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PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

Automatic Approval

“Yosef’s brothers perceived that their father was dead...” (Ber. 50:15)

It’s amazing how much we need approval

I recently got a new car. It’s all-electric, all ‘whistles and bells,’ and does absolutely everything thing for you. It turns the headlights on when it’s dark, tells you when you need air in the tires and even warm itself up for you before you get in on a cold day. The only thing it doesn’t do is make you a cup of coffee, but I’m sure they’re working on that.

One of the features that was new to me is that, if you have the electric key in your pocket, your mere approach to the car releases the lock on the door and all the light flash.

The other day, I was crossing the road to take out the trash and I came within a few feet of the car. The lights flashed; the door locks opened with a welcoming clunk, and the side mirrors flipped out like a pair of ears of an old canine friend.

I had this unmistakable feeling, absurd as it was, that the car was smiling at me, and gave me a fleeting moment of happiness. I caught myself and thought, “Wow! If being recognized by an inanimate object can bring a smile to my face, how much more does the recognition of a human being lift our spirits?”

“Yosef’s brothers perceived that their father was dead...”

With Yaakov’s death, the brothers sensed that Yosef’s attitude to them had changed. He no longer invited them to dine with him as he had done during their father’s lifetime. They thought his latent resentment was now surfacing, but they were wrong. The Marahal explains that with the death of Yaakov, Yosef knew that the persecution of the Jews could start at any time. An invitation to the palace could be construed as the Jews seeking power and influence. So, to minimize this latent antisemitism, Yosef stopped inviting them.

Yosef knew that his actions might be misinterpreted by the brothers, but to be a leader of the Jewish People means knowing when to override the natural sensitivity that a brother has toward his siblings for the greater good of the Jewish People.

Q & A

Questions

1. Why is kindness towards the dead called "chesed shel emet" – kindness of truth?
2. Give three reasons Yaakov didn't want to be buried in Egypt.
3. How do you treat a "fox in his time" (i.e., a commoner who rules)?
4. "When I was coming from Padan, Rachel died on me... I buried her there on the way to Efrat..." Why did Yaakov say all this to Yosef?
5. Initially, why was Yaakov unable to bless Ephraim and Menashe?
6. What does *pillalti* mean?
7. What does "Shechem" mean as used in this week's parsha? (two answers)
8. Which individual is called "the Emori"? Why? Give two reasons.
9. What did Yaakov want to tell his sons but was unable to?
10. What privileges did Reuven lose due to his rash actions?
11. What congregation from Yaakov's offspring did Yaakov not want to be associated with?
12. What did Yehuda do after he heard Yaakov rebuke Reuven, Shimon and Levi? Why?
13. What does milk do to teeth?
14. Why is Yissachar like a "strong-boned donkey"?
15. With what resource did both Yaakov and Moshe bless Asher?
16. In Yosef's blessing, Yaakov said, "They embittered him..." Who are "they"?
17. Which descendants of Binyamin "will divide the spoils in the evening"?
18. From whom did Yaakov buy his burial place?
19. What oath did Yosef make to Pharaoh?
20. Which two sons of Yaakov did not carry his coffin? Why not?

Answers

1. 47:29 - Because the giver expects no reward from the recipient.
2. 47:29 - a) Egypt's ground was to be plagued with lice; b) At the time of the resurrection, those buried outside Israel will suffer; c) So the Egyptians wouldn't make him into an idol.
3. 47:31 - Bow to him.
4. 48:7 - Yaakov thought Yosef harbored resentment since Yaakov had not buried Yosef's mother, Rachel, in the Ma'arat HaMachpela.
5. 48:8 - The Shechina departed from him.
6. 48:11 - "I thought."
7. 48:22 - a) The actual city of Shechem; b) A portion.
8. 48:22 - Esav. a) He acted like an Emorite; b) He trapped his father with words (*imrei pi*).
9. 49:1 - When Mashiach will come.
10. 49:3 - Priesthood and Kingship.
11. 49:6 - Korach and his congregation.
12. 49:8 - He drew back. He was afraid that Yaakov would rebuke him for the incident with Tamar.
13. 49:12 - It makes them white.
14. 49:14 - Just as a donkey bears a heavy burden, so the tribe of Yissachar bears the yoke of Torah.
15. 49:20 - Oil-rich land.
16. 49:23 - Yosef's brothers, Potifar and his wife.
17. 49:27 - Mordechai and Esther.
18. 50:5 - From Esav.
19. 50:6 - Yosef swore not to reveal Pharaoh's ignorance of Hebrew.
20. 50:13 - Levi, because he would carry the aron (holy ark). Yosef, because he was a king.

