing the names of G-d, as during the public Torah reading, they must be pronounced properly. However, in the context of learning or quoting only parts of verses, the custom is to avoid pronouncing the various names, and even more when referring to G-d in normal conversation. Hence the convention of saying "Elokim" for this case, or "Hashem" (The Name) for the Tetragrammaton.

Despite the fact that this word is holy when used as a name of G-d, you are right about it being used in mundane contexts as well. There are several examples. Note that in these cases, the convention of changing the pronunciation is not applied (in addition, using a lower case "e" at the beginning is also appropriate). On the contrary, doing so

would imply holiness instead of mudane.

The Ten Commandments state, "I am the L-rd your G-d.... You may have no other gods before Me" (Ex. 20:2,3). The Hebrew word used for other or foreign gods is "elohim". The reason for this should be obvious: foreign worship is humanity's mistake of ascribing Divinity to the myriads of powers in Creation. If "Elokim" expresses G-d's power over all forces, "elohim" expresses man's giving these forces Divine power. This dichotomy is poignantly illustrated by the fact that "Elokim" – alef, lamed, hey, yud, mem (1,30,5,10,40=86) – has the *gematria* numerical equivalent as "Nature"/*HaTeva* – hey, tet, bet, ayin (5,9,2,70=86). G-d's power over Creation is masked within what appears to be the power of Creation itself. It is our job to see "Elokim" in Creation; not the Creation as "elohim".

Another instance of non-Divine usage of "elohim" is in the following: "And it came to pass when Mankind began to increase upon the earth and daughters were born to them, that the sons of 'elohim' saw that the daughters of man were good and they took for themselves wives from whoever they chose" (Gen. 6:1-3). Rashi offers two possible meanings here of "elohim". One understanding of this verse would have "elohim" mean "rulers", referring to their power of rule over others. However, based on the implication in the verse that the "elohim" were not "man", the Midrash explains this refers to certain angels who, in spiritual form, self-righteously recalled before G-d the shortcomings of man, but when later congealed into physical forms of great stature, they came to abuse their superlative powers to ravage Mankind.

A third usage of this term refers to judges. For example, if on account of poverty or theft a Jewish man was indentured to work for a Jewish master, then chose to stay in servitude despite being given the opportunity to be released, he was to be brought before the "elohim" – judges – who would order that the man's ear be pierced symbolically stating, "G-d says the Children of Israel are My servants; and this one chooses to be a servant of a servant!" (Ex. 21:6).

However, regarding this last usage, the commentaries suggest a relationship with "Elokim". Namely, the Torah court of judges is called by the word for G-d since it carries out G-d's laws on earth (Ibn Ezra). Alternatively, because G-d's Presence and influence rests upon the judges (Ramban). This is based on the Sages' explanation of the verse "in the midst of judges (elohim) G-d will judge" (Psalms 82:1).

REVENGE FOR SIMCHA

Question: I received an invitation to the Bar Mitzvah celebration of the son of an acquaintance. Not too long ago I invited this acquaintance to the Bar Mitzvah celebration of my son. He failed to turn up and didn't offer any apology for his absence. Is it proper for me to "repay" this behavior by refusing to attend his simcha (festive celebration)?

Answer: The Torah forbids a Jew to take revenge for some hurt he has suffered. Although the classic example of revenge cited in the Talmud deals with monetary matters ("I refuse to lend you the tool you request because you refused to lend me your tool when I requested it of you"), the mainstream view of halachic authorities is that the prohibition against revenge applies to all matters of human relations. Even if you go to that Bar Mitzvah but can't resist telling the host that you came despite his not coming to your simcha, you are guilty of violating the Torah prohibition against harboring a hatred for

the person who offended you.

All of this applies, however, to someone who ordinarily attends any simcha to which he is invited. If, however, you are a very busy person who finds it difficult to even attend every simcha of friends and relatives, but feels an obligation of gratitude to attend the celebrations of those who participated in the ones you hosted, the decision to absent yourself from the simcha of one who did not make that gesture cannot be considered a forbidden act of vengeance.

Although this is the halachic norm, you should be very careful to search your soul to ascertain that you are not acting out of the slightest motive of vengeance, and even then try your utmost to go beyond the letter of the law by attending your acquaintance's simcha so that there should not remain any trace of retaliation.

• Based on the Responsa of Rabbi Yitzchak Zilberstein, Rabbi of Ramat Elchanan Community in Bnei Brak, Israel)

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

FROM TWIN TOWERS TO JERUSALEM YESHIVA

The shock of 9/11 touched everyone in one way or other. Most deeply affected were those in the front lines of rescue work, the members of the Fire Department of New York.

Many of these courageous firefighters lost their lives while attempting to rescue the people trapped in the collapsing buildings. For others the trauma of losing a score of comrades, and being so intensely involved in the life and death struggle to evacuate the victims, changed their lives.

One of them was a young Orthodox Jew (name withheld upon request) who arrived at Ohr Somayach in Jerusalem shortly before the first anniversary of the disaster. Trained as a paramedic, he was giving emergency medical treatment to evacuees when the towers collapsed. When someone is so

close to death, he confided to the head of the yeshiva, he starts to seriously reconsider the priorities in his life. He recalled the months he spent studying in an Israeli yeshiva upon graduating from a yeshiva high school in the New York area and decided that it would be a good idea to recharge his spiritual batteries by returning to study Torah in Israel once the Fire Department allowed him to take a leave of absence.

One of the sad souvenirs which he carries with him from the 9/11 experience is a book on public speaking which he found among the ruins. Whenever he opens it he can still smell the stench that filled the nostrils of all who were involved in that heroic rescue mission. Now he is opening other sorts of books those on Torah subjects which will enhance his understanding of life and his dedication to saving lives.

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