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PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

On the Thirteenth Yahrtzeit of HaRav Dov Schwartzman, *zatzal*

“...to eulogize Sarah and to cry for her” (23:2)

The Jumbotron screens at rock concerts can be more than one hundred feet high. It can make a five-foot-eight rock singer cavorting on the stage in the front of them look 20 feet tall. But the closer you get, the smaller he becomes.

The Gemara (Moed Katan 18a) says that Pharaoh was one amah high. That’s between 18 to 24 inches. To the world, Pharaoh looked like a giant, but really he was a midget.

It also says that Moshe was ten amot tall; that’s almost 20 feet. (Berachot 54b, Shabbat 92a). Moshe looked like a man of mere flesh and blood, but on the spiritual level he was the greatest giant that ever walked this planet.

At the age of thirty eight, I came to Ohr Somayach from the world of Pharaoh, a world of celebrity, where the giants of the entertainment industry looked like gods of enormous stature. But the closer you got, the smaller they became.

After I had been in Ohr Somayach for a couple of weeks, I was sent for by one of the Rabbis. The word had got around that I was unmarried, and well, a thirty-eight-year-old “eligible young yeshiva student” and that it was time to get married!

I came into the room and there was this Rabbi with a sweet gentle expression, a long white beard and twinkling eyes. I didn’t realize that I was sitting in the presence of a giant of twenty amot. But the closer I got to him, the more I got to know him and the bigger he became.

His name: HaRav Dov Schwartzman, one of the greatest Torah scholars and leaders of his generation. So outstanding was he, that Rabbi Aharon Kotler *zatzal*, the leader of American Jewry and the Rosh HaYeshiva of Lakewood, chose him as his son-in-law. At Reb Dov’s funeral, Rav Moshe Shapiro *zatzal* said that no one was greater than Reb Dov.

We spent a while chatting, and then he came to the point. He had a suggestion for a shidduch. I went out with the young lady he suggested, but it didn't work out. However, later when I met my wife, Reb Dov was the one who helped me to get to the chupa and beyond. And without him, I'm not sure I would have been able to do it.

One of the advantages of getting married young is that you believe that nothing can go wrong. You charge in with all the enthusiasm of youth. The older you get, the more you realize that things can - and do - go wrong. It's not easy to get married when you're forty. The Rosh Yeshiva gave me the much-needed confidence to get to the chupa and through *Shana Rishona*.

A few years later, I was in the shiur of Rabbi Naftoli Kaplan *shlita*. We were going so slowly that it was a secret how slow we were actually going. After a few years, Reb Naftoli told me that he was moving me up to the shiur of the Rosh Hayeshiva – Reb Dov.

I didn't know what hit me! I was lost after the first few sentences. Reb Dov saw I was struggling and came up to me one day after the shiur and said, "Who is your chavrusa?" I said, "I don't have a chavrusa." He said, "You don't have a chavrusa!? I will be your chavrusa!"

And, every day after the shiur, he would sit me down for a half an hour, sometimes 45 minutes, and go over one of the points in the shiur until I understood it. I think by this time, the Rosh Yeshiva was already starting to become ill with the disease that took him from this world. At times, he was tired but he would not give up. He taught me an important lesson about being a Torah teacher. It's not enough to say brilliant insights into the Gemara. It's your responsibility that every student is gaining from you. And you can't just say, "Well, we'll sort it out..."

The story has an interesting twist. Many years later, one of my sons went to a Yeshiva Katana that was very difficult to get into, very competitive. Every boy's father was a Rosh Yeshiva or a Rosh Kollel, and I think my son felt a bit less.

One day, Reb Dov's name came up in a conversation in the class, and my son said, "Dov Schwartzman? My father learned as chevrusa with Reb Dov." "Your father learned as chevrusa with Reb Dov?! Your father must be a Torah genius!"

My wife once had a problem. She was in a partnership in a project and she had been ousted unfairly. She felt resentment and went to the Rosh HaYeshiva to ask his advice. He listened until she told him the whole story and then he just said one sentence: "*At Tehi Tova!*" "You will be well!"

