

# O H R N E T

SHABBAT PARSHAT TOLDOT · 3 KISLEV 5773 - NOV. 17, 2012 · VOL. 20 NO. 6

## PARSHA INSIGHTS

### AS CLOSE TO ETERNITY

*“Yitzchak loved Eisav for game was in his mouth; but Rivka loves Yaakov.” (25:28)*

Not far from where I lived as a child there was a particularly fascinating shop. On the sides of the entrance doors, two mirrors faced each other. As you extended your leg over the threshold, millions of legs in perfect synchronization also extended themselves to your right and left.

It seemed that the reflections went on forever. And indeed they did. There was no beginning and no end.

To my young mind, this was as close to eternity as you could get.

Of all the misrepresented words in the English language, “love” must be up there with the top scorers.

Love is unique because it’s like those mirrors. In love, the cause and the effect are indistinguishable. Any love that depends on a reason will evaporate when the reason is no longer valid. If you love someone because they are young, their old age will not appeal to you; because they’re beautiful – they better watch the lines round their eyes, the chins under their chins and the escalating battle of the bulge. Love that depends on something else isn’t really love. It’s love of... Love of this; love of that.

Real love is defined as zero distance between cause and effect.

G-d chose Noach because he was a righteous person. In Parshat Lech Lecha, however, the Torah describes how G-d chose Avraham without mentioning anything about his prototypical kindness or his hospitality or any of his other merits. The reason is that G-d chose Avraham for no other reason than that He loved him. Why did He love him? Because He loved him! The cause was the effect, and the effect was the cause, like an infinite unceasing reflection.

*“Yitzchak loved Eisav for game was in his mouth; but Rivka loves Yaakov.”*

The grammar of this verse is strange: The love of Yitzchak for Eisav is described in the past tense “Yitzchak loved Eisav.” The love of Rivka for Yaakov, however, is portrayed in the present: “Rivka loves Yaakov.” The love of Yitzchak was a love that depended on an outside factor. He loved Eisav because “game was in his mouth.” When that external reason turned out to be misplaced, the love ceased. Rivka’s love, on the other hand, was a love that was self-sustaining, it needed no cause, and thus the Torah describes it in the present tense since it never came to an end.

• *Based on the Ramban and the Sh’lah HaKadosh*

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Parsha Insights written by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair • General Editor: Rabbi Moshe Newman • Design: Rabbi Eliezer Shapiro

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## PARSHA OVERVIEW

After 20 years of marriage, Yitzchak's prayers are answered and Rivka conceives twins. The pregnancy is extremely painful. G-d reveals to Rivka that the suffering is a microcosmic prelude to the worldwide conflict that will rage between the two great nations descended from these twins, Rome and Israel. Esav is born, and then Yaakov, holding onto Esav's heel. They grow and Esav becomes a hunter, a man of the physical world, whereas Yaakov sits in the tents of Torah developing his soul. On the day of their grandfather Avraham's funeral, Yaakov is cooking lentils, the traditional mourner's meal. Esav rushes in, ravenous from a hard day's hunting, and sells his birthright (and its concomitant spiritual responsibilities) for a bowl of lentils, demonstrating his unworthiness for the position of first-born. A famine strikes Canaan and Yitzchak thinks of escaping to Egypt, but G-d tells him that because he was bound as a sacrifice, he has become holy and must remain in

the Holy Land. He relocates to Gerar in the land of the Philistines, where, to protect Rivka, he has to say she is his sister. The Philistines grow jealous of Yitzchak when he becomes immensely wealthy, and Avimelech the king asks him to leave. Yitzchak re-digs three wells dug by his father, prophetically alluding to the three future Temples. Avimelech, seeing that Yitzchak is blessed by G-d, makes a treaty with him. When Yitzchak senses his end approaching, he summons Esav to give him his blessings. Rivka, acting on a prophetic command that the blessings must go to Yaakov, arranges for Yaakov to impersonate Esav and receive the blessings. When Esav in frustration reveals to his father that Yaakov has bought the birthright, Yitzchak realizes that the birthright has been bestowed correctly on Yaakov and confirms the blessings he has given Yaakov. Esav vows to kill Yaakov, so Rivka sends Yaakov to her brother Lavan where he may find a suitable wife.

