

OHRNET

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PARSHA INSIGHTS

AS THIN AS AIR

“And Yaakov sent angels before him to Esav, his brother...”

Seeing is believing, but there is far more to see in this world than meets the human eye. Take the air that surrounds you, for example. The air seems empty enough, but take a not-so-powerful microscope and you’ll be amazed at how the emptiness of the air teems with all manner of minute particles.

And if you could go further than that, beyond the microscopic, if you’d go beyond the limits of human vision itself, you’d be even more amazed – and not a little frightened.

The fact is that we are all of us surrounded by myriad incorporeal spiritual beings. Some of these beings are benevolent and others, well, let’s just say, they’re less than benevolent.

“And Yaakov sent angels before him to Esav, his brother....” Why does the Torah include the phrase *“before him”*? Ostensibly, the sentence could have equally well been *“And Yaakov sent angels to Esav, his brother.”*

The Mishna (*Avot Chapter 4*) tells us that if we do even one mitzvah we acquire for ourselves a defending angel, and if we do one transgression we acquire a prosecuting angel. The mitzvah itself creates that spiritual entity (so inadequately translated into English by the word “angel”). Every mitzvah literally, begets a holy angel.

As in the world beneath, so too it is in the world above.

A defense lawyer will do everything he can to show off his client in a good light, and similarly the angel born of a mitzvah pleads for his “client” before G-d’s throne in the

Heavenly Assizes. This angel tries his hardest to advance his client’s welfare, not only spiritually but materially too. This angel is really more like a son pleading on behalf of his father, for like a son, he was created by his “father.”

Rabbi Yosef Karo, the “Bet Yosef”, author of the *Shulchan Aruch*, the standard compendium of Jewish law, would regularly learn the entire six orders of the Mishna by heart. It is well known that, as a result of this prodigious achievement, an angel would come and learn Torah with him. The book “Magid Meisharim” (*lit. The Speaker of Straight Things*) details what the angel taught him and more. This book is still readily available to this day.

The *Shelah Hakadosh* in his commentary on Tractate Shavuot recounts an amazing story. One Shavuot, he and nine other Sages stayed up all night on both nights of Shavuot and they witnessed how the angel spoke with the Beit Yosef. It started speaking as follows: “I am the Mishna speaking in your throat...”

The name of that angel was “Mishna”, since that was the mitzvah that gave it life.

At the end of this lengthy testimony, all ten sages, including Rabbi Shlomo Alkabetz (the composer of the famous Shabbat song *Lecha Dodi* that is sung in synagogues every Friday night, the world over) signed an authentication of what they had seen and heard.

“And Yaakov sent angels before him to Esav, his brother...”

Yaakov didn’t want to employ the services of those angels who stand before G-d’s throne. He sent only angels that were the offspring of his good deeds, the ones that were “before him.”

• Source: *Lev Eliyahu*

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PARSHA OVERVIEW

Returning home, Yaakov sends angelic messengers to appease his brother Esav. The messengers return, telling Yaakov that Esav is approaching with an army of 400. Yaakov takes the strategic precautions of dividing the camps, praying for assistance, and sending tribute to mollify Esav. That night, Yaakov is left alone and wrestles with the Angel of Esav. Yaakov emerges victorious but is left with an injured sinew in his thigh (which is the reason that it is forbidden to eat the sciatic nerve of a kosher animal). The angel tells him that his name in the future will be Yisrael, signifying that he has prevailed against man (Lavan) and the supernatural (the angel). Yaakov and Esav meet and are reconciled, but Yaakov, still fearful of his brother, rejects Esav's offer that they should dwell together. Shechem, a Caananite prince, abducts and violates Dina, Yaakov's daughter. In return for Dina's hand in marriage, the prince and his father suggest that Yaakov and his fami-