The Rosh Yeshiva did not have an easy life, and his advice sometimes came from a place of painful experience. It's not what you say, it's who you are. As much as Reb Dov was a giant in Torah scholarship – the twenty-foot Moshe of his generation – so he was the Moshe Rabbeinu of his generation in his humility and his compassion.

TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Decrees and Negligence

Rabbi Chanina said, “Everything is in the hands of Heaven except for sickness from cold and heat, as the verse states, “Cold and heat are traps on the path; one who wants to be safe from them will keep at a distance from them.” (Prov. 22:5)

The verse refers to the dangers as *tzinim pachim*, which means “cold” and “heat” according to one explanation by the Rashbam, and is also the explanation in Tosefot. Another possibility is cited by the Rashbam, saying that the verse speaks only about cold (*tzinim*), with *pachim* meaning the cold as a harmful “trap” (*pach*). However, according to all explanations, the verse teaches about the danger to a person posed by adverse climatic conditions.

Rabbi Chanina’s teaching is cited in our *sugya* to explain the meaning of “illness through negligence,” an expression in the *gemara*. One might think that a person’s well-being is always decreed from Above, and a person’s negligent conduct will not affect his health and physical condition. The verse in Proverbs, Rabbi Chanina states, is proof that a person has the free-will to choose to be negligent, which can lead to sickness or injury.

Tosefot explains a *gemara* in Bava Metzia (107b), which elucidates the verse in Deut. 7:15, “And Hashem will remove all sickness from you.” “Sickness” refers to the cold, which seems to imply that Hashem, and not the individual person, controls whether a person gets sick from the cold. This means that if it was not decreed, a person could walk outside indefinitely in Arctic weather and remain perfectly healthy. Tosefot explains that the accurate meaning of the verse is not that Hashem controls whether a person is cold or not, but that Hashem gives a person wisdom to guard against the cold by choosing to wear warm clothing.

The Talmud Yerushalmi tells a story, as quoted by Tosefot, that the Roman ruler Antoninus was setting out to travel and asked Rebbi (his close friend, with whom he studied Torah) to pray for his welfare. Rebbi prayed, “May it be the will of Hashem that you be saved from the cold.” “Is that a fitting prayer?” asked Antoninus with disappointment. He clearly knew that he could put on a warmer coat if necessary! So, Rebbi then prayed, “May it be the will of Hashem that you be saved from extreme heat.” Antoninus replied, “Now, that prayer is certainly a helpful prayer, since it is written (in Ps. 19:7): ‘And no one can escape its (the sun’s) heat.’”

Years ago, I was in a classroom on a cold day, when a dispute broke out between two students. One said, “Close the window, I’m too cold!” The other argued that he was not cold (even a bit warm, if anything), and that he needed fresh air from outside. The teacher settled the matter by quoting a ruling he had heard from his Rabbi about a hot vs. cold situation. He said, “The person who is warm and wants the window open “wins.” The cold student should put on warmer clothing. And the source for this decision? The verse that Tosefot cites, ‘No one can hide from its heat.’ (Ps. 19:7) The cold person can add layers of clothing for warmth, but what can the warm person do in order to not be hot? Step out of his skin?!”

▪ *Bava Batra 144b*

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.

COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

KIDDUSH LEVANAH (PART 16)

UNDER THE LIGHT OF THE SILVERY MOON

“My walk on the moon lasted three days. My walk with G-d will last forever.”
(Charles Duke – Lunar Module Pilot, Apollo 16)

Kiddush Levanah continues with an excerpt from Tractate Sanhedrin (42a): The Academy of Rabbi Yishmael taught, “Had Yisrael (the Jewish People) been privileged to greet the Countenance of their Father in Heaven only once a month, it would have been sufficient for them.”

Abaye said, “That is why it [the blessing] must be recited standing.”

As we have learned, reciting Kiddush Levanah is akin to greeting the Shechinah. Therefore, Rashi explains, even if we only had this one mitzvah to perform, it would be enough of a reason to praise Hashem. Abaye adds that Kiddush Levanah must be recited standing up, because whenever testimony is given, it needs to be done while standing.

