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PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

LEAVE THE LOBBUS TO GROW

“And the lads grew up...” (25:27)

To the best of my knowledge, the word ‘lobbus’ is a word that only British Jews recognize. I’m assuming it’s Yiddish but I’ve yet to meet an American Jew, or a Jew from anywhere else for that matter who knows what it means.

A *lobbus* is a naughty young boy, the sort who gets himself into scrapes and narrow escapes. He’s not bad but he’s ‘a bit of a lobbus.’

Why this word should be exclusively used by British Jews is a mystery to me. I can think of no other word in Yiddish (mind you that’s not saying a lot) that is local to only one region, especially since Jews from the States and the UK share English, the *lingua franca* of the world.

Yaakov was a ‘lobbus.’ Rashi says that until the age of Bar Mitzvah, he and Esav were similar to one another. Now, either this means that they were both angels, which I doubt, seeing as how Esav very shortly afterwards became an idol worshiper, rapist and murderer. (Ber. Rabbah 63:12). Therefore, it seems that young Yitzchak was not an absolute angel since he was ‘similar’ to his brother.

I think there is a lesson here for us parents. It’s easy to be panicked when our children don’t seem to be ‘toeing the line,’ especially when that line can be extremely narrow. With the inroads into our culture of the known new-age era’s ‘Weapons of Mass Distraction,’ our reaction is often to overreact and push our children in the direction we most fear.

The Brisker Rav was once asked how he had been successful in raising illustrious and holy children. He replied (in Yiddish), “Prayer with tears.”

Children, let us not forget, are people as well. One can only pray that they choose to dominate the Esav in them and follow their higher selves.

PARSHA OVERVIEW

After 20 years of marriage, Yitzchak's prayers are answered and Rivka conceives twins. The pregnancy is extremely painful. Hashem 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 on to 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 firstborn.

A famine strikes Canaan and Yitzchak thinks of escaping to Egypt, but Hashem 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 redigs three wells that were dug by his father, prophetically alluding to the three future Temples. Avimelech, seeing that Yitzchak is blessed by Hashem, 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, and so Rivka sends Yaakov to her brother Lavan where he could find a suitable wife.

Questions

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"?

Answers

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 angels 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.

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

The Doers and Fighters

Back in November 2021, the inimitable Rabbi David Bashevkin of the OU challenged his Twitter followers to consider the following question: "What's the difference between a *shtadlan* and an *askan*?" Both Hebrew terms refer to those tireless individuals who busy themselves with public service and helping out the community-at-large. But how do these terms differ from one another? This essay explores precisely that question and — instead of the witty answers offered by Rabbi Bashevkin's followers — offers a serious look at the words' respective etymologies for clues.

The term *askan* seemingly comes from the root AYIN-SAMECH-KUF, but where do we find such a root in the Hebrew language?

The Torah recounts a series of incidents between the shepherds employed by Isaac and those employed by Abimelekh (Philistine king of Gerar), in which the former dug wells, and the latter tried to usurp control of those wells. In telling this story, the Torah relates that Isaac called the first well *Esek*, because Abimelekh's shepherds "had fought" (*hitasku*) with him (Gen. 26:20). The name *Esek* and the verb *hitasku* are the only two instances of the three-letter root AYIN-SIN-KUF in all of the Bible.

In the Mishna, verb forms of *esek* refer to somebody who was "busy dealing with" something, which often causes one to do another action only haphazardly and unawares (see *Shekalim* 6:2, *Rosh HaShanah* 4:8, *Sotah* 1:9, *Kiddushin* 4:14, *Eduyot* 2:5, *Kritot* 4:3, *Taharot* 7:8, *Nidah* 8:2, and *Zavim* 2:2). From this sense of the term, the act of "toiling" in Torah Study came to be known as *osek b'divrei Torah*, and noun forms of the word refer to specific "matters" or "affairs" with which one might have to deal (*Maaser Sheini* 4:7, *Shabbat* 23:4). When the Mishna says that the rabbis wanted to make a "big deal" out of the cutting of the Omer, the term used in the Mishna is *esek gadol* (*Menachot* 10:3). In other contexts, the Targumim use cognates of *esek* (for examples, see Gen. 12:17, 20:11, 20:18, Joshua 14:6) or *iska* (Ecc. 3:1, 3:18, 7:8, 8:2) when discussing any matter with which one must deal, or to which one must otherwise attend.

