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PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

The Best Cholent In The World

“Sarah’s lifetime was...” (23:1)

A few years ago, on Shabbat afternoon, I was asked to speak to group of young boys and girls who were about to go into the IDF. To prepare them better for their leadership roles, they join what are known as *mechinot k'dam tzva'i*. Part of their preparation is to come into contact with sections of Israeli society they would not normally meet.

This particular Shabbat, they were being hosted by Orthodox families in our area. They were all intelligent and articulate, the *crème de la crème* of Israeli secular society. For the most part, they had never had an in-depth encounter with someone Orthodox. I emphasized to them that as a Jew I have an obligation to love and respect every Jew as my brother and sister, and that Orthodox Jews care and love their secular neighbors, even though this may not be immediately apparent. The gulf between the two worlds is not easy to bridge, but that afternoon I felt I made some headway.

Towards the end of my presentation, one of the young ladies accused me of not being a typical Orthodox person.

“You don’t seem judgmental to me,” she said. “At lunch, my hostess made me feel like ‘an empty wagon.’”

I’m not sure if she realized it, but that phrase “an empty wagon” was part of an historical argument between the Chazon Ish and the then Prime Minister of Israel, David Ben Gurion. Ben Gurion went to Bnei Brak to try and reach a compromise

about yeshiva students serving in the army. He asked the Chazon Ish how the two communities could find a way to live together and the Chazon Ish responded, by quoting from the Gemara in Sanhedrin: “If two wagons meet each other while on the ascent to Bet-Horon, how then should they act? If one is laden and the other empty, the empty wagon should give way to the former.”

The Chazon Ish said that the Torah observant Jew is like a wagon laden with the tradition and customs of centuries, and the secular community should give way to it.

Sometimes, in our sincere desire to bring our Jewish brothers and sisters close to Yiddishkeit, we might possibly come off as somewhat condescending. No real relationship can start with an agenda. However intense my desire to bring those who are far away, close to the *Shechina*, if I treat my fellow Jew as a mitzvah waiting to be done, if I treat him or her like an Etrog, I will end up with a lemon.

In this week's Torah portion, the two greatest outreach workers in history pass from the world's stage. Avraham and Sarah. In Parshat Lech Lecha, the Torah speaks of 'the souls they (Avraham and Sarah) made in Charan.'" Rashi explains that these were the converts whom Avraham and Sarah brought under the wings of the Divine Presence. Avraham and Sarah brought them to a belief in Hashem. How is it then that Noach spent one hundred and twenty years, while building the ark, trying to make the people repent, and not a single one did?

When I was young, I remember a fellow walking up and down Oxford Street in the center of London, wearing a placard that read, "Repent while ye can! The end of the world is nigh!" The rush of commuters past him testified to his singular lack of success. Noach spent 120 years building an ark, the equivalent of a placard proclaiming the end of the world. Avraham and Sarah opened up a hostel which served the best cholent in the world.

Kindness isn't kindness unless it's unstinting and unconditional.

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.

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?

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

Take a Drink

When Abraham's servant travelled to the Land of Aram to find a suitable mate for Abraham's son Isaac, the servant was determined to find the right girl by seeking somebody who engages in the sort of kindness that matches Abraham's own comportment. He decided that if he asks a girl to drink water from her jug, and the girl in turn offers to let him and his camels drink, then this shows that she has mastered the trait of kindness and is a suitable match for Isaac. Of course, it was Rebecca who fit that exact description. The Bible uses three different words for the verb "to drink."

In some cases, it uses cognates of *l'shtot*, whether to denote the servant himself drinking (Gen. 24:14, 24:18, 24:44, 24:46) or his camels drinking (Gen. 24:19, 24:22). In other cases, it uses cognates of *l'hashkot*, again whether to denote the servant himself drinking (Gen. 24:18, 24:19, 24:43, 24:45) or his camels drinking (Gen. 24:14, 24:46). And in one case the servant himself uses the word *hagmi'ini* to mean "allow me to drink" (Gen. 24:17). What, if anything, are the differences between these seemingly synonymous terms?

A close analysis of the terms in question and how they are used in the Bible actually shows that they do not quite mean the same thing. Inflections of the infinitive verb *l'hashkot* appear over 60 times in the Bible, and not only apply to humans and animals drinking, but to the watering of the land. Moreover, *l'hashkot* does not actually refer to the act of drinking itself, but to the act of "providing [water] for another to drink/be quenched." It is thus almost always in the *hifil* form. By contrast, inflections of the infinitive verb *l'shtot* appear over 220 times in the Bible, referring exclusively to humans and animals drinking. Moreover, *l'shtot* always refers to the act of drinking itself, not the act of providing another with something to drink.