Perhaps the most consistent example of our bearing witness to Hashem’s Majesty is the Amidah. Three times a day, four on Shabbat and five on Yom Kippur, we stand in front of Hashem to attest that our very existence is entirely dependent on Hashem. We stand in front of the King of Kings in absolute sublimation. We cannot physically see Him — but He sees us. We do not hear Him — but He hears every word that we say. As we recite the Amidah, we are bearing testimony that there is nothing greater nor more fulfilling than living our lives with the knowledge that we are completely beholden to Hashem.

Heinrich Heine (1797-1856) was born a Jew. In his day, he was famous in the literary world for his poetry and essays. He is infamous in the Jewish world for having “converted” to Lutheranism to further his social aspirations and academic career. A career that could not advance if he remained Jewish. Ironically, his “conversion” made no difference whatsoever, as he was not accepted in the world of academia. Towards the end of his life, he wrote, “Our ancestors were men of integrity and courage. They stood in submission before G-d, but they stood firm and stiff-necked before the rulers of the nations. I was brazen-faced before Heaven, but I crawled submissively on all fours before man. And now I lie on the ground like a trampled worm.”

It is a personal and national tragedy that Heinrich Heine, and all the “Heinrich Heines” in Jewish history, failed to understand the significance of being Jewish. The only way to live a

truly meaningful life is to stand up straight and declare that Hashem is our King. Ignoring the truth will bring them to an eternal spiritual dead-end. And that it is never too late to return to Hashem.

After sinning by eating from the Tree of Knowledge, Adam, in his intense embarrassment, attempts to hide from Hashem. So, Hashem calls out to Adam (Ber. 3:9), “Where are you?” And Adam answers Hashem, “I heard Your Voice and I was frightened because I was naked.”

The Rabbis teach that Adam’s fear was not due to his physical nakedness. Rather, it was because he felt spiritually naked. He considered himself completely undeserving to stand in front of Hashem after having gone against His wishes. He felt worthless in the Eyes of Hashem.

And how did Hashem answer Adam? “Who told you that you are naked?” This seems like a strange question. After all, Adam was simply stating an undeniable fact. However, according to the Ba’alei HaMussar, Hashem’s reaction is anything but simplistic. The Ba’alei HaMussar offer a most uplifting interpretation. When Hashem confronts Adam and asks him, “Who told you that you are naked?” Hashem is really saying, “Who told you that this is a valid reason for not standing before Me? Even if you are currently spiritually devoid of merits due to your having sinned, it does not exempt you from doing what is incumbent on you to do!”

As we stand in front of the Shechinah each month, we affirm — even if we also feel devoid of spiritual merits — that we have been granted an opportunity to bask in the light and beauty of Hashem’s Presence. It is an unparalleled opportunity to realign our relationship with Hashem and with ourselves. And to do exactly what is incumbent upon each and every one of us.

To be continued...

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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?

Synonyms in the Hebrew Language

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

True Love (Part 1/2)

The verb for “loving” appears in the Bible for the first time when Hashem commands Abraham to offer up his son “that he loves” (Gen. 22:2) — Isaac. Afterwards, Isaac himself becomes the subject of *ahavah*, as the Bible reports that after he married his wife Rebecca, “he loved her” (Gen. 24:67). Later on, Isaac is said to “love” his son Esau (Gen. 25:28) and asks him to prepare for him the delicacies that he “loves” before receiving special blessings (Gen. 27:4, 27:9, 27:14). The theme of *ahavah* continues in the book of Genesis with Rebecca “loving” Jacob (Gen. 25:28), Jacob “loving” his wife Rachel (Gen. 29:18, 29:30), Jacob “loving” his son Joseph (Gen. 37:3, 44:20), and so forth. In all of these passages — and many more — variations of the term *ahavah* are used. This essay attempts to hone in on the exact meaning of *ahavah*, and how the idea it represents may differ from other terms or conceptions of “love.”