Rabbi Binyamin Mussafia (1606-1675) in *Mussaf HaAruch* writes that *esek* in the rabbinic sense of "busy, preoccupied" actually derives from Greek, but he does not provide us with a cognate Greek word that relates to this concept. Dr. Alexander Kohut (1842-1894) in his *Aruch HaShaleim* presumes that Rabbi Mussafia was referring to the Greek word ἀσχέω (pronounced *áschéō*) which, according to Google Translate, means "I don't care" — possibly what a busy person who is already doing one thing feels about doing something else.

However, Kohut rejects this etymology and instead assumes that the Rabbinic Hebrew sense of this root derives from its original Biblical Hebrew meaning. According to this understanding, the SIN of the Biblical Hebrew root AYIN-SIN-KUF morphs into a SAMECH in Rabbinic Hebrew to become AYIN-SAMECH-KUF. The interchangeability of the Biblical SIN with the Rabbinic SAMECH is not at all unusual.

To read the rest of this article, visit us online at: http://ohr.edu/this_week/whats_in_a_word/

COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

The Amidah (Part 26) – The Final Blessing: Peace (part 2)

“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.

Our blessing opens with a plea that Hashem “establish peace, graciousness, kindness and compassion.” Rabbi Yosef Albo (1380-1444), the brilliant Spanish Torah scholar renowned for his masterpiece *Sefer HaIkrim*, defines “graciousness, kindness and compassion” as stages a person goes through in their spiritual development. When a person focuses on self-growth and becoming a better person, they become the recipient of Hashem’s graciousness. However, there are times when continuous growth is too difficult to sustain. At those times, even though there is no recent additional growth, if a person succeeds in holding on to the levels that they have previously reached, Hashem relates to them with kindness. And there are moments when a person’s connection to Hashem is so weakened by their negative actions that they actually move away from Hashem. Even under those circumstances, Hashem is compassionate and patient.

Rabbi Eliezer Horowitz (d.1806) was the rabbi in Tarnograd, Poland. He was a disciple of Rabbi Elimelech of Lizhensk. He was renowned for his

deep analytical thinking and for his riveting Torah teachings to the public. After his passing, a book of his Torah thoughts and innovative insights was published under the title of *Noam Megadim u’Chevod HaTorah*. In the Torah portion of *Nasso*, he questions how it is possible for us to ask Hashem to fulfill *all* our needs and desires. Due to our never-ending demands, it is impossible for us to delineate them all. Therefore, he explains that our blessing entreats Hashem that we be blessed with “the light of Your Countenance” because when Hashem illuminates our lives, we will merit experiencing all the goodness that there is to be had in our physical world.

It is, however, perhaps somewhat *chutzpadik* for us to imagine that we can ask Hashem to illuminate our lives when, at the very same time, we may not be living our lives in exactly the way Hashem demands from us. Rabbi Elya Lopian explains that this is the reason why our blessing speaks of “love of kindness.” It is not enough to *perform* acts of kindness. Rather, we have to aspire to reach the level of *loving* kindness. Of course, the only way to attain such an exalted level is to be continuously involved with doing acts of kindness so that this desire becomes ingrained within us.

As our blessing continues, we ask for “kindness, righteousness, blessing, compassion, life and peace.” But, we have already asked for peace! The very opening words of our blessing are “establish peace,” and our Sages have already taught us the significance of peace and its impact on our lives. Why the repetition? There are times when it might be possible to imagine that it is morally and ethically justifiable

to not be at peace with certain people. Our blessing teaches us a fundamental concept: When true peace – *shalom* – is established, not only will it be *possible* to forgive those who have harmed us, but we will *want* to forgive them. Living at odds with another, and at the same time basking in the holy light that radiates from Hashem’s countenance, is irreconcilable.