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

Synonyms in the Hebrew Language

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

White is Light

While on his deathbed, Jacob gathered his sons to offer them blessings before his demise. In doing so, Jacob prayed that the future territory of his son Judah will yield an abundance, saying that the Tribe of Judah should attain “redness of eyes from [an abundance of] wine, and whiteness (*lavan*) of teeth from [an abundance of livestock to produce] milk (*chalav*)” (Gen. 49:12). In this essay, we focus on the Hebrew words for “white/whiteness,” starting with the word *lavan* mentioned in this passage. In doing so, we will consider how *lavan* differs from its apparent synonyms *chivar* and *tzochar*. To do that, we trace the etymologies of these different words and compare them to various cognates to sharpen their nuanced meaning.

The word *lavan* in the sense of “the color white” appears many times in the Bible, with a majority of those instances clustered around the laws of leprosy (Lev. 13). Inflections of this root also appear as verbs that mean “whitening” (Isa. 1:18, Yoel 1:7, Ps. 51:9) and “elucidating” (Dan. 11:35, 12:10).

The classical lexicographers all trace *lavan* to the trilateral root LAMMED-BET-NUN, which means that *lavan* derives from the same root as the Hebrew nouns *leveinah* (“brick”), *levanah* (“moon”), *livneh* (“styrax” or “white poplar” tree), and *levonah* (“frankincense”). The former of those words appears twelve times in the Bible, with a plurality of its appearances in the Book of Exodus in the context of the enslaved Jews needing to produce their own “bricks” when working for the Egyptians. A verb form of that word which means “preparing bricks” also appears in the Bible (Gen. 11:3, Ex. 5:7, 5:14).

The three-letter string LAMMED-BET-NUN also makes appearances in proper names. For example, the personal name Lavan (Laban) appears multiple times in Genesis in reference to Jacob’s uncle/father-in-law. Later on, Jacob’s grandson Gershon had a son named Livni (Libni) who is mentioned several times in the Bible (Ex. 6:17, Num. 3:18-21, 26:58, I Chron. 6:2-14). It is possible that Livni was actually named after his great-great-grandfather Laban. A man named Levanah was listed as descending from the Netinim (mentioned in Ezra 2:45 and Neh. 7:48).

Several place-names related to *lavan* include Livnah (Libnah), also known as Lavan (Laban), one of the places to which the Jews travelled in the Wilderness (Num. 33:20-21, Deut. 1:1); Libnah, a Canaanite city-state near Lachish that was conquered in the time of Joshua (Josh. 10:29-39, 12:15); and Levanon (Lebanon), a mountain range north of the Holy Land, especially related to the often snow-topped Mount Lebanon. Nowadays, Lebanon is also the name of the country directly north of the State of Israel.

Since Hebrew and Arabic are both classified by linguists as Semitic languages, it makes sense that a word related to *lavan* would pop up in Arabic. Indeed, the Arabic word *laban* refers to “milk,” but more specifically “sour milk.” Either way, it relates to the Hebrew word *lavan* because its color is invariably “white.” This Arabic term is actually the basis for the Yiddish and Modern Hebrew term *leben* (“coagulated sour milk,” “yogurt”).