ly intermarry and enjoy the fruits of Caananite prosperity. Yaakov's sons trick Shechem and his father by feigning agreement. However, they stipulate that all the males of the city must undergo *brit mila*. Shimon and Levi, two of Dina's brothers, enter the town and execute all the males who were weakened by the circumcision. This action is justified by the city's tacit complicity in the abduction of their sister. G-d commands Yaakov to go to Beit-El and build an altar. His mother Rivka's nurse, Devorah, dies and is buried below Beit-El. G-d appears again to Yaakov, blesses him and changes his name to Yisrael. While traveling, Rachel goes into labor and gives birth to Binyamin, the twelfth of the tribes of Israel. She dies in childbirth and is buried on the Beit Lechem Road. Yaakov builds a monument to her. Yitzchak passes away at the age of 180 and is buried by his sons. The Parsha concludes by listing Esav's descendants.

ISRAEL Forever

THE THIRD ELEMENT

The ongoing struggle of the Jewish State to defend itself against its enemies and of Jews throughout the world to counter the new wave of anti-Semitism has already been foretold in the Torah portion of this week.

The Patriarch Yaakov prepares for his critical encounter with his hate-ridden brother Esav who is approaching him with an army bent on destruction. The steps he takes in self-defense are recorded in the Torah in order to teach the descendants of Yaakov – the Jewish People – how to defend themselves throughout the generations against the heirs of Esav's hatred – the enemies of Jews ranging from the Romans to the rest of Europe and the Middle East.

The diplomacy of Yaakov in sending an appeasing gift is repeated today in all the negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians, which include appeasement offers of "painful concessions". The military preparations of our forefather in splitting his camp to create two fronts today takes on the

form of the Israel Defense Forces and the nation's police force guarding many fronts and even carrying the battle into enemy territory.

But what about the third element of Yaakov's preparations?

Our ancestor did not rely on his efforts alone. He was absolutely confident that the outcome of his confrontation with a mortal enemy would be determined by Heaven. Although he realized it was the will of Heaven that he make all the human efforts possible to ensure his survival, he expressed his faith in Heaven's determining the finale by turning to Heaven in prayer to "save me, please, from my brother, from Esav".

Are we doing enough today in regard to praying for the security of Jews in Eretz Israel and throughout the world? Something to think about as we strive, as Yaakov did, to guarantee Israel forever.

LOVE OF THE LAND - THE NAMES

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael

NACHALAT ZVI – LAND OF THE DEER

In describing Eretz Yisrael the Prophet Yirmiyahu uses the term *tzvi* which has a double meaning: "desirable" and "deer".

But why should the land be compared to a deer?

One of the Talmudic Sages, Rabbi Chisda (*Mesechta Ketubot 112a*) offers this explanation: Just as



the skin of the deer shrinks after it is removed from its body and is no longer capable of containing the animal's flesh, so too does Eretz Yisrael produce so much fruit that there is not enough room to store it. And just as the deer is the fleetest of the animals, so is Eretz Yisrael the fleetest of all lands in bringing forth its fruit.

PARSHA Q&A ?

1. What sort of messengers did Yaakov send to Esav?
2. Why was Yaakov both “afraid” and “distressed?”
3. In what three ways did Yaakov prepare for his encounter with Esav?
4. Where did Dina hide and why?
5. After helping his family across the river, Yaakov remained alone on the other side. Why?
6. What was the angel forced to do before Yaakov agreed to release him?
7. What was it that healed Yaakov’s leg?
8. Why did Esav embrace Yaakov?
9. Why did Yosef stand between Esav and Rachel?
10. Give an exact translation of the word *nisa* in verse 33:12.
11. What happened to the 400 men who accompanied Esav?
12. Why does the Torah refer to Dina as the daughter of Leah and not as the daughter of Yaakov?
13. Whom should Shimon and Levi have consulted concerning their plan to kill the people of Shechem?
14. Who was born along with Binyamin?
15. What does the name Binyamin mean? Why did Yaakov call him that?
16. The Torah states “The sons of Yaakov were twelve.” Why?
17. How old was Yaakov when Yosef was sold?
18. Esav changed his wife’s name to Yehudit. Why?
19. Which three categories of people have their sins pardoned?
20. What is the connection between the Egyptian oppression of the Jewish people and Esav’s decision to leave the land of Canaan?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week’s Questions!

