Do Angels Fear To Tread?

...And behold, a ladder was set earthward and its top reached heavenward; and behold! angels of G-d were ascending and descending on it." (28:12)

Mention the word angel and the picture of an improbably non-aerodynamic, overly-plump baby with wings flying around doing target practice with a bow and arrow will probably float into your subconscious.

The word malach in Hebrew is very poorly translated as angel. Really, there is no English word for malach. A malach is an incorporeal spiritual messenger. If this is so, why do angels need a ladder? Presumably they can reach their destination without recourse to such worldly apparatus.

Yaakov is the third of the Patriarchs. Avraham, the first, represents chessed, kindness, going out to people, expansiveness, the emotional way. His son, Yitzchak, represents din, self-control, intellectual analysis, judgment.

Avraham represents the idealist, the person with “his head in the clouds,” the expansive thinker. Yitzchak has “his feet on the ground.” And Yaakov? Yaakov is the ladder between the two. Yaakov is the synthesis.

Yaakov shows that there need be no contradiction between the head and the heart, that emotion and intellect are not at war. Yaakov is the ladder set earthward, with its top reaching to the heavens. On that ladder, that perfect connection between the head and the heart, angels can travel to their appointed destination.

“Only in unity can we fulfill our purpose: To reflect the Oneness of the Creator who unites everything into One.”

Personally, even though my gastronomic opportunities are more limited, I’d rather be a human being.

When we develop a closer relationship with G-d, we develop a sensitivity to the world around us. Song lyrics on the radio which we used to hum, suddenly seem coarse and offensive. Billboards which we never even noticed, now seem incredibly indecent. Our eyes and ears have been opened. Now we smell the difference between garbage and steak.

Rashi tells us that the Torah chose the word “depart” rather than just “go” to tell us that the departure of a righteous person makes an impression. When a righteous person is in town, he illuminates it with his presence. When he leaves, his lack is felt.

The question arises, why didn’t the Torah also use the verb “depart” when Avraham left his birthplace? Surely, when Avraham left Charan, there was the same lack as when Yaakov left Be’er Sheva?

When Avraham left Charan, all he left was a city of idol worshippers, people whose spiritual sensitivity was about the level of a cat. They never perceived Avraham’s spiritual stature when he dwelled amongst them, and thus his departure went unnoticed. When Yaakov left Be’ersheva, however, he left behind his parents, Yitzchak and Rivka. It was upon these spiritual giants that his departure made an impression. Yitzchak and Rivka were sensitive to the barometric difference that Yaakov’s departure caused. The people of Charan, however, couldn’t tell the difference between garbage and steak.

Launch Pad to the Stars

...And behold, a ladder was set earthward and its top reached heavenward; and behold! angels of G-d were ascending and descending on it. And behold! Hashem was standing over him...” (28:12)

The gematria (numerical equivalent) of the word sulam (ladder) is the same as (Mount) Sinai — 130. This is so because Mount Sinai is the ladder that connects the physical and the spiritual. G-d “stood” at the top of the ladder that Yaakov saw in his dream, just as G-d “stood” at the top...
Fleeing 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 a ladder between heaven and earth. Hashem promises him the Land of Israel, that he will find a great nation and that 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 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 the 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. Six 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. Yaakov and Lavan agree to a covenant and Lavan returns home. Yaakov continues on his way to face his brother Esav.

A FRIEND IN HIGH PLACES

“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 thousand 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.

* Based on Ahavas Yehonason in Mayana shel Torah

HAFTORAH: HOSHEA 11:7-14:10

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BEITEL

“He called that place Beit El, but its original name was Luz.” (Bereishis 28:19)

BB

eit El — Luz, where Yaakov had his prophetic dream of a ladder reaching to Heaven, reappears in the Biblical account (Shoftim 1:23) of the tribe of Yosef conquering the city. The entrance to this city was perfectly concealed. A giant luz tree stood in front of a cave which served as the entrance, and only the city’s inhabitants were aware that the tree was hollow and could be walked through. The Hebrew scouts waited until someone exited, and induced him to reveal the entrance by promising him protection from the war they were about to wage against his town.

They thus succeeded in invading and conquering the city, and allowed their guide and his family to safely leave. He went to the Hitite area of the land and established a city which he named Luz. The new Luz was where the techeiles dye for tzitzis was pressed, and its secret location made it invulnerable to the invasions of foreign kings who exiled the inhabitants of all the other cities.

