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PARSHA INSIGHTS

CLOSE ENCOUNTERS

"He encountered the place..." (28:11)

Here I am sitting in Jerusalem writing these words on a small black box. It's amazing! And you there in LA. Yes YOU! There you are sitting there on the other side of the globe, watching minute electrons dancing around on a screen in front of your eyes and you can UNDERSTAND what I'm writing! It's amazing! More. If this was a .wav file you could hear me! If this was an .mpeg file you could watch and listen to me! (Poor you!) It's AMAZING!

It's so amazing that we don't even notice it anymore. But think for a moment about the millions of man hours and hard work and the ingenuity of thousands of minds that went into providing this amazing device. How many miles of cable, ISDN lines, satellites, satellite launch vehicles, deep-sea cable-layers, microchips, hundreds of thousands of tons of plastic and metal all making it possible for me to talk to you.

Are you still listening?

Now think about this. A Jew gets up in the morning, puts on tallit and tefillin, opens up his siddur and starts to pray... and his voice is heard on the other side of the Universe. Who installed the spiritual narrow-cast that accomplishes such an incredible feat? Who was able to construct a system which elevates every prayer in every generation through all the worlds above this one until they find their home under G-d's throne of Glory?

Who engineered such an incredible communications system that even the Internet pales in comparison?

Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov. The Avot Patriarchs. The spiritual fathers of the Jewish People established

those incredible spiritual conduits to Heaven. However, each of the Avot established something unique in his prayer.

The Talmud (*Berachot 26b*) tells us that Avraham established Shacharit, the morning prayer. The morning is the time of *Chesed*, kindness. As it says in Tehillim, "to relate in the morning Your Kindness." The *midah* (defining characteristic) of Avraham is *Chesed*, as it says "Chesed L'Avraham."

Yitzchak established Mincha, the afternoon prayer. The afternoon is the time when the world starts to descend into the darkness of night. It is a time of *Din*, of Judgment. The *midah* of Yitzchak is *Din*.

That Yaakov established the evening prayer, *Ma'ariv*, we learn from this week's Torah portion: "He encountered the place..." The spiritual masters teach us that the Hebrew word which is translated here as "encountered" implies the supreme encounter with the Divine — prayer. Yaakov prayed at night. Another understanding of the word "encounter" means that Yaakov wanted to move from that place but he "encountered" the Wall of the World. The whole world became like a giant stone wall in front of him.

During the history of the Jewish People's long night of exile, it seems sometimes like the whole world is like a stone wall in front of us, a stone wall that will not let us pass. For these times, Yaakov established a prayer for his children and their children and their children until the long night of exile finally ends.

That prayer is the prayer of the night.

The prayer that lifts us above the tragedies of pogrom and holocaust, the prayer of exile. The prayer of hope.

Ma'ariv.

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. Hashem 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 Hashem 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

STONES AND POLITICIANS

“The National Unity Government has come apart!” This headline in the local media caused an entire nation and world to wonder how this could happen at a time when Israel faces some of the most serious security and economic problems it has ever had to deal with.

When Jews hear this week's Torah portion read in synagogues they will get an insight into a historical perspective of unity.

When the Patriarch Yaakov lay down to sleep at the site where the Holy Temple would someday stand, the Torah relates that he formed a protective fence and pillow from “stones” he gathered from the area. After he awoke from his prophetic dream of angels and a ladder reaching to Heaven, those same “stones” are referred to as a single “stone.” He erected that stone as a pillar upon which he poured a libation of oil in thanks to G-d who assured him in that dream that the earth he slept on would belong to his descendants forever.

How “stones” become one “stone” is explained by the Talmudic Sages. The stones which Yaakov gathered began to quarrel amongst themselves, with each vying for the privilege of having the righteous Patriarch rest his head upon it. G-d thereupon combined all of the stones into one large

stone so that all of them would be privileged and pleased.

Let us put aside all of the cynical observations of political analysts who accuse one or the other of the protagonists in this drama, Prime Minister Sharon and Labor Party head Ben-Eliezer, of causing the collapse of the unity government by sticking to the uncompromising stances they adopted in order to gain popularity with the voters in their respective parties who must soon decide in primary elections their political futures. Let us be naïve enough to attribute to each of these politicians a genuine concern for the nation as their motive. But are they not like those stones vying for the privilege of rescuing Israel from its security and economic woes? If G-d imposed on the Jewish state problems of such magnitude that compelled such competing “stones” to form into one entity, could we not expect that all parties would be pleased to have the privilege of serving the people who elected them as leaders?