All references are to the verses and Rashi’s commentary unless otherwise stated.

1. 32:4 - Angels.
2. 32:8 - He was afraid he would be killed. He was distressed that he would have to kill.
3. 32:9 - He sent gifts, he prayed, and he prepared for war.
4. 32:23 - Yaakov hid her in a chest so that Esav wouldn’t see her and want to marry her.
5. 32:25 - He went back to get some small containers he had forgotten.
6. 32:27 - Admit that the blessings given by Yitzchak rightfully belong to Yaakov.
7. 32:32 - The shining of the sun.
8. 33:4 - His pity was aroused when he saw Yaakov bowing to him so many times.
9. 33:7 - To stop Esav from gazing at her.
10. 33:12 - It means “travel”. It does not mean “we will travel.” This is because the letter *nun* is part of the word and does not mean “we” as it sometimes does.
11. 33:16 - They slipped away one by one.
12. 34:1 - Because she was outgoing like her mother, Leah.
13. 34:25 - Their father, Yaakov.
14. 35:17 - His two twin sisters.
15. 35:18 - *Ben-Yemin* means “Son of the South.” He was the only son born in the Land of Israel, which is south of Aram Naharaim.
16. 35:22 - To stress that all of them, including Reuven, were righteous.
17. 35:29 - One hundred and eight.
18. 36:2 - To fool Yitzchak into thinking that she had abandoned idolatry.
19. 36:3 - One who converts to Judaism, one who is elevated to a position of leadership, and one who marries.
20. 36:6 - Esav knew that the privilege of living in the Land of Israel was accompanied by the prophecy that the Jews would be “foreigners in a land not their own.” Therefore Esav said, “I’m leaving — I don’t want the Land if it means I have to ‘pay the bill’ of subjugation in Egypt.”

BONUS QUESTION ?

“And Yaakov said to Shimon and Levi “You have besmirched me, giving me a bad reputation amongst those who dwell in the land...” (34:31) Yaakov never had any intention of letting his daughter marry a Canaanite. He knew all along that the agreement with Shechem was no more than a ruse. So why was Yaakov suddenly angry at Shimon and Levi?

BONUS ANSWER !

Yaakov knew that the brothers wanted to rescue Dinah while the people of Shechem were weak from the circumcision. But he didn’t know that they were going to kill all of the people.

• Ramban

CLEARING THE WAY FOR TORAH STUDY

When Jews entered Eretz Yisrael they were obligated to bring the first grain that they reaped as a *minchat omer* flour offering. “You shall bring an omer measure of the first of your reaping unto the kohen” (*Vayikra* 23:10) says the Torah in introducing this mitzvah.

The Torah’s insistence on this barley flour offering being the “first of your reaping” serves as a prohibition against reaping any grain before Pesach, when the grain for the omer is reaped to be processed and offered. We nevertheless find that it was permissible to reap the grain of a field to clear it as a place for people to learn Torah if there was no other space available to seat a large number of Torah students. Where do we see in the words of the Torah such a dispensation?

The answer lies in the Torah’s use of the possessive form in the term “your reaping”. This is understood by our Sages as an indication that pre-Pesach reaping is forbidden only when it is done for your personal use, but not when that reaping is done for the purpose of fulfilling a mitzvah. A few examples of cutting down grain for the sake of a mitzvah are mentioned in the *mishna* (*Menachot* 71a) and one of them is this need to clear a field for the sake of Torah study.