While most grammarians and philologists see the word *lavan* as derived from the aforementioned trilateral root, Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim (1740–1814) takes a wildly different approach. He developed a system of Hebrew etymology wherein core two-letter roots may be joined with the letters HEY, ALEPH, MEM, NUN, TAV, YUD, or VAV to create three-letter roots. In line with that system, Rabbi Pappenheim offers an original way of understanding the word *lavan* by seeing the final NUN of its root as non-essential to its core, leading him to trace *lavan* to the biliteral root LAMMED-BET (*lev*, “heart”).

Our next word for “white” is *chivar*. This word appears once in Biblical Hebrew in the verb that refers to the “whitening” of one’s face (Isa. 29:22). In Modern Hebrew, it likewise refers to somebody whose face has become “pale.” But looking more broadly, the word *chivar* actually just means “white.” It already appears in Biblical Aramaic in the phrase *tlag chivar*, which means “white snow” (Dan. 7:9). In fact, *chivar* is the standard word in the Targumim for translating the Hebrew word *lavan*. Some readers might be familiar with an inflection of *chivar* in the phrase *chamar chivaryan* (“white wine”) mentioned in the *Pitum HaKetoret* prayer, while other readers might recognize the Talmudic term *michavarta* to refer to an explanation which is deemed the “whitest”—that is, the “clearest,” or “most logically-sound.”

**To read the full article about the words *lavan*, *chivar*, *tzachor* and *chalav*, check out Ohr Somayach online: https://ohr.edu/this_week/whats_in_a_word/*

TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Bava Kama 58-64

An Indiscriminate Trait

“Once ‘the destroyer’ is given permission to destroy, it does not distinguish between the righteous and the wicked.”

This statement by Rav Yosef is derived from a verse in Chumash that warns all of the Jewish People to remain indoors on the night of the final plague in Egypt – the smiting of the firstborn. The verse states, “And no person shall go out from the entrance of his house until morning.”

This concept of seemingly indiscriminate and collective Divine punishment is one that is reserved for unique and special occasions. It is a concept which seems to be far beyond our understanding. Aside from this being the manner of punishment on the night of the Exodus, I have heard from my teachers that the same was true during the destruction of the Temples in Jerusalem and during more recent holocausts.

Rav Yosef adds a caveat to this idea. The destruction begins with the righteous, as the verse states, “And I shall cut off from you the righteous and the wicked” (Yechezkel 21:8). Rav Yosef, when he taught this, cried, since the righteous are mentioned first in line for punishment, indicating that they are relatively “worthless” - Rashi. Abayei comforted Rav Yosef, explaining that the punishment of the righteous first is actually a favor from Above. In this way, they would not see the terrible punishment to follow (Rashi). Abayei cites his source as the verse, “The righteous man has perished, but no one takes it to heart, and men of kindness are taken away, with no one understanding that *because* of the evil the righteous man has been taken away.” (Yeshayahu 57:1) The word for “because” in the verse is “*mipnei*,” which can also mean “before” or “prior to.”

▪ *Bava Kama 60a*

COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

BIRKAT HAMAZON (PART 6)

BLUEPRINT OF JEWISH DESTINY

“Anyone who recites Birkat HaMazon is blessed through it.”
(Zohar HaKadosh to Parshat Terumah)

The second paragraph reads, “We thank you, Hashem, our G-d, because You have given to our forefathers as a heritage a desirable, good and spacious land, because You removed us, Hashem, our G-d, from the land of Egypt, and You redeemed us from the house of bondage; for Your covenant that You sealed on our flesh, for Your Torah that You taught us, and for Your statutes that You made known to us. For life, grace and lovingkindness that You granted us, and for the providing of food with which You nourish and sustain us constantly, every day and every hour.”

The paragraph continues with another set of three concepts. The first is Brit Milah – “Your covenant which You sealed on our flesh.” The second is the Torah – “For Your Torah, which You taught us.” The third concept involves the statutes – “For Your statutes that You made known to us.” What is the connection between Brit Milah and the Land of Israel? In Bereshit 16:7-14, Hashem makes granting the Land dependent on Avraham agreeing to perform Brit Milah on himself, and for the Brit Milah to be an integral element of the Jewish nation.