## LOVE OF THE LAND

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

### THE DESPOT'S DREAM

Life for the Jews in Jerusalem became extremely difficult when a ruffian by the name of Mohammed Farouk took control of the city in 1625. From his fortress in the Citadel of David he conducted a reign of terror which included arrests, floggings and torture in order to force the community to enrich him with ransom money.

Relief from this tyrant finally came on the 12th of Kislev that year. Farouk had a dream in which he saw an old, well-dressed man strangling him. When he screamed and asked



who his attacker was the response he received was "I am King David and you will surely die if you sleep another night in this city."

When he awoke Farouk loaded several camels with the plunder he had extracted from Jerusalem's residents and left the city, never to be heard of again.

The 12th of Kislev thereafter remained a day of celebration in Jerusalem.

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## PARSHA Q&A ?

1. Why was it important that Yitzchak look like Avraham?
2. Why does the Torah stress that Rivka was Betuel's daughter and Lavan's sister?
3. What are the two differences between Tamar's pregnancy and Rivka's pregnancy?
4. Why was Esav named Esav?
5. Who gave Yaakov his name?
6. How did Esav deceive his father?
7. Why was Esav faint when he returned from the field?
8. Why are lentils a food for mourners?
9. What was the birthright that Yaakov bought from Esav?
10. Why was Yitzchak not permitted to go to Egypt?
11. Why did the Philistines plug up the wells?
12. Why did Yitzchak lose his sight? (three reasons)
13. At what age should one anticipate his own death?
14. Why did Rivka ask Yaakov to bring two kid goats?
15. Why did Esav leave his special garments with Rivka?
16. What fragrance did Yitzchak detect on Yaakov's garments?
17. What was the "fat of the land" promised to Esav?
18. When will Esav be freed from subjugation to Yaakov?
19. What inspired Esav to marry the daughter of Yishmael?
20. Knowing that Machalat was Yishmael's daughter, it's self-evident that she was the sister of Nevayot. Why, then, does the Torah state that Esav married "Yishmael's daughter, the sister of Nevayot?"

## PARSHA Q&A!

### Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

1. 25:19 - So everyone would agree that Avraham was indeed his father.
2. 25:20 - To praise her, that even though her family was evil she was righteous.
3. 25:24 - Rivka gave birth at full term to two children, one righteous and one wicked. Tamar gave birth after seven months to two righteous children.
4. 25:25 - He was born fully developed. The name Esav is based on the Hebrew word for "made".
5. 25:26 - G-d.
6. 25:27 - Esav deceived Yitzchak by asking questions that suggested that he was very strict in mitzvah observance.
7. 25:29 - From having murdered.
8. 25:30 - They are round like a wheel and mourning is like a revolving wheel that eventually touches everyone.
9. 25:31 - The right to bring sacrifices.
10. 26:2 - Through the *akeida* he had attained the status of a *korban* and was forbidden to leave Eretz Canaan.
11. 26:15 - They felt that either marauders would attack to capture the wells, or, if attacking for other reasons, they would use the wells as a water supply.
12. 27:1 - a) From the smoke of the incense offered by Esav's wives to their idols; b) From the angel's tears which fell into Yitzchak's eyes at the time of the *akeida*; c) In order for Yaakov to receive the blessings.
13. 27:2 - When he reaches five years from the age his parents were when they passed away, until five years after.
14. 27:9 - One for Yitzchak and the other to offer as a *korban Pesach*.
15. 27:15 - He suspected that his wives might steal them.
16. 27:27 - The scent of *Gan Eden*.
17. 27:36 - Italy.
18. 27:40 - When the Jewish People transgress the Torah.
19. 28:7 - Seeing that his father despised his current wives, he resolved to take a wife from his father's family.
20. 28:9 - To indicate that Yishmael died between her betrothal and her wedding, and that it was Nevayot who gave his sister in marriage to Esav. Knowing the date of Yishmael's death, we can determine the date of Esav's marriage and thus Yaakov's age, 63, at the time of his flight from Esav.