Although it is not clear from our *gemara* why there was a need for such a large, concentrated area, we may gain a clue from a *mishna* in *Mesechta Shabbat* (126b). There we learn that it is permissible to remove on Shabbat four or five crates of straw or grain to make room for Torah study despite the fact that the physical exertion involved is not ordinarily permitted on this day of rest. In his commentary on that *mishna* Rashi explains that a Torah lecture was to be delivered and a large space was needed for the audience. We may safely assume that this was the situation referred to in our own *gemara* as justifying an early reaping.

• *Menachot* 72a

EATING FOR ATONEMENT

When G-d informed Aharon of all the holy things “reserved from the fire of the altar” which would be consumed by him and his sons a special mention is made of “all the *mincha* flour offerings” (*Bamidbar* 18:9). This all-inclusive term is interpreted by our Sages as an indication that even the *omer mincha* offered to permit use of the new grain and the *mincha* brought by the husband of a suspected adulteress are also consumed by the *kohanim* after a *kemitza* portion of them has been burned on the altar.

Why, the question is raised, would I have thought that the *kohanim* should be less entitled to enjoy these *mincha* offerings?

The answer lies in what is written about the consumption of animal meat and loaves used in the sacrificial service in the inauguration of the *kohanim*. “They shall eat those things with which atonement was made” says the Torah (*Shmot* 29:33), indicating that the consumption of these sacred items is part of the atonement process.

Had the Torah not spelled out with the word *all* — that these two barley flour *mincha* offerings were also assigned to the *kohanim* for consumption — we would have assumed that only a *mincha* which serves as an atonement goes to them because they participate in the atonement process through their eating. The purpose of the *mincha* of the omer, on the other hand, is not atonement, but a license for enjoying the new crop of grain, and the other *mincha*’s purpose is to clarify the guilt or innocence of the suspected adulteress.

The *Sefer Hachinuch* (Mitzvah 95) explains the role of the *kohen* eating sacrificial flesh or loaves in terms of the sinner providing “the portions which sustain the teachers of Torah who will pray for him”.

While this may be the purpose of the *kohen* eating in cases where atonement is necessary, the Torah, in its all-inclusive “all” revealed that there are other reasons as well for such an allocation to G-d’s servants, and that they apply to the two barley *mincha* offerings as well.

• *Menachot* 73a

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HOLY VS. KADOSH

From: Jeffrey B. Sidney

Dear Rabbi,

Many of the seemingly simple things leave me wondering. We use the word "kadosh" or "holy" often in our prayers, as in the Kedusha or in the third blessing of the Shemone Esrei standing prayer. But what does it mean? I have asked a number of people over the years, but I've never received a clear answer. I would appreciate your thoughts. Thank you.

Dear Jeffrey,

You assume "kadosh" means holy. However, the Torah calls a harlot "kadesha" (see Gen. 38:15, 21), even though a streetwalker doesn't exactly fit most people's definition of holy. The commentators explain that *kadosh* means separate or set aside for a specific purpose. In the example above, then, *kadesha* refers to a woman who has separated herself from moral behavior and has designated herself for prostitution.

In the examples you brought, the third blessing of the *Shemone Esrei* (called *kedushat Hashem*) and *Kedusha* during

the repetition of the *Shemone Esrei*, we are expressing the fact that G-d is entirely separate from the mundane world, as we attempt to raise ourselves out of materialism and cleave to Him. In this way we intend to mimic the angels, who are themselves separate from this world and designated to praise G-d.

The Jewish people are also called *kadosh*, as in "For you are an *Am Kadosh* to the Lord your G-d who has chosen you to be a special people to Himself, above all peoples of the earth" (Deut. 7:6). Here too, as explicit in the verse, the Jewish people are separate and set aside from the other nations to be G-d's special, chosen people.

Similarly, the Land of Israel is called *Eretz HaKodesh*, the city of Jerusalem is called *Ir HaKodesh*, the Temple is called *Beit HaMikdash*, and the most restricted area therein was called the *Kadosh HaKadoshim*. In all of these instances, the term *kadosh* expresses that these places are separate and more special than other places of their kind.