The Maharal notes that Brit Milah is performed on the physical body. The Torah is something that is understood by one’s intellect. And the statutes stretch beyond the intellect, as they are laws we cannot understand but are commanded to keep anyway. These three dimensions – the physical, the intellectual, and the spiritual – must unite together so that we can serve Hashem with our entire beings.

The Maharal explains that our paragraph ends with the words, “You...sustain us constantly, every day and every hour” because our needs and desires are always in a state of flux. Yesterday’s requests are exactly that, of yesterday. And today’s needs will be quickly superseded by those of tomorrow. It is possible that a person might end up living a life as described by an English author, where unnecessary things are our only necessities!

Rabbi Yisrael Hager (1860-1936), the third Rebbe of the Vizhnitz Chassidic dynasty, once saw one of his Chassidim trying to mimic the way he prayed. The Rebbe told him, “It’s a waste of time for you to try and copy me, because my prayers and supplications of today are different from my prayers and supplications of yesterday.”

That does not mean there is anything intrinsically wrong with desiring more than we have. It simply means that we have to learn how to identify which things are truly important and which are things we want in order to make our lives easier. It is sad to say, but sometimes we are so intent on attaining what we want that we don’t even stop to appreciate what we have. In the words of Rabbi Yitzchok Hutner (Pachad Yizchok, Shavuot), “Luxuries are only felt when you have them. Necessities are only felt when they are taken away.”

Rabbi Simcha Zissel Ziv Broida (1824-1898), known as the Alter of Kelm, had a brother, Leib, who was a successful businessman. Despite the fact that Rabbi Simcha Zissel dedicated his life exclusively to spiritual growth, to the exclusion of nearly all materialism, he once wrote a letter to his brother asking him for a loan. His brother, being aware that Rabbi Simcha Zissel paid no attention to monetary matters, was intrigued why

his esteemed brother wanted to borrow money. What could he possibly need a loan for? Rabbi Simcha Zissel explained, "I want to give charity, but I don't have any money to give. And, unfortunately, I'm getting accustomed to the idea that I don't have to take part in this great mitzvah of serving Hashem by giving charity!"

Rabbi Simcha Zissel teaches us an important lesson: We must learn how to channel our material desires into more spiritual spheres.

To be continued...

PARSHA OVERVIEW

After 17 years in Egypt, Yaakov senses his days drawing to a close and summons Yosef. He has Yosef swear to bury him in the Machpela Cave, the burial place of Adam and Chava, Avraham and Sarah, Yitzchak and Rivka.

Yaakov falls ill and Yosef brings to him his two sons, Ephraim and Menashe. Yaakov elevates Ephraim and Menashe to the status of his own sons, thus giving Yosef a double portion that removes the status of firstborn from Reuven. As Yaakov is blind from old age, Yosef leads his sons close to their grandfather. Yaakov kisses and hugs them. He had not thought to see his son Yosef again, let alone Yosef's children. Yaakov begins to bless them, giving precedence to Ephraim, the younger, but Yosef interrupts him and indicates that Menashe is the elder. Yaakov explains that he intends to bless Ephraim with his strong hand because Yehoshua will descend from him, and Yehoshua will be both the conqueror of *Eretz Yisrael* and the teacher of Torah to the Jewish People.

Yaakov summons the rest of his sons in order to bless them as well. Yaakov's blessing reflects the unique character and ability of each tribe, directing each one in its unique mission in serving G-d. Yaakov passes from this world at age 147. A tremendous procession accompanies his funeral cortege up from Egypt to his resting place in the Cave of Machpela in Chevron.