And then the term peace is mentioned for yet a *third* time in the same blessing. With this reference to peace we are petitioning Hashem that there be no more war. We seek that the nations of the world will live in harmony, and that we, as Hashem’s chosen nation, will be able to serve Him without fear of inquisitions, pogroms, massacres and Holocausts. It is truly a beautiful and poignant plea with which to end our recitation of the blessings of the Amidah.

The very final words of the last tractate in the Mishna (*Uktzin* 3:12) teach in the name of Rabbi Shimon ben Chalafta, “The Holy One, Blessed is He, found no vessel to hold blessing for Israel other than peace, as it is stated (Tehillim 29:11), “Hashem gives strength to His nation, Hashem blesses His nation with peace.”” Rabbi Yom Tov Lipmann Heller (1579-1654) eloquently writes in his indispensable commentary on the Mishna called *Tosfot Yom Tov* that it is an inescapable fact that no blessing in the world can be sustained in the absence of peace.

In the same way that the Oral Torah concludes with the inspirational and foundational concept of peace,

so too does the Amidah draw to a close with the same theme. The necessity for peace is so fundamental that the *Sifra* (a Midrashic text on *Sefer Vayikra*) states that “A person can be blessed with wealth, a plentitude of food and drink, but without peace it is all worthless.”

As we reach the conclusion of the blessings, perhaps it is the moment to attempt to comprehend a seeming contradiction between the Talmud and the Amidah. Our Sages teach (*Ta’anit* 8b) that one cannot pray for two things at once. We should only pray for one thing at a time. However, it is clear from the blessings of the Amidah that we have just presented Hashem with a long list of diverse requests. Sometimes, there are even more than one request within a single blessing. How, then, can we reconcile the Talmud’s injunction with the format of the Amidah? The *Chatam Sofer* explains that despite the Amidah being comprised of so many different requests, they are all, essentially, only one – to serve Hashem in the best possible way we can. As it states (Tehillim 27:4), “One thing I ask from Hashem... That I should dwell in the house of Hashem... to behold the sweetness of Hashem and to visit the House of Hashem.” King David declares that he is asking only for one thing, and then he asks for three! How is that possible? The *Chatam Sofer* answers that, in reality, everything that King David is asking for – and everything that we are asking for in the Amidah – is really just to accomplish one aspiration — to merit drawing even closer to Hashem.

To be continued...

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TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Nedarim 16-22

Peace in the Home and for the Children

Rabbi Levi said, "These are the children of a mother who is hated by her husband."

Rabbi Levi in our *gemara* lists nine scenarios in which the offspring will be "rebellious and transgressing against Hashem," as found in Yechezkel 20:38. One of these scenarios leading to rebellious children is when the mother is hated by the father.

Although it would appear from two verses in Chumash (Gen. 29:31 and 33) that Leah was hated by her husband Yaakov, this was certainly not the case — and their children were certainly righteous and devoted to Hashem. Leah was neither hated by Yaakov nor blamed for her father's treacherous dealings with Yaakov. Rather, she was greatly loved by her husband Yaakov as is evident in 29:30, which states, "And he (Yaakov) *also* loved Rachel." He loved Rachel in addition to Leah. The other verses that seem to imply that she was "hated" merely indicate that Yaakov had an even greater love for Rachel. (Rabbi S. R. Hirsch)

- Nedarim 20b

The Neder Sacrifice

Rabbi Natan said, "Making a neder (vow) is like building a forbidden altar, and fulfilling the neder is like offering a sacrifice there."

This teaching appears in a *beraita* on our *daf* and is cited by the Rambam, the Tur and the Shulchan Aruch. The severe negative equivalencies taught here by Rabbi Natan is that making a *neder* separates a person from the community. When a person makes a personal altar, he is separating himself from the ways of the unified Jewish People. Likewise, one who makes a *neder* to forbid to himself that which is permitted to the rest of the community is separating himself from the community. Fulfilling his *neder* makes matters worse. Just as sacrificing on his personal altar is the act of completing his separation from the community, likewise fulfilling his *neder* demonstrates his complete separation from the community. (Maharal)

- *Nedarim 22a*

PEREK SHIRA: The Song of Existence

by Rabbi Shmuel Kraines

THE SONG OF THE RAVEN

The Raven says: “Who prepares for the raven its sustenance when its young cry out to Hashem?” (Iyov 38:41)

There is a species of raven that is born white and blackens as it reaches adulthood. The father suspects its offspring to be the progeny of another male and they are neglected. Nevertheless, no living being is neglected by Hashem: the chicks feed on fleas that emerge from their droppings. Thus, the merciless raven sings a song of Divine mercy.