Nonetheless, these differences do not resolve the differences between the synonyms, they only compound the question. Why does the Hebrew language use two different roots for "drinking," one as an active verb ("to drink") and one as a causative verb ("to make someone else drink")? To make the case stronger, the Hebrew words for "eating" and "feeding" are both derived from the same trilateral root, ALEPH-KAF-LAMMED, "eating" is *l'echol* and "feeding" is *l'ha'achil*. Yet, when it comes to "drinking" there are two different roots. Why is this so? Additionally, why does the active verb *l'shtot* apply only to human and animals, and the causative verb *l'hashkot* apply even to flora? I have wondered about these questions for years but have not yet found a satisfactory answer. Nonetheless, we can gain some insights into the words in question by examining their etymologies and visiting the core meanings of their ultimate roots.

To read the rest of this article, please visit us online at:

https://ohr.edu/this_week/whats_in_a_word/

COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

The Amidah (Part 25) – The Final Blessing: Peace (part 1)

“Prayer is not a miracle. It is a tool, man’s paintbrush in the art of life. Prayer is man’s weapon to defend himself in the struggle of life. It is a reality. A fact of life”
(Rabbi Avraham Chaim Feuer)

The nineteenth blessing reads: “Establish peace, goodness, blessing, graciousness, kindness and compassion upon us and upon all of Your people Israel. Bless us, our Father, all of us as one, with the light of Your Countenance You gave us, our Hashem, the Torah of life and a love of kindness, righteousness, blessing, compassion, life and peace. And may it be good in Your eyes to bless Your people Israel in every season and in every hour with Your peace. Blessed are You, Hashem, Who blesses His people Israel with peace.”

We conclude the blessings of the Amidah with, perhaps, the most beautiful and uplifting entreaty of all: Hashem bestowing peace upon us. What could be more apt for concluding our recitation of the Amidah than with the request to merit to living in a state of spiritual and physical tranquility so we can serve Hashem without distractions.

If we look closely, there seems to be an anomaly. The previous blessing is the Blessing of Thanksgiving. If we have already thanked Hashem, why are we now asking Him for something else? More than that, the blessings in the Amidah are arranged in a manner which “gains momentum” as we reach upwards in our pursuit of our spiritual aspirations. The most exalted moment of our connection is when we ask Hashem for peace. So, how can we recite the Blessing of Thanksgiving as if we have reached the end of the Amidah, and then afterwards – almost as an afterthought – turn to Hashem with not just another request, but with the most significant request of all?

The Amidah is the most sublime moment in our daily prayers. As we recite the Amidah, the Divine Presence appears in front of us. The Heavenly Gates open so that our most heartfelt desires can be heard. When recited with intent and concentration, the Amidah becomes the vehicle through which the Divine goodness flows down into our physical world and into our lives. The Amidah becomes our conduit to unlimited blessings and infinite goodness. And when we give thanks for everything that He has given us, it is as if we are telling Hashem that it is enough. The words “thank you” carry with them a certain sense of finality. We are saying that whatever was done for us is sufficient.

However, one could reason that as we bask in the Divine abundance that the Amidah grants us access to, the last thing that we want to do is to give Hashem the impression that He has given us enough and that He shouldn’t continue to shower us with His beneficence. But, on the other hand, we have an absolute obligation to give thanks to the only One who can grant us our desires. So, the Men of the Great Assembly, in their great wisdom, composed the Blessing for Peace, and instead of placing it *before* the Blessing of Thanksgiving, they deliberately put it immediately afterwards. Placing it *before* the Blessing of Thanksgiving would mean that we do not want or need more Divine blessings. And nothing could be further from the truth!