Perhaps the difference between stones and politicians is that stones have no agenda other than providing support for the righteous. Let the politicians take a cue from the stones and increase their support for the righteous Torah institutions which are the best guarantee for the security and economy of Israel – forever!

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CONSENT OR HUMOR?

Idol worship is so grave a sin that it is punished by stoning, the severest of the death penalties. Another dimension of its gravity is to be found in the laws of *meisit* (*Devarim 13:7-11*).

A Jew who persuades another Jew to worship an idol is liable for the death penalty even if neither he nor the object of his persuasion actually perform any act of idol worship. If the victim of this missionary effort expresses his consent to worship the idol he too is executed even if he does not actually carry out his intention.

What if the persuader has declared himself a deity and attempts to persuade other Jews to worship him? If they actually serve him as a deity both they and he are liable for the death penalty. But what if they express only their consent to do so?

It is the opinion of Rabbi Meir that there is no difference between expressing consent to worshipping the idol being promoted by the missionary or to worshipping the persuader himself, and in both cases the death penalty applies. Rabbi Yehuda, however, contends that the consent expressed in regard to a self-promoting persuader cannot be considered incriminating because it is not a serious declaration. After all, the object of such persuasion will ask himself why another human is more divine than himself, and expresses consent only to humor the persuader.

What about the *meisit* who attempts to persuade his victim to worship him? Is he still liable for the death penalty for his attempt or do we consider it such an exercise in futility that he too is exonerated?

Two views on this question are found in Tosafot. Support for the view that the *meisit* to worship himself will be executed seems to arise from the *gemara* (*Sanhedrin 67a*) which describes the entrapment which is tagged to incriminate a missionary by having him repeat his pitch for idol worship within earshot of two witnesses. The object of persuasion asks the *meisit* to repeat his appeal while two hidden witnesses watch and listen. After he hears the appeal he gives the *meisit* an opportunity to backtrack by protesting that he cannot abandon his Father in Heaven for an idol. The subsequent persistence of the *meisit* incriminates him and he is executed.

This would seem to indicate that even though the object of persuasion indicates that the missionary is futile the *meisit* is executed for the attempt alone. Tosafot does suggest, however, the possibility of distinguishing between the cases. When it is an idol that is being promoted there is a reasonable chance to convince even a reluctant audience and the attempt alone is punishable. But when one wishes to pass him off as a deity there is so little chance that he will succeed that he is not even considered a *meisit* deserving of the death penalty.

• *Sanhedrin 61a*

WHAT A DIFFERENCE A LETTER MAKES

As serious as was the sin of the golden calf it did not bring total destruction upon the nation that betrayed G-d so soon after receiving the Torah. The mitigating element in this apparent slip into idolatry is expressed in a single letter.

When the golden calf appeared the people cried out that “this is the god of Israel who brought you out of the land of Egypt” (*Shmot 32:4*). The letter *vov* in the term “who brought you out” transforms it into plural form and indicates that the people did not reject their belief in G-d but merely looked upon the golden calf as a partner with Him in bringing about their Exodus. Such a polytheistic belief, say some of our Sages, is bad enough but it is not as serious as abandoning belief in G-d altogether. So it was that little letter *vov* which saved them from the annihilation total rejection would have invited.

Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, however, considers this an insufficient explanation for Israel’s survival. “Only G-d must be served,” the Torah warns (*Shmot 22:19*) and polytheistic partnership is also a cause for annihilation. What then was the saving grace of the *vov* which turned the term into plural form?

Maharsha explains that even in worshipping the golden calf they were not rejecting their belief in G-d as the Supreme Power. They made the mistake of “seeking many powers” by adopting the perspective which Rambam (*Laws of Idolatry 1:1*) ascribes to the first idol worshippers of history. Those idolaters thought that since G-d, Creator of the world, had delegated power to heavenly bodies to run the world for Him, then it must be His desire that these bodies be respected and served in the same manner as a human king expects his ministers to be respected as an expression of respect for the king himself. In the same way the worshippers of the golden calf recognized G-d as the Supreme Power but served what they believed He had delegated power to in order to take them out of Egypt. When Moshe subsequently says to G-d (*Shmot 33:12*) “See, You tell me ‘Lead this nation’ ” he was suggesting that just as G-d was empowering him with leadership, so too did his people mistakenly think that in his absence it was the golden calf who had received this mandate.