Rabbi Pinchas Eliyahu Horowitz of Vilna (1765–1802) in his work *Sefer HaBrit* discusses the concept of *ahavah* at great length, and categorizes different types of *ahavah* as well as the interplay between *ahavah* and *yirah*. He especially elaborates on the distinction between what the rabbis (*Avot* 5:16) call “love which depends on a matter” and “love which does not depend on a matter.” His most basic definition of *ahavah* is that “Love is the expansion of the soul and its joy in something that pleases it, desiring it more than anything else. It opens the chambers of the heart, and the vital spirits within it will run alongside all the parts of the body.” Essentially, his definition of *ahavah* highlights “love” as an emotional experience that involves a deep connection, joy, desire, and the positive physiological and psychological impacts it has on an individual. He emphasizes how love is a profound and transformative emotion that extends beyond mere physical attraction or fondness. His description of the “opening of the chambers of the heart” and the “flow of vital spirits” suggest a profound, almost spiritual, connection associated with “love.” Rabbi Horowitz applies this understanding of “love” both to the commandment to “love” Hashem (Deut. 6:5) and the commandment to “love” fellow Jews (Lev. 19:18).

However, Rabbi Eliyahu Lopian (*Lev Eliyahu* vol. 1 p. 110) explains that most people are mistaken in their understanding of the concept of “love.” People think that love refers to a pleasant feeling that fills a person when in the company of someone defined as their “beloved.” Meaning, they delight in themselves through their loved one, using their beloved as merely a tool for their own enjoyment. However, Rabbi Lopian asserts, this understanding love is incorrect. The way he explains it, true love is that which awakens a person to give assistance to their friend and to bestow goodness upon them. In other words, true love is that which

arouses a person to provide for their beloved and make them happy. (For a similar lesson, see Rabbi Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler's *Michtav M'Eliyahu*, vol. 1 pp. 32–36.)

Rabbi Lopian famously compared this to someone entering a restaurant to eat, and when the waiter asks, "What do you like?" they answer, "I love fish." Clearly, this person does not *love* the fish, but rather he loves himself and the good sensations he experiences when eating fish. The Bible relates that when Jacob had to work for Laban for seven years in order to marry Laban's daughter Rachel, "those [years] were in his [Jacob's] eyes like several days in his love [*b'ahavato*] of her" (Gen. 29:20). This passage is very difficult to understand, because according to the popular conception of "love," when someone loves something and wants to attain it, then the days of waiting are just unbearable. But with the supernal type of "love" that Rabbi Lopian was talking about, it's not about one person attaining some pleasant feeling, but about one giving to one's beloved. Hence, the more that Jacob worked for his beloved's father, the more he felt like he was giving towards her and fulfilling his *ahavah*. Of course, this is the exact opposite of the popular conception of "love," whereby the lover really loves themselves, meaning they love to delight in themselves through somebody else.

**To read the rest of this essay about the Hebrew word ahavah and related terms, and find out what "love" truly means, visit us online at: http://ohr.edu/this_week/whats_in_a_word/*

TAAMEI HAMITZVOS – Reasons behind the Mitzvos

by Rabbi Shmuel Kraines

"Study improves the quality of the act and completes it, and a mitzvah is more beautiful when it emerges from someone who understands its significance." (Meiri, Bava Kama 17a)

EXCESSIVE MOURNING

(Vayikra 19:28 and Devarim 14:1-2; Mitzvos #467-468 in Sefer HaChinuch)

At the beginning of *Parashas Chayei Sarah*, the Torah relates that Avraham came "to eulogize Sarah and to cry over her" (Bereishis 23:2) In this verse, the word *livkosah*, "to cry," is written with a small *kaf*. Most commentators interpret it to mean that Avraham cried only a small amount over his wife's passing (see *Sefer Katan V'Gadol*). Let us explore the Torah's outlook on the proper measure of mourning as it is reflected in two Mitzvos: the prohibitions against cutting oneself and making a bald spot as an expression of mourning. Then we will return to examine Avraham's conduct.

The Torah states in *Parashas Re'eh* (Devarim 14:1-2): *You are children of Hashem, your God! Do not cut yourselves and do not make a bald spot between your eyes over a dead person. For*

you are a holy nation to Hashem, your God, and Hashem chose you for Himself as a treasured nation, out of all the nations on the face of the earth.

What does the fact that the Jewish people are Hashem's children have to do with these two prohibitions? *Rashi* explains that as Hashem's children, we ought to appear beautiful, and we therefore cannot mar ourselves with cuts and bald spots. The next verse adds that we are a holy nation, and it is not fitting for holy people to ruin their features (*Chizkuni*).