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Based on the Talmudic Sages found in the seven pages of the Talmud studied each week in the Daf Yomi cycle

## SHABBAT 44 - 50

*“One wearing tefillin should have a body as clean as that of Elisha of the Wings.”*

The counsel given here is to avoid falling asleep while wearing tefillin because one is not in complete control of his bodily functions in such a state.

The standard for being careful regarding tefillin was set by a Jew named Elisha, whose care for tefillin was so great that he was blessed with a miracle that saved his life and gave him his nickname. An anti-Semitic decree threatened anyone seen wearing tefillin with death. Elisha defied the decree and was soon pursued by a policeman. He managed to remove the tefillin before being caught, and held them in his hands. To his pursuer’s question he answered that he was holding the wings of a dove. When he was forced to open his hands there were wings of a dove rather than tefillin, and his life was spared.

• *Shabbat 49b*

*“One should daily wash his face, hands and feet for the honor of his Creator.”*

The *beraita* which offers this counsel bases it on a passage in *Mishlei* (16:4) which states that everything G-d created is a reflection of His glory.

Rashi explains that since the Torah (*Bereishet* 9:6) states that man was created in the image of G-d, it is important to ensure that his body should be maintained with dignity.

• *Shabbat 50a*

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## SOUL SEEKER

**From: Ellen**

*Dear Rabbi,  
Does Judaism present any rational proof for its belief in  
the existence of the soul?*

Dear Ellen,

The term “rational proof” is a bit problematic. If you mean conclusive proof, the answer is no. But this should not be surprising; there are many disciplines in which assumptions are operative even though they are not conclusive, all the more so regarding the non-physical realm. On the other hand, lack of conclusive proof doesn’t render the idea irrational – there may still be a rational basis for accepting the belief.

The Kuzari, by Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi, in its discussion of Prophecy versus Philosophy, notes that seekers of the spiritual realm have several advantages over those who pursue a solely rational exploration of the intellect. Prophets perceive truths in both the spiritual and physical world, while also addressing issues that are pertinent to the most refined of people as well as the most simple. The Philosophic approach, however, focuses primarily on subjects of a worldly nature, and appeals only to those of trained and refined intellect. In addition, its great emphasis on critical thinking can degenerate to a cynical rejection of everything, leading its adherents to dissatisfaction and despair.

That being said, let me suggest several “rational” indications for the existence of the soul.

For one, consider the difference between a live body and one immediately after death. Both have the same biology and biochemistry. In both scenarios, the bodies and body parts are exactly the same. Why in one case do the eyes see, the ears hear, the mouth breathes etc., and in the other, the functions of the exact same organs cease? Lest one answer that the biological process of life has been terminated - biologically speaking, there’s absolutely no difference. Furthermore, science itself has no explanation for the mystery of life. Rather, what’s missing is the spiritual charge which energizes and animates the system. In this way, it can be compared to an appliance before and after losing its current. In both scenarios the system is exactly the same — what’s missing is the charge.

Another indication rises from real-life experience. We’ve all been in a situation where in a room full of people, activity and commotion, we have an inexplicable, instinctual and nearly subconscious urge to suddenly turn around, only to find someone we don’t even know to be staring at us. Our

preoccupation with our own thoughts as well as the noise in the room would preclude our seeing or hearing the person we’re being drawn to. Nor do we generally have this sensation, look around, and see no one such that one might argue the phenomenon is random. Rather, just as physical stimuli such as sound, smell and sight are perceived and communicated to us through their relative receptors, so too the intellectual and spiritual stimulus of one’s focused attention is perceived and transmitted through the soul and mind to others.