After Yaakov's passing, the brothers are concerned that Yosef will now take revenge on them. Yosef reassures them, even promising to support them and their families. Yosef lives out the rest of his years in Egypt, seeing Ephraim's great-grandchildren. Before his death, Yosef foretells to his brothers that G-d will redeem them from Egypt. He makes them swear to bring his bones out of Egypt with them at that time. Yosef passes away at the age of 110 and is embalmed. Thus ends Sefer Bereishet, the first of the five Books of the Torah. *Chazak*

TAAMEI HAMITZVOS

Reasons behind the Mitzvos

By Rabbi Shmuel Kraines

PROCREATION

(Mitzvah 1 in Sefer HaChinuch)

Hashem, Elokim, blessed [Adam and Chavah] and said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the world and conquer it, and rule over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the heavens, and over all the animals that walk the earth.” (Bereishis 1:28)

THE MITZVAH: The very first words that Hashem said to mankind were *pru u’rvu*, meaning, “be fruitful and multiply.” *Rav Hirsch* suggests an alternative translation of *u’rvu*, “and raise [your offspring],” and explains that raising children and teaching them the proper conduct is part of this mitzvah. The Sages teach that it is “a very great mitzvah” for a man to marry in order to bear children. The basic mitzvah entails bearing one son and one daughter, but it is also a mitzvah to multiply as much as possible (see *Even HaEzer* §1). When a person dies and ascends to Heaven, one of the first things he is asked is whether he was “involved” in this mitzvah (*Shabbos* 31a). *Maharsha* infers from this that part of the mitzvah is to be “involved” indirectly in this mitzvah, by helping others to get married so that they may bear children. The Jewish people were redeemed from Egypt in the merit that they were fruitful and multiplied, and so too, the Final Redemption will only come when the Jewish people are fruitful and multiply and fill the world (*Tana D’vei Eliyahu Zuta* ch. 14).

REASON ONE: PERPETUATION

Since man does not live forever, his service to Hashem includes leaving behind another generation to continue that service (*Rav Menachem HaBavli*).

REASON TWO: THE SETTLEMENT OF THE WORLD

Hashem commanded mankind to be fruitful and multiply (that is, to bear as many children as possible), in order to settle the world. This is a great mitzvah, for it allows for the fulfillment of all the other mitzvos (*Chinuch*). [Meaning, as the verse in which this mitzvah is written indicates, mankind must multiply in order to conquer the world and harness its resources. In addition, the proper function of humanity depends on the cooperation of societies, and many of the mitzvos involve multiple people.]

REASON THREE: TO BRING DOWN SOULS FROM HEAVEN

Mashiach will not arrive until all the souls come down from Heaven (*Yevamos* 62a), because each soul accomplishes another part of mankind’s goal. It is therefore a very great mitzvah to bear a child.

REASON FOUR: INDICATION OF MAN’S MORTALITY

Hashem created Adam like Himself, single, and with no need to procreate. However, He was concerned that it would be said that man created the other beings that were created in pairs and procreate, so He created Chavah

and commanded man to procreate. (*Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer*) In other words, procreation indicates that man needs to bear offspring to replace him when he dies, and that he is not the immortal Creator of the universe.

REASON FIVE: HASHEM'S GLORY

The world was created for Hashem's glory, and "a king's glory is apparent through multitudes of subjects." Therefore, the more children a person bears, the more he fulfills the purpose of Creation (*Yalkut HaMachiri, Mishlei 14:28*).

REASON SIX: EMULATING HASHEM

Another reason for this mitzvah is that Hashem wants man to come close to Him by emulating His ways, and especially His kindness and compassion. Thus, just like He creates and raises all living beings, which involves countless acts of kindness, so too He enabled us and commanded us to bear and raise children of our own.

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Contributing authors, editors and production team: Rabbi Nota Schiller – Rosh HaYeshiva, Rabbi Yitzchak Breitowitz - Rav of Kehillos Ohr Somayach, Avi Kaufman, Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein, Rabbi Reuven Lauffer, Rabbi Yaakov Meyers, Mrs. Rosalie Moriah, Rabbi Moshe Newman, Rabbi Shlomo Simon, Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair, Rabbi Yehuda Spitz, Mrs. Helena Stern.

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