The kindness the guide had shown the Hebrews by just pointing his finger towards the entrance received its ultimate reward in the city’s invulnerability to death itself. When its aged inhabitants grew weary of life, they went outside the walls of the city to die.

The modern Jewish settlement of Beit El, established after the Six-Day War on the approximate site of the ancient city, is fifteen minutes north of Jerusalem and near the Arab city of Ramallah.

I DIDN’T KNOW THAT!

And Lavan gathered all the people of the place and made a feast (lit. drinking repast). (Bereishis 29:22)

Lavan wanted Yaakov to get intoxicated so that he could more easily fool him into marrying Leah. That’s why he made a festive meal which included alcoholic beverages. But when Yaakov married Rachel, Lavan made no feast at all.

Sources:
Do Angels Fear To Tread? - Rabbi Reuven Laufer, Rabbi Menachem Nissel
Top Cat - Chasam Safier
Launch Pad To The Stars - Midrash
Talking Stones - heard from Rabbi Calev Gestenter
Ultimate Name-Dropping - heard from Rabbi Mordechai Perlman

continued from page one
HAVDALAH WITH A DIFFERENCE

When a Yom Tov festival begins motzei Shabbos (Saturday night) the usual havdalah over wine which ushers out the holy day undergoes an addition and a subtraction.

The addition is the kiddush which declares the holiness of the incoming Yom Tov. There is a difference of opinion among the Sages as to which comes first — kiddush or havdalah. We follow the opinion that kiddush comes first. Two reasons for this are offered by the commentators.

One reason is that it is more important to declare the holiness (kiddush) of the Yom Tov than to stress the distinction (havdalah) between Shabbos and all other days. Kiddush therefore deserves precedence.

Another reason for putting havdalah second is that putting it first would create the impression that one is eager to be free of the burden of Shabbos and therefore ushers it out at his earliest opportunity.

The subtraction is in regard to the blessing we usually make on besamim (spices or fragrant substances) in our havdalah. Two reasons are offered by the commentators for deleting this blessing on the eve of a Yom Tov.

One reason is that there is no need for the besamim. The reason we sniff them at the conclusion of a regular Shabbos is to provide comfort for our spiritual essence traumatized by the departure of the neshama yesera (extra dimension of soul) which has been part of us during this soulful holy day. Since we are endowed with a neshama yesera on Yom Tov as well, we suffer no such trauma, and have no need for the comfort of besamim.

Tosefos, however, finds this explanation problematic since it raises the question as to why we do not sniff besamim in the havdalah we make at the conclusion of Yom Tov to comfort us for the loss of our Yom Tov neshama yesera. The alternative explanation offered is that the joy of the Yom Tov and the abundance of delicious food and drink serve the same comforting purpose as besamim and therefore render them redundant.

The GREAT KIDDUSH

Upon his arrival in an unfamiliar community, Rabbi Ashi was honored with saying kiddush on wine Shabbos morning on behalf of the congregation.

"Please say kiddusha rabba for us" they requested. "Kiddusha rabba?" Rabbi Ashi silently pondered. He had never heard that phrase before and he began to wonder what sort of a kiddush was traditionally said in this community. Then he hit on a foolproof plan.

Every kiddush begins with the blessing on wine — "borei pri hagefen." He therefore said that blessing and paused. If no one in the congregation would drink from the cup of wine before him, he would assume that the communal tradition was to say the longer kiddush said on Shabbos eve, and he would continue with its text. When he observed one of the older congregants bending down to partake of his wine, he knew that their tradition was no different from his, and that the kiddush consisted of no more than that one blessing.

But why is this kiddush, which consists of only a single blessing (the passages from Torah and Prophets traditionally recited before the blessing are customary but are not an essential part of the kiddush), called by the paradoxical name of kiddusha rabba — the “great kiddush”?

The Torah commands us to “remember the Shabbos day to sanctify it,” which obligates us to verbally declare its holiness. Our Sages directed us to fulfill this command by making this declaration in the kiddush we say at the onset of the holy day, and therefore designed a special text for it which concludes with the praise of Hashem as the “One Who sanctifies the Shabbos.” Since the Shabbos meal eaten during the day gives more honor to the holy day than the one at night, our Sages commanded us to make a token kiddush before it as well. But in order to distinguish this kiddush of rabbinic origin from the Torah-mandated one at night, they limited its text to the single blessing on wine.