Rabbi Klonimus Kalman Epstein (1753-1825) was one of the most influential leaders of the Chassidic movement in Poland. He was one of the closest disciples of the revered Rebbe Elimelech of Lizhensk,

who sent Rabbi Klonimus Kalman to become the spiritual leader of the Chassidic community in Krakow. Towards the end of his life, Rabbi Klonimus Kalman asked that his insights into the revealed and the hidden Torah be published. His son eventually succeeded in printing his father's works under the title *Meor v'Shemesh*, which became a classic work studied by both Chassidim and non-Chassidim. There he writes the following idea. Our Matriarch Leah named her fourth son Yehuda because "This time let me gratefully praise Hashem" (*Ber.* 29:35). The verse continues, "Therefore she called his name Yehuda; and she stopped giving birth." Rabbi Klonimus Kalman writes that he heard from Rabbi Yaakov Yitzchak HaLevi, the Chief Rabbi of Lublin, that Leah "stopped giving birth" because by thanking Hashem *and not asking for more* it was as if she was declaring that she was satisfied with what she had and she did not need more.

Perhaps this can explain the seemingly odd meaning behind the name that Rachel gives her first son. Rachel has watched her sister Leah give birth to six boys. Bilhah and Zilpah, Leah and Rachel's maidservants, have each given birth to another two boys. And, at long last, after an agonizing wait, it is Rachel's turn. After having despaired that she would ever merit having a child of her own, she finally gives birth to a son. Rachel calls him Yosef as a plea that, "May Hashem add on for me another son" (*Ibid.*

30:24). It always struck me as strange that Rachel didn't follow Leah's lead and give her son a name that reflected her immeasurable thankfulness to Hashem for having granted her most heartfelt desire. Instead, Rachel chose to give a name that highlighted, not her gratitude to Hashem, but, rather, her passionate desire for another child. However, according to the explanation of the *Meor v'Shemesh*, perhaps it is possible to understand why Rachel did as she did. Using a name that signified her gratitude to Hashem might have given the mistaken impression that she had been granted enough blessing and did not want more. Unquestionably, Rachel's feelings of indebtedness to Hashem were immeasurable, but she did not want to do anything that might inadvertently be the cause of her not being able to have another child. Therefore, she called him Yosef, meaning to say: "May Hashem add on for me another son."

Consequently, we find ourselves with the same dilemma. We must thank Hashem for everything He has given us. And we must thank Him for everything He is going to give us. And we must thank Hashem for being the only Entity capable of giving us what we desire. This is exactly what the Blessing of Thanksgiving does. And then, to ensure that we do not end the Amidah with the misconception that what we have already received is enough, we ask for more. Without pausing for a moment, we ask Hashem to bless us with the most precious entity of all – peace.

To be continued...

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TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Nedarim 9-15

Nourishing the Soul

“Against which *nefesh* did this person sin? He ‘suffered’ by forbidding himself to drink wine.”

In this manner Rabbi Elazar Hakapar explains why the Torah calls a *nazir* a “sinner” (Bamidbar 6:11). He even takes this a step further by saying: “And if this person is called a sinner for not drinking wine, one who abstains from everything (i.e. fasts unnecessarily) – all the more so!”

In Judaism, the physical is not evil and is not an illusion. It is real, but it is not all of our reality. The body created by Hashem is morally neutral, meant to be used as a vehicle for spiritual and moral accomplishments. Far from ignoring the physical, we are commanded to nourish and care for our physical bodies in every way. Even nonessential needs are to be gratified as long as this is done appropriately. In order to live a healthy life, human beings must experience pleasure in addition to having their basic needs satisfied. Judaism considers it a sin to deny oneself permissible physical pleasures.

- *Nedarim 10a*

Forbidding the Forbidden

“If a person who makes a *neder* by comparing a certain object to *terumah*, the object is still permitted to him (the *neder* is not effective).”

This is one of numerous scenarios taught in the *mishna* on our *daf* in which his words do not create a prohibition of the object to him by means of his “*neder*”. The reason is because a *neder* is only effective if the person compares the object he wishes to forbid to himself to something which is not inherently forbidden, as opposed to comparing it to something that can become forbidden by making a *neder*.

The Rishonim ask why *terumah* is not something which is made forbidden by the person who separates it and therefore would qualify to be a suitable object to make a comparison to in his *neder*. One approach is that the person really separates the *terumah* but does not cause it to become forbidden. It is the Torah that forbids it to one who is not a *kohen*. (Rabbeinu Nissim)

Another approach is that *terumah* is not made *forbidden* by the separation and declaration of the person. Even before the person took *terumah* it was forbidden because it was *tevel*. On the contrary, when he took *terumah* he made it permitted, at least to *kohanim*. (Tosefot and Rabbeinu Asher on 12a)

- *Nedarim 13a*

PEREK SHIRA: The Song of Existence

by Rabbi Shmuel Kraines

THE SONG OF THE STORK

The Stork says: “*Speak to the heart of Yerushalayim, and call out to her, [saying] that her measure has been filled. For her sin has been pardoned, for she has taken from Hashem’s hand twofold for all of her sins.*” (Yeshayah 40:2).