The verse of this song refers to Hashem as “Keil” (meaning, “G-d”), a term that describes the immenseness of His mercy. Although the responsibility of feeding offspring belongs to their parents, and although the raven chicks themselves are destined to be cruel to their own offspring, Hashem does not withhold His overwhelming Divine compassion when the chicks call out to Him.

We should strive to emulate Hashem in this way. When approached by the poor, our first reaction should not be to study him critically, considering whether he is at fault for his state of need. Rather, exercising the Divine mercy that flows from within our Jewish souls, we should open our hearts to his cry, and to that of his helpless family.

It can sometimes be virtuous to restrain mercy, similar to the nature of the raven. In order to properly devote oneself fully to his service of Hashem, a person has to be wary not to be overly attentive to the physical comfort of himself and his family. A person never loses out by casting his lot with Hashem. Just like Hashem takes care of the raven, He takes care of all who shelter under His wing.

- *Sources: Ketuvot 49b; Vayikra Rabbah 19:1.*

In loving memory of Harav Zeev Shlomo ben Zecharia Leib

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LETTER AND SPIRIT

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

Blessing in Isolation

In the face of famine, Yitzchak contemplates relocating to Egypt, as his father Avraham had done. Hashem appears to him and instructs him not to do so, and to ‘sojourn’ (*gur*) in the land of Canaan, the land that will be given, as promised, to the children of Avraham.

Yitzchak first settles (*vayeshuv*) in Gerar. He runs into trouble there when the king of the Philistines, Avimelech, discovers that Rivka is in fact his wife, and not his sister as he had told them. The king then commands all of his people — at the threat of death — not to touch Rivka or Yitzchak. In the years that follow, Yitzchak experiences tremendous prosperity, and, with it, the envy of his neighbors. As a result of this envy Yitzchak is chased away and settles (*vayeshuv*) in the Valley of Gerar. Again he encounters hostility from the locals, who quarrel over several wells that Yitzchak’s servants had dug.

After these travails, Yitzchak *moves* (*vaya'al*) to Beer Sheva. There is no mention of his *settling* there. Until now, the hostility of the Philistines had forced Yitzchak into isolation. But perhaps, as the son of Avraham, he should have sought this isolation of his own free will. Avraham sought to isolate himself and his household from the atmosphere and society of the cities, and chose to settle in the desolate south, only gradually establishing ties with the cities. In his waning years, even as he was regarded as a prince among his neighbors, he returned to the south, to an uninhabited area near the wilderness of Shur. Avraham’s great spiritual mission required the benefits of isolation: the calm and contemplative life it affords, nurturing a relationship with Hashem, and the avoidance of the negative influences of a society at odds with his values. Now, when Yitzchak moves to Beer Sheva, as a sojourner in the southern wasteland, Hashem appears to him for the first time in many years. Until now, he is not assured of Hashem’s protection, and the hostility of his neighbors grew unchecked. This may have been providentially designed to ensure that Yitzchak not become preoccupied with wealth and honor.

When Yitzchak removes himself back to his childhood environs, Beer Sheva, Hashem reappears to him, assuring him blessing and protection in the merit of his father Avraham. Back in this place of isolation, the cocoon which supported and nurtured Avraham’s great spiritual mission, Hashem appears to Yitzchak and refers to Abraham as *avdi*, my servant. This is the single instance when Avraham is called *my servant*, and in this single word, Hashem expresses all that He expects of his son, Yitzchak.

Those re-pledged blessings once promised to Avraham immediately return. Yitzchak’s men find water at their first attempt (in the desert), and the king who had chased him away pays him a visit with every show of honor and respect. Until now he had struggled in vain to gain control of the wells his men dug and to live peaceably with the locals. Once he followed his father’s footsteps to the isolated Beer Sheva, these blessings are forthcoming.

▪ Sources: *Commentary, Bereishet 26:23-24*