Rashbam (Rabbi Shmuel ben Meir, grandson of Rashi) explains that this kiddush of a single blessing is accorded this grandiose title because it is the universal opening for every Shabbos and Festival kiddush.

Rabbeinu Nissim (RaN) takes an almost opposite approach by suggesting that this title is a euphemism to cover up the brevity of the kiddush, in the same way that we euphemistically refer to a blind person as “one with much light.”

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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?

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SHERLOX HOMES AND THE MYSTERY OF REUVEN

“Little Falswell will have an inferiority complex when he grows up,” said world famous detective Sherlox Holmes.

“How do you figure?” asked Watstein.

“His mother constantly compares him to her other children. Comparing siblings always causes problems.”

“Speaking of problems with mothers and children,” said Watstein, “Help me with this problematic text concerning Leah and her son Reuven: ‘And she called him Reuven, for she said: G-d has seen my affliction...’” (Bereishis 29:32).

“What’s problematic?” asked Sherlox.

“Rashi’s comment. According to Rashi, Reuven stands for ‘reu ben’ — ‘look at the difference’; with this name, Leah prophetically declared: ‘Look at the difference between my righteous first born, Reuven, and Yitzchak’s evil firstborn, Esav.’”

“Do you deny Leah her natural right as a mother to brag about her children?”

“No. But I deny the right of anyone to say that Rashi quotes a midrash for no reason! The verse itself clearly gives a reason for Reuven’s name! Why, then, does Rashi bring a midrashic reason for no apparent reason?”

“Comparing siblings always causes problems,” said Sherlox.

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.
**LIGHTEN UP**

Leora from South Africa  
<613@netactive.co.za> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

I have 2 questions: I have a non-observant guest who comes to me every Friday night and sleeps here. She will switch off the light if it’s on when she goes to sleep, and if the light is off when she comes into the room, she will switch it on. Is it better for me to leave it on, knowing she will switch it off (one Shabbat violation), or is it better for me to leave it off knowing she will switch it on and off (thus doing two Shabbat violations)? I know that even if I try explain to her not to do anything with the light, she won’t listen.

My second question is, what is the purpose of writing “beit, samech, daled” at the top of the page? And when is it necessary? Thank you.

Dear Leora,

If those were your only choices, then it would be better to leave the light on. That way she will only do one prohibited act instead of two.

But there are other options. (Don’t worry, I won’t suggest removing the light bulb. I assume you’ve thought of that and decided it wasn’t an option!) Get a “Shabbat clock” (a timer) which turns the lights on and off automatically. Any hardware store has them. Till then, how about lighting a candle in a safe place before Shabbat? Candles are the original Shabbat clocks, shutting themselves off automatically! Get the proper length candle, timed to extinguish approximately when she usually goes to sleep.

Or, how about a small fluorescent desk lamp which she can cover with an upside down waste basket? (Caution must be taken against fire, even with a fluorescent bulb.)

Regarding your second question, “beit, samech, daled” stands for b’siyat d’Shmaya, Aramaic for “with G-d’s help.” It’s a custom to write it on top of the page as a prayer for success in what we are about to write, but it’s not an absolute requirement. I’ve never noticed anyone writing it when they write a check. Before an exam, I used to make sure to write it right on top of the form.

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**MAKE ME AN OFiR**

Name@Withheld wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

I am asking this question for a friend at work. His wife is expecting a baby boy and he asked me whether the name Ofir (Bereishet 10:29) is OK to use. He and his wife are both Jewish, anti-religious and want a name from the Bible. However, they do not want any names that sound too religious. For example he does not want the name Yeshayahu, etc. Ofir is the name of one of Yoktan’s sons. They are asking for a rabbi’s opinion because I told them sometimes people mistakenly choose names of wicked people or unclean animals.

(He did say that the name Nimrod sounds nice and is becoming popular in Israel.) Ofir’s lineage does not apparently lead to any righteous people mentioned in the Torah. Someone said that it is not good to use a name that is not of a righteous person. Can you shed light on what names should be used from the Tanach?

Dear Name@Withheld,

According to the Chida in the name of our Sages, one should avoid using names of people from before the time of Avraham. Ofir was before Avraham. However, many people are named Noach, which is apparently an exception.