Similar phenomena which operate on a more long-distance, far-reaching scale include those uncanny instances where we spontaneously think or dream of a person we haven’t seen or thought of for a long time, or something that’s going to happen, and then the person suddenly calls or appears in our lives, or the event actually happens. These and other such premonitions which are experienced universally also indicate that we all have some non-physical component which is aware of, in tune with, perceives and communicates to us information, “activity” and energy in the non-physical realm. In Judaism, this component is referred to as the soul. And by the way, the indisputably universal phenomenon of *deja-vu* is also understood by Judaism to be the soul’s “recalling” to us events, situations, places and people from a previous reincarnation where the current re-interaction gives us the opportunity to repair and correct past misdeeds and shortcomings in order benefit the soul on its journey.

There are many more such indications, but I’ll conclude with a recent personal experience. A saintly rabbi that I was once very close to, Rabbi Yosef Tzeinvert of blessed memory, passed away. On Shabbat around 10 AM in the middle of concentrated prayer, I had a sudden thought of him which was clouded with a feeling of darkness and void. I was afraid to dwell on that feeling, and certainly didn’t express it to anyone. Immediately after Shabbat ended I heard the terrible news that he had in fact passed away shortly before 10. At the funeral procession I shared this with another great rabbi, the Admor of Nadvorna-Bania, Rabbi Moshe Meir Lifer *shlita*, who told me that mystical sources in Judaism teach that when very holy and righteous people pass, they “inform” those who were close to them. A few days later, while visiting the mourners, I told them of my experience and what the Admor had said. Their immediate reaction was, “You have no idea how many people have told us this!” And right after that, a person who was sitting just next to me, whom I did not know exclaimed, “I also came here to share the same experience!” and then he told his story too...

## THE HITCH IN HITCHHIKING

### Question:

A late night appointment in Jerusalem kept me in the city after the last intercity bus had left. I had no way of getting back to my home in Bnei Brak except for hitching a ride, a fairly common practice in Israel. As I stood waiting for what Israelis call a “tramp” at the informal “*trampada*” hitching station at the exit of the city, a fellow hitchhiker rushed ahead of me to grab the ride in the car which stopped near me. Is this the right thing to do?

### Answer:

It all depends on what is the accepted custom at the particular site where hitchhikers wait for catch a ride. In his response to this question, Rabbi Yitzchak Zilberstein, the rav of the Ramat Elchanan community in Beni Brak, distinguished between places where hitchhikers stand in line and

where they each stand a short distance away from each other. Where there is a queue it may be assumed that the driver offering a lift did not have any individual in mind. It is therefore commonly assumed that the one who waited longest deserves first crack. But if there is no queue and the car stops in front of the “trampist” who arrived last, his acceptance of the offered ride cannot be challenged by those who arrived at the site earlier. It may well be that the driver decided for some reason that he was a more desirable passenger, or that it was the *mazal* of that particular hitcher that the car should stop in front of him.

It should be noted, however, that tragic situations have sometimes arisen from a lack of caution in regard to which rides to accept. So be careful that there is no hitch to your hitchhiking.

## THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY \_\_\_\_\_

### THE STRANGE DANCE

**T**he Torah discussion between Rabbi Meir Simcha Hacoen — the rav of the Latvian community of Dvinsk and author of the “Ohr Somayach” — and one of his disciples was interrupted by the arrival of a young couple. The rav invited them into his private chamber while the disciple waited outside.

After a while the sound of singing and dancing came from the rav’s room, arousing the curiosity of his disciple, who rushed to peek through the keyhole. To his surprise he saw the rav and the couple singing and dancing around the table.

After the rav came out of his room and bade the couple

farewell he explained to his disciple what had transpired.

“Don’t be surprised,” he told him, “why I spent so much time with that couple. Their parents are the most respected people of the community and dear friends of mine. For some silly reason the husband came to me the other day asking for a divorce. I asked him to bring his wife to me, and when they arrived I spent a long time convincing the young man to abandon his idea of divorce. When I finally succeeded I decided to put the final touch on domestic peace by dancing around the table with them.”

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