• *Sanhedrin 63a*

The Weekly Daf

by RABBI MENDEL WEINBACH

at Jewish Bookstores Everywhere!

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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. "Hashem 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*.

LOVE OF THE LAND - THE PEOPLE

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

ELISHA – THE CHARM OF YOUR PLACE

Soon after the Prophet Elisha saw his master, the Prophet Eliyahu, taken to heaven in a chariot of fire he came to the city of Jericho. The people there told him that their city was a good place to live. The water supply, however, was of very poor quality which resulted in the land being barren. Elisha asked them to provide for him a new plate with some salt in it. He then poured the



salt into the source of the water and it was miraculously healed.

If the water was bad and the land barren, ask our Talmudic Sages, how could the residents of Jericho describe their city as a good place to live?

The answer they give is that the place in which one dwells has a special charm for him that enables him to overlook all of its shortcomings.

JEWISH MISSIONARY?

From: A. M. in England

*Dear Rabbi,
One of my work colleagues asked me yesterday why Jews do not missionize, and Christians do. To me it just seems obvious that we would not, but it is difficult to explain this intrinsic notion to him. Could you help me out?*

Dear A. M.,

Jews do not missionize among non-Jews. There are two reasons for this.

First of all, we believe that when a non-Jew keeps the seven Noachide laws, he merits a portion in the World-to-Come, and therefore there is no imperative for him to become Jewish. If, like many Christians and Moslems, we believed that those of other religions are condemned to damnation, then we would also desire to convert people. However, we believe that a person can be completely righteous and merit the World-to-Come without conversion, by adhering to the basic moral laws revealed to Noach. Therefore we feel no compulsion to convert others, unless they show a true desire to convert.

Secondly, since sincerity is one of the criteria for conversion, we can determine that the candidate is sincere by discouraging him from converting. If he persists and does so for the love of Judaism, we accept him with open arms.

REINCARNATION

From: H. in Florida

*Dear Rabbi,
I just read on your website something about reincarnation? Are we not given only one life to live? Are we to come back from the dead in another body and correct any mistakes we made in this life? This was very confusing to me. I have never read about reincarnation in the Torah. Can you give a scriptural*

basis for this belief? Thank you so much for your time and effort. I read your "Ask the Rabbi" series religiously (pun intended).

Dear H.,

Reincarnation is one of the teachings of the Oral Torah. In the Written Torah there are no explicit references to reincarnation, but there are hints.

Perhaps the closest Scriptural hint to this idea is Deuteronomy 25:5-10 which says that "when brothers are on the earth at the same time, and one of them dies childless, the wife of the dead brother must not marry a man outside the family. [Rather] her brother-in-law shall come to her and perform levirate marriage with her. And he shall be the first-born whom she bears; he shall succeed to the name of his dead brother, and so the name of the dead brother shall not be erased from the people of Israel... But if he refuses to marry his sister-in-law... she shall remove his shoe... His name shall be called in Israel: 'The house of him whose shoe was removed'."

The main reason for reincarnation is for the soul to fulfill its role in the Creation and achieve the spiritual level for which it is destined. If a soul does not manage this in its first life, it may be given another chance, and another. If the soul did not succeed in three times, it will have to settle for whatever it has gained in the everlasting after-life.

Another reason for reincarnation is to repay a soul for its deeds in a way parallel to its sins; for example, a rich miser might be reincarnated as a poor beggar and be disregarded by a rich man, who was himself one of the paupers disregarded by the rich miser in his previous life.

Rabbi Yitzchak Luria, (the Arizal) writes that Moshe was a reincarnation of Adam's third son, Sheit (Seth), and that Sheit was a reincarnation of Hevel (Abel). (The *mem* of Moshe's name stands for Moshe, the *shin* stands for Sheit, and the *heh* for Hevel.) The great mishnaic Sage Shamai was a reincarnation of Moshe, and Hillel was a reincarnation of Aharon.

Sources:

- Zohar, Mishpatim, Exodus 1:1
- Sha'ar Hagilgulim, Hakdama 36

New Feature! **THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY**

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.

DID YOU KNOW THAT...

...since its founding more than 30 years ago, Ohr Somayach has been instrumental in the establishment of more than a dozen *yeshivot* for students of limited background learning in Hebrew, English, Russian, Spanish, French and Persian?

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