Regarding names in general, the verse states “zechor tzadik livrocha, v’hem resham yirkav.” The Talmud sees this verse as a support for our custom not to use names of wicked people. Thus it’s wrong to name a person Nimrod, especially since Nimrod tried to murder Avraham, the founder of the Jewish nation. It would be like naming a child Haman or Adolf.

How about Efraim?

Sources:
- Mishlei 1:7
- Tractate Yoma 38b

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**LUZ-ERS ARE WINNERS**

Dr. Aharon Altabe from Paris, France <aharon@club-internet.fr> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

The Sefer Ta’amei Haminhagim states in the name of Eliyahu Rabbi and Zohar that there is a bone in the brain which never vanishes. You can’t burn it, break it or mill it. I believe it b’emuna shelema — with utmost faith — but I would like to know if someone could tell me more about it: Did you see it or read about it or hear a Rav … or a physician who could give the name of such a bone? Thanks to you.

Dear Dr. Aharon Altabe,

Yes, according to tradition there is a kind of bone or organ no bigger than a barley corn called the luz or neski; its shape is almost cubic and apparently it lies at the top of the spine, inside the skull underneath the brain. It is described as having within it many intertwined spider-like blood vessels.

It has curious properties: It receives nourishment only from food eaten Saturday night at the melave malka meal. And, yes, it is indestructible and doesn’t decay in the grave. The Midrash says that the Roman Hadrian once took a luz and tried to grind it, burn it, and dissolve it in water, to no avail. When he hammered it against an anvil, the hammer and anvil broke!

The future resurrection of the dead will be from this bone; that is, a
person will be resurrected from his luz bone.

The idea behind it is this: The luz symbolizes the point where physical and spiritual meet. Thus, it is nourished only from melave malka, the meal eaten between the spiritual Shabbat and the physical weekday. It's like the Western Wall: Just as the Western Wall will never be destroyed, and from it the Third Temple will be built, so too the luz is never destroyed, and from it the person will be re-built during the future resurrection.

Regarding the precise identity of the bone, I advise asking Dr. Eli Temstet from Paris. I am sure he can be of help.

Sources
• Sefer Ta'améi Haminhagim 425
• Bereishit Rabbah 25
• Mishna Berurah 300:2

JACOB’S RIGHT

Jeff <JRKatz@aol.com> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

In last week’s Parsha summary (Toldot) you wrote: “Esav rushes in, ravenous from a hard day’s hunting, and sells his birthright (and its concomitant spiritual responsibilities) for a bowl of soup, clearly demonstrating his unworthiness for the position of the firstborn.” Why didn’t Yaakov simply give his brother something to eat? Wouldn’t that be the brotherly (not to mention humanly decent) thing to do? I do, however, understand how selling the birthright for food demonstrated his unworthiness.

Dear Jeff,

You’re asking a good question. Interestingly enough, there’s no clear indication from the text that Yaakov withheld food from Esav.

On the contrary, the verses indicate that Yaakov actually did give Esav the food immediately. The verse says: “He sold his birthright to Yaakov, and Yaakov had already given Esav bread and lentils...” According to the rules of Hebrew grammar, “had given” is past perfect: When Esav sold the birthright for money, Yaakov had already given him free food!

But assuming that Yaakov withheld the food, why would he do that? The Talmud states: “Said Rabbi Yochanan: Five sins that wicked one (Esav) transgressed on that day — adultery, murder, heresy, denial of the future resurrection and despising of the birthright.”

Yaakov knew who his brother was. Esav was totally unworthy to serve G-d. He would desecrate that service. Esav was a fraud. The very fact that Esav sold the birthright showed just how unworthy of it he was. Therefore, Yaakov saw this opportunity as an obligation to relieve Esav of the birthright.

Sources:
• Haktav V’Halakalla 25:31
• Tractate Bava Batra 15b

PUBLIC DOMAIN

Comments, quibbles and reactions concerning previous “Ohrnet” features

Re: Non-Jewish Spouse (Ohrnet Vayera):

A recent Torah Weekly article titled “Body and Soul” refers to “saving souls” and to the intermarriage rate in the US (it is probably similar in Canada). My comment/question is, could we not consider this situation an opportunity as well? That is, if we are judicious and caring in our efforts to bring these people back to Yiddishkeit (or for the non-Jewish spouse, to convert them), could we not strengthen our People, both in numbers and vitality? I recognize the difficulties associated with this course of action, and the need to attempt it with sensitivity and understanding. I hardly advocate seeking converts for the purpose of increasing our numbers. However, since we are presented with the situation, would it not be right to try and “win” two “strong” Jews as opposed to “losing” one “weak” one?