Ibn Ezra has a different approach to the above verses: *You are children of Hashem, your God! Know that He loves you more than a father loves his son, and therefore: Do not cut yourselves and do not make a bald spot between your eyes over a dead person.* This because whatever your Father in Heaven does to you is for your good. Focusing on the word "children," *Ibn Ezra* adds that we should realize that with respect to Hashem's conduct, we should be like little "children" who do not understand their father's conduct and yet trust him unquestionably.

Taking a third approach, *Rav Yosef Kara* explains the Torah is addressing mourners as follows: "Even if your father has passed away, do not grieve excessively by making cuts and bald spots, for you are not orphans. You still have a Father [in Heaven] — Who is great, living, and enduring! The next verse (v. 2) points out that we are Hashem's holy nation whom He selected from all the nations. The Torah means to say that an idolater has good reason to mourn the loss of his relatives, but a Jew can never be separated from his closest and most significant relative: Hashem.

Ramban explains that the Torah's description of the Jewish people as Hashem's "holy nation" and "treasured nation" is a reference to that which the Jewish soul is Hashem's holy treasure that He stores for eternity after a person's passing. Since a person's soul, the primary element of his being, lives on after death, it is not fitting to mourn excessively over its departure from the body.

Elaborating on this theme, *Tzror HaMor* writes based on the *Zohar* (see *Vayechi* 245b): The Torah admonition against excessive mourning can be compared to a king who sent his son to a small rural village for an extended period to engage in study and to prepare himself for his future position of kingship. Eventually, the king summoned his son to return home and the friends that the son had made in the village mourned greatly over his departure. A wise man said to them: "Fools! Your friend is about to become king over the entire land, and you cry over his departure from this little village?" So too, Hashem sent the soul down to this lowly world to prepare himself for kingship by engaging in Torah and mitzvos. When Hashem summons him to return to Heaven and take up his position of kingship, his family and friends cry over his loss, sometimes too much. The wise Moshe addresses them, saying, "Don't cry over him! He is ascending to the treasure room of souls in the loftiest heavens." According to this interpretation of the verse, "You are Hashem's children" means that the deceased is Hashem's child and is now returning to his Father in Heaven.

The Sages cautioned against mourning excessively over the deceased, even in ways that do not include making cuts and bald spots (*Moed Kattan* 27b). *Ramban* writes that the Sages based their words of caution on the Torah's prohibition against these two specific expressions

of mourning. The Sages add that if a person extends the mourning period beyond that required by Torah law, Hashem says: “You do not care about the deceased more than I do!” In other words, excessive mourning implies that Hashem was cruel in removing the deceased from the world. In truth, Hashem’s love and compassion for each Jew is greater than that of a human father for his son, and all that He does is with the best possible intentions.

One might ask: If so, why does the Torah not prohibit mourning altogether? *Abarbanel* explains that it is natural for people to mourn over the loss of a relative or close friend, and it is also a fitting expression of honor for the deceased. However, in recognition of the fact that Hashem’s ways are just and good, the Torah sets limits for mourning.

When the Torah states that one may not make a bald spot "between your eyes," it means anywhere on the head (*Makkos* 20a). As to why the Torah specifies the region “between the eyes,” *Rav Menachem HaBavli* suggests that this hints at the head-*tefillin*, which are places “between the eyes” (*Devarim* 11:18). The Torah intimates that it is not fitting for the holy nation to deface their scalps by making a bald-spot, for indeed, that is the place where we ought to place the glorious crown of *tefillin* that represents Hashem’s kingship over the Jewish people.

We return to the Torah’s account of Avraham’s limited weeping over the sudden passing of his great and irreplaceable wife with whom he had forged a nation. The Vilna Gaon explains that Avraham realized that Sarah had accomplished all she was meant to accomplish in her lifetime. He therefore had no reason to cry over the departure of her soul, which was rising to its rightful, complete reward, so he cried only over the loss of her body (cited in *Beis Avos*, pg. 69). The words “Avraham came to eulogize Sarah and to cry over her” may thus be interpreted to mean that after eulogizing Sarah as the quintessential *Eishes Chayil* who had nothing left to accomplish in this world, he saw reason to cry only a limited amount. As the Torah goes on to relate, Avraham honored Sarah’s body to the greatest extent possible, expending much effort and a great sum of money to acquire for her a burial plot among the greatest people in history.

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