The stork has the longest wingspan of all birds, reaching up to 3.2 meters, with which it can soar across great distances. The prophet Yirmiyahu castigated his generation for lacking the intuition to follow Hashem’s mitzvahs and avoid danger, contrasting them to the stork, which migrates to escape harsh winter climates. Unlike passerine migratory birds who fly solely by instinct, storks memorize their routes, learning from older storks. Yet, that generation strayed from the path of their parents and became lost. The stork’s migratory route crosses through Eretz Yisrael, and therefore serves as a vivid symbol of this lesson.

The stork returns to the northern hemisphere without fail at the dawn of spring, which symbolizes how we will return after our winter-like exile as well. In this way it comforts us that our “measure has been filled,” that is, the allotted years of our exile will have reached its end and we will be redeemed.

The song continues, “for her sin has been pardoned,” meaning, we may be redeemed earlier if we repent and merit Hashem’s forgiveness. The stork’s virtuous conduct alludes to this eventuality as well. Storks share food with each other, and they are known to be particular regarding the loyalty of their mates. Its very name “*chasidah*” is related to the word “*chessed*” – kindness, which the Kabbalists associate with the stork’s white color. “*Chasidah*” is also related to the words “*chassidus*” (devoutness) and “*chasa*” (pity). The stork thus indicates that if we live with virtuously, Hashem will hasten our return.

Conversely, if the Jewish people do not repent, Hashem may choose to hasten the redemption by intensifying the exile, as the stork’s song concludes, “for she has received from Hashem’s hand twofold for all of her sins.”

- *Sources: Based on the following sources: Yirmiyah 8:7 and Malbim; Chullin 63a; Perek B'Shir; Shir HaChaim; Midrash Shocheh Tov 104, Mahari Kohen, Aderes Eliyahu (Shemini), and Otzar HaYedios. Wikipedia. See also Sifsei Renanos and Daas Shalom.*

**In loving memory of Harav Zeev Shlomo ben Zecharia Leib*

LETTER AND SPIRIT

Insights based on the writings of Rav S.R. Hirsch by Rabbi Yosef Herschman

Marriage and Love

Love and marriage, the lyrics teach, *go together like a horse and carriage*. If the implication is that love is the horse and marriage is the carriage, Judaism will disagree.

The vast majority of this week's Torah portion concerns itself with the story of Yitzhak and Rivka's courtship and marriage. When Rivka returns with Avraham's servant Eliezer, Yitzhak marries her, and for the first time, the Torah describes *love* between a man and wife: *Yitzhak brought [Rivka] into the tent of Sarah, his mother. He married Rivka, she became his wife, and he loved her, and only then was Yitzhak comforted for his mother.*

Notice how the marriage *precedes* the love. First, he brings her into his mother's tent, then he marries her, then she *becomes* his wife, and only *then* does he love her. This marriage of the first Jewish son describes the model formation of a Jewish marriage, built on foundations of reason, judgment and emotional compatibility – and not on the basis of passion or sensuality.

For centuries the Jewish way has been for parents and relatives to consider whether the two young people are suited to each other – based on their character, commitments, life visions, goals, temperaments. If the

couple indeed finds those sparks of connection, their *love* forms after they marry, and that love increases as they come to know each other. The more Rivka *came to be his wife*, the more Yitzhak loved her.

When blind “love” – driven by ungrounded physical or emotional passion – is the starting point of commitment in marriage, often, each step deeper into the relationship brings with it new disillusionment.

Not so in the Jewish marriage, where love is the *culmination*, not the beginning of the relationship. *[Yitzhak] married Rivka, she became his wife, and he loved her.* Marriage is only the beginning.

The next words, writes Rav Hirsch, “have remained and will remain unsurpassed in beauty and glory” until the end of time: *and then [Yitzhak] was comforted for his mother.* A forty-year old man, inconsolable over the death of his aged mother, finds consolation in his wife! With Sarah's death, the nurturing feminine spirit – the spirit that guides and molds and supports and cares – departed from the home. It is this spirit that is the connection that man truly seeks when he goes out in search of “love.” His tent has been filled again, and so has his heart.

Source: Commentary, Genesis 24:67

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