In commanding us to refrain from eating forbidden foods, G-d says *hitkadashtem* (withdraw yourselves from it) and you shall be *kedoshim* because I am *kadosh* (Lev. 11:44). Finally, one who sacrifices his life for his belief in God, the Torah or the commandments is also called *kadosh*. Such an extreme expression of faith repudiates the false beliefs of his tormentors, distinguishes him from among his people, and relegates him to a special status in Heaven.

WHAT'S THE RIGHT THING TO DO?

REAL-LIFE QUESTIONS OF SOCIAL AND BUSINESS ETHICS

TALKING TO THE WALLS?

Question: I am frequently asked to deliver lectures on Torah subjects to audiences who are interested in spiritual strengthening. What happens if through some mistake in notification hardly anyone shows up? Is there still an obligation for me to deliver my talk?

Answer: A beautiful story is told about a renowned Jerusalem rabbi who was called upon to deliver a talk for a group of Jews in the city of Holon. Some fifty Jews had expressed an interest in gathering for this talk in a private home. At the last minute the scheduled speaker couldn't make it and an emergency call came to Rabbi Binyomin Finkel to fill in for him.

Rabbi Finkel jotted down the address and proceeded to Holon. After a long search he finally found the home he was looking for and knocked on the door. His wonder at not hearing the noise he would expect to hear from inside a home filled with 50 people was surpassed only by the failure of anyone to respond to his repeated knocking. Just as he was about to give up in despair, the door opened slightly and there stood the host of the lecture in pajamas.

"Wasn't there supposed to be a lecture here?" asked the

Rabbi.

"I'm so sorry," was the embarrassed reply, "but I forgot about the entire affair and failed to notify anyone about the right date."

When he expressed deep regret that the Rabbi had come all the way from Jerusalem he was surprised to hear this response:

"You are as important to me as 50 people. I am ready to study Torah with you in the time period set for my talk and if there is anyone else in your family who wishes to join us he is welcome to do so."

The offer was gladly accepted and the host's young son joined them for a very special hour of study, which included the host's first introduction to Talmud. Twenty years later Rabbi Finkel met a Jew in Jerusalem whom he did not recognize. The stranger identified himself as the Jew in Holon whom he had introduced to Torah study. He was so moved by that experience that he and his son completely dedicated themselves to Torah study and now the two of them have established a kollel for married scholars in Jerusalem. All because the Rabbi didn't leave.

Award Winning Site

Dear Ohr.edu,

Congratulations for winning our Jewish Agency top site award for your Chanukah page ohr.edu/yhiy.php/holidays/chanukah. This award is given only after careful research into the content, graphics and user friendliness of a site.

Each month we sift through dozens of sites in order to best determine to whom to bestow the award.

• Eli Birnbaum

Re: Keeping Your Word (Ohrnet Toldot "What's the Right Thing to Do?")

To Ohrnet,

According to your answer could it be that if you pur-

chase an item in a store (say an article of clothing) and then change your mind about it, then there might be halachic implications about returning it?

• R. K.

To Ohrnet,

I own a *sefarim* book store and people return things all of the time. Is that forbidden?

M.

Ohrnet replies,

We have received a sizable number of follow-up questions in the spirit of that which you have posed. Since these are questions which involve knowing the exact circumstances of each particular case, only a qualified, and preferably local, halachic authority can rule on the "right thing to do" in each matter.

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

THE GOVERNOR'S BELATED CONDOLENCE VISIT

During his recent five-day visit to Israel, Maryland Governor Robert Ehrlich paid what may be described as a belated condolence visit to someone from his state.

Back in May 2001, two 13-year old boys hiking in the Tekoa area were brutally stoned to death by Palestinian terrorists. One of them was Koby Mandell, son of Ohr

Somayach alumnus Seth Mandell. Before coming to Israel Seth was Hillel Director at the College Park campus of the University of Maryland.

The governor heard from Seth what he and his wife are doing to help the families of other terror victims through the Koby Mandell Foundation that they have established.

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