Name@Withheld from Thornhill, Ontario, Canada

Ohrnet responds:

Each situation is unique and halachic guidance must be sought in each individual case.

Re: Moon Worship (Ohrnet Vayera):

Regarding kiddush levanah being mistaken for moon worship, it is interesting that the ArtScroll Siddur notes that many congregations recite aleinu following kiddush levanah to publicly refute this idea, since a basic statement in aleinu is “it is only to G-d that we pray.”

Stanley Nachamie, JLE Israel Summer ’88
<STNBH@CUNYVM.CUNY.EDU>

Re: Ask the Rabbi’s Interactive Email:

Thank you, Ask the Rabbi, for your kind and sensitive (and speedy) response to my questions. What a wonderful service! Truly Heaven sent!

Maddi Yaacobi, Hollywood, Florida
<zohary@icanect.net>
Judging favorably helps avoid igniting the forbidden fire of anger, especially on Shabbos. Shabbos is Hashem’s special gift. It’s ...

AN OFFER YOU CAN’ T RE-FUSE

For the aufruf (Shabbat pre-wedding celebration kiddush) of our son, we hired a small hall in the basement of a yeshiva. On Friday, on our way to carry cartons of stuff into the hall, I met a friend who warned us: “Be careful, the electricity there has a tendency to overload and pop the fuse. Several people had to make do with cold kugel at their kiddush.” After taking precautions and checking the electricity long in advance, we usher in the Shabbos. We had a great evening meal. In the morning as we prepare for the kiddush, my wife tells me that the hot plates and the air conditioning are off.

Baruch Hashem, it apparently happened that morning, since everything was still warm. But I asked myself: “Why can’t the hall’s managers improve their maintenance?”

After Shabbos as we pack up, my wife shows me that the wire of one of the hot plates was melted due to contact with the hotplate. The short circuit had been caused by my own carelessness in setting up the hot plate!

By the way, when I approached the hall manager to offer to fix their hot plate at my own expense, he said: “These accidents are part of the deal!” and had his assistant fix it at no cost to me!

• An Ohrnet Reader Concept based on “The Other Side of the Story” by Yehudis Samet, ArtScroll Series

YIDDLE RIDDLE

The Year 2000 will, G-d willing, be very special; so much so that we will not fast on Asara b’Tevet (the Tenth of Tevet) that year. Why not? (Ohrnet’s note: The Tenth of Tevet commemorates the beginning stage of the destruction of the Temple. It never occurs on Shabbat). Answer next week...

• Submitted by Zvi Freund <miltonf@villagenet.com>

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SHERLOX ANSWER!

“Compare Reuven’s naming to that of his brothers,” said Sherlox. “Notice anything?”

“Hmm,” said Watstein, thumbing through the text. “Now that you mention it, I notice an oddity regarding the order of the naming.”

“Continue,” said Sherlox.

“At the birth of Yaakov’s other sons, the reason for the name is stated first. Then the name is stated: ‘This time I will praise (odeh) G-d, therefore she called him Yehuda,’ or ‘G-d has judged me (dan-ani)...therefore she called him Dan.’ ” (Bereishis 29:35 30:5) Reuven is the one exception!”

“Exactly,” said Sherlox. “Regarding Reuven the order is reversed: Leah first names him — ‘and she called him Reuven’ — and only as an “afterthought” does she give a reason — ‘for G-d has seen my affliction....’ Thus the text indicates that her decision to name him Reuven preceded the stated reason. She must have had another, unstated reason.”

“I see,” said Watstein. “By reversing the order, the text hints that the name Reuven came first and that the stated reason was secondary. Leah would have named him Reuven regardless of the stated reason, because she had another reason not stated in the text. Rashi answers the question: What was her other reason?”

“Spoken with reason,” said Sherlox.

• Based on Haemek Davar Sherlox by Reuven Subar

Inspired by “What’s Bothering Rashi” by Rabbi Avigdor